



Major League Baseball  
Going To Bat Against Breast Cancer™  
**2011 HONORARY BAT GIRL CONTEST**

## 2011 Honoree Stories

### Angels

#### **Melanie Hansen nominated by Sue Snyder**

Melanie is outstandingly brave. She is committed to service and has a compassionate heart. After a double mastectomy she participated in a focus group at the City of Hope to launch a support network. At St. Jude's Hospital, she taught Laughter Yoga as an alternative therapy to fellow survivors and health care professionals. She educated these professionals regarding the physical, emotional, and social benefits laughter provides. She is working to bring more alternative therapies to other support groups. During her reconstructive surgery she completed course work for her Masters Degree with the goal of working with medically challenged children because she survived leukemia as a child. She is now working to complete her Masters thesis. Melanie continues to receive chemotherapy at the City of Hope in order to combat the recent diagnosis of spots on her liver and a tumor on her back.

### Astros

#### **Linda Anderson**

In 2005 right after celebrating my daughter's 5th birthday, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had a double mastectomy, 6 rounds of chemo and reconstructive surgery. The Astros making the playoffs was a true blessing as I cheered them on from my recliner while making it to one game in person. In 2010 we celebrated my 5 year survivorship and my son's 8th birthday. The celebration was short lived as the cancer was back with a vengeance -- stage IV metastatic in my lymph nodes, lungs, liver and spine. I immediately started radiation and chemo. I'm a fighter and won this battle once and determined to not only win it again, but to continue fighting until we ultimately win the war -- finding a cure! My husband created a logo with a baseball, bat and pink ribbon that we use to help raise awareness. I have also walked in 5 Komen Races.

### Athletics

#### **Deborah Mata**

Eleven years ago as a student, I made a commitment to advocate for early detection of breast cancer when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. During my education, I made it a point whenever the opportunity arose to speak about my personal experience, breast cancer awareness, and how many lives can be saved, female and male, by early detection. I emphasized that many people, particularly in disadvantaged communities, need to be aware of early detection. After completing my education, I decided to instruct in a economically disadvantaged environment and to include my testimony, survivorship and early detection during NBCAM and whenever a teaching moment occurs. I once again was diagnosed with cancer in 2010 but this time as a teacher. Advocacy and the support of my friends, family and students makes me even stronger this second round in my "bat against cancer."

## **Blue Jays**

### **Joanne Lubansky-Johns**

Touch 'em all Joe - 18 years ago these iconic words created mass exhilaration across Canada when our Blue Jays won their first World Series. "You are cancer-free, Joanne" - 14 years ago these words created the same sense of personal exhilaration for my family and I when I beat Breast Cancer. Just as Joe Carter touched every base in 1993, I have tried to do the same in helping others face this devastating disease. The story of my winning battle was filmed, and the film used to raise over \$600,000 for the mammography department of St Joseph's Hospital in London. For 13 years my family has run the CIBC Run for the Cure. I addressed the 3000 participants prior to a run, as did my daughter two years later. Most importantly, I regularly counsel and support other women who encounter Breast Cancer. Joe did not stop until he reached home plate; I will not stop until this disease is eradicated.

## **Braves**

### **Donna Brantley nominated by Justin Brantley**

During my fifth grade school year my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. Seeing as how I was only eleven at the time and not really aware of all the risks and dangers that cancer could bring. I had no idea what to expect when she told me that she was diagnosed with the disease and didn't know how I was suppose to react. During chemotherapy and radiation it got tough on both me and my brother as we witnessed our mother, one of the strongest people we will ever know; suffer from the consequences of the treatment process. Through all of this she stayed strong and did whatever she needed to in order for me and my brother to continue playing the various sports we had become accustom to playing. Through all of this we have grown as a family and I honestly can't think of anyone better to receive this award then my mom.

## **Brewers**

### **Joan Kamholz**

In 2007, as I was planning my retirement from 30 yrs. of Law Enforcement, I heard those life changing words, "you have breast cancer". I did retire as planned, but have made it my mission to help fight this fight along with Susan G. Komen for the Cure, so others don't have to go through it, or we lose another loved one to this terrible disease. I am a active volunteer with SGK, and have created a program called, "Justice for a Cure", a law enforcement partnership with SGK. What I started at Dane County Sheriff's Office, has grown State wide, and this year I am taking the campaign Nation wide for breast cancer awareness, and help to raise funds to continue the education and research needed to put a END to breast cancer.

## **Cardinals**

### **Alissa Nicks**

On May 15th, 2000, I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 17, one week before my high school graduation. As part of a mentor program I met a wonderful woman and survivor named Gwen. Her selflessness and spirituality helped me get through some of my darkest days. When Gwen lost her battle I knew I had to do something to keep her with me and to continue the fight. That year I started the team Alissa's Hope. Last year we set out to raise \$10,000 for my 10th year in remission but instead raised almost \$20,000 for Komen. Our fundraisers are meant not only to bring awareness but to celebrate life and cherish our time spent with friends and family. This year we have a renewed sense of urgency to find a cure as we anticipate the birth of our first daughter. We hope to look back and show her that today and every day mom and dad were "Going to Bat Against Breast Cancer" Let's go Cards!

## **Cubs**

### **Katie Blossfield Iannitelli nominated by John Fallon**

A talented physician & engineer, Katie would argue her most notable accomplishments are mother, wife & breast cancer survivor. Just after giving birth to her son, Katie & Mike's journey towards recovery included surgery, radiation & chemotherapy, but also optimism, laughter & faith. Katie co-founded Models of Inspiration & mentors at Imerman Angels Cancer Network. I recently was diagnosed with Stage IV Lymphoma and Katie immediately mobilized a support network which is saving my life. Katie, a life-long Cubs fan, danced at her wedding to Take Me Out to the Ballgame with her father. I can think of no greater privilege for her than to serve as the Honorary Bat Girl celebrating her 40th birthday & 3 year Cancerversary.

## **D-backs**

### **Connie Marino nominated by Cristina Boccio**

May 2009 and my mom (biggest baseball fan) was diagnosed with breast cancer. It was found at Stage 0. Mom, under 50 years old, went through 3 lumpectomies and a mastectomy. She had a total of 6 surgeries. As a family we do everything to promote early detection because no one in our family has had breast cancer. I have walked the Komen 3-Day race in honor of my mom. Together we have walked in the Race for the Cure for 7 years. It would be our honor if you choose my mom to "Go to bat against breast cancer!" This would be an amazing opportunity because we get to mix our favorite sport with a cause we support. We both have grown up with the game of baseball. Even when my mother was going through recovery we attended AZ DBACKS games because it is part of our life. Please let us combine 2 of our biggest impacts in life together for this special day at the ballpark. GO DBACKS!

## **Dodgers**

### **Alicia Manzur**

At the age of 13 I found out my mom, Julia Manzur, had been diagnosed with breast cancer. My mom fought this terrible disease for 5 years before the cancer spread throughout her entire body and took her life. I saw my mom transform from being an outgoing and always on the go woman to having to stay in bed because of the medications she was on and the effects of radiation and chemotherapy. I have dedicated my time since the day she passed away to spreading awareness. I have organized the largest team for the Orange County Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure two years in a row with 286 participants under the age of 18. I plan to expand my efforts, as I am getting older by participating in more events. I have now ran in 10 Race for the Cure walks and I am currently volunteering with the Los Angeles Susan G. Komen. I would be honored to be chosen as an Honorary Bat Girl in memory of my mother.

## **Giants**

### **Jennifer Solorio**

Diagnosed at the Age of 32, the words "Its not good, You have Breast Cancer" would change my world and give me a whole new appreciation for life showing me an inner strength I never knew I had. March 2, 2011 marks the 1 year anniversary of my Diagnosis, electing for a bilateral mastectomy, 6 Chemo Rounds & 30 Radiation sessions I proudly wear PINK and call myself a Survivor. Two weeks after my diagnosis I created Team HER Knockout for Komen 2010 Race for the cure raising consisting of \$ 70+ team members walking to "Make an Impact raising \$9000.00+. This year, I have volunteered my time with the Sacramento Affiliate of Komen & serve as a CoChair for the Survivors Committee Race for the Cure 2011. Im proud to affiliate myself with the organization that brought so much Hope to the forefront during the early stages of my diagnosis and will continue to advocate to Knock this Diagnosis Out!

## **Indians**

### **Beth Vanek nominated by Dina Douglas**

I am nominating my friend Beth, who has not only demonstrated empathy and care for those who are dying from breast cancer, but is showing the strength and courage to fight breast cancer. Beth is a hospice nurse, who found a lump in her breast before the holidays. After mammograms and a biopsy, the lump turned into cancer. As a young mother of a 21 month old girl, she decided to opt for a bilateral mastectomy. At that time they found she has triple negative breast cancer - a rare form that has few targeted treatments and a poor prognosis. She will begin chemo soon, but will be ready for Mother's Day. What a gift being a bat girl for the Indians would be for someone who has taught so many of us what it means to be strong in our faith and courageous despite the odds. In September, we will be walking in the Race for Cure to help all of those battling this horrible disease.

## **Mariners**

### **Kathleen Willett**

After losing my father and sister to breast cancer, I found a lump myself. I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer on my father's birthday. My battle included 8 surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation. But I now have a new job and was married last year. I volunteer with the Breast Cancer Network of Strength counseling other women with similar diagnoses and/or treatment. I'm a Mariner's season ticket holder. We all have challenges in our lives that can lead to uncertainty and fear. Hope is the antidote to fear. I needed hope that I would get my life back. I didn't get my old life back, but I got a new life and I am definitely living. Cancer lurks in the lives of all survivors and leaves a wake of experiences and memories we'd rather not have. But with those experiences comes the knowledge that I have those things that matter most - hope, faith and people who love me.

## **Marlins**

### **Alison Pages**

Back in 1985, I lost my mom to breast cancer. I was only 17 yrs. old & she was 44. Little did I know that I would be diagnosed myself at 32. I am now a 10 yr. survivor. Since the beginning, I have participated in the Susan G. Komen Miami/Ft. Lauderdale Race for the Cure in which I raised more than \$1,500 last year. I also helped start the one of the local chapter's of the American Cancer Society Relay for Life collecting more than \$40,000. After numerous reconstructive surgeries & 7 months of chemo, I barely recognized myself. Several years ago, I decided to do something drastic & have a prophylactic mastectomy. It was a difficult decision to make but given my family history & other risk factors, it was the obvious choice. One thing is certain; I want to be alive for many years to come. I want to see my 12 nieces/nephews grow up and take them to lots of Marlins games.

## **Mets**

### **Linda LaCugna nominated by Joe LaCugna**

My Mother, Linda LaCugna, is an amazing woman. Born in and raised in NY, she grew up in a housing project with 7 brothers and sisters. Her entire life has been an ongoing struggle but Baseball has always been a constant in her life. Her favorite team has always been the NY Mets through the good times and bad, but as a baseball player myself, she has always been my #1 fan. In November of 2010, she was diagnosed with Breast Cancer and will now go into her first baseball season fighting this terrible disease. My dream was once to play pro baseball, but now my dream is for my mother to be cured. She deserves to be honored by her favorite team. Her courageous fight everyday is admirable and she is my hero for fighting the way she does. Other than to see me play on Citi Field one day, nothing would make my Mother happier than to be honored for her fight as the NY Mets Honorary Bat Girl.

## **Nationals**

### **Cathy Colleli**

My sister died from breast cancer in 2004 at age 38. My family's first Race for the Cure was with Sheri in 2003. We've walked since in her memory. In May/June 2009, my hair went to Locks for Love and I completed another Race for the Cure. In August, I too was diagnosed with breast cancer. Last year meant surgeries and chemo but my prognosis is excellent. I'm on the Olney Relay for Life committee, a Sister Study cancer research participant, and do the Avon Walk. I've shared my caregiver-to-survivor story with a number of organizations to promote awareness. Sheri loved baseball. As one of her caregivers, we watched Nats games together during her last months. My birthday is May 10th. My family always celebrates my birthday on Mothers Day. It would be great to be the Nats Honorary Bat Girl to mark Sheri's love of the game and my Mothers Day/ birthday as a new breast cancer survivor. GO NATS!

## **Orioles**

### **Brigid Morahan**

I became a Pediatric ICU nurse at Hopkins to help sick children. During my treatments and surgeries, I reflected on their lessons of courage, strength, and no-quit attitude. I feel I have won the World Series as I just completed my first year of survivorship with my three young children cheering me on. Last year I formed Team FACT for the Komen Race For The Cure and raised thousands of dollars and will do it again this year. I've been raised the Oriole way as my dad was born in Baltimore and we are avid fans. I remember my first game with him and we still talk about our O's. My husband and I carry on the O's tradition with our own children. I am thrilled to Go To Bat Against Breast Cancer and honor the children's no-quit attitudes and hope my efforts today will prevent my girls from the same diagnosis in the future, but if they do, may they too have the no-quit attitude; the Orioles way!

## **Padres**

### **Anitra Rooney**

I really do love my job. Officially I teach high school Physics, but life lessons get thrown in every chance I get. This year provides the best opportunity I've had yet. A large breast tumor found in July meant chemo in Aug. Knowing I'd lose my hair, I set up a fund raiser where the winner would get to shave my head. Enough was raised to give \$500 each to two staff members who did the Komen 3-day and to make the top 100 donors' list for the Komen 5k. A number of stories in the school paper to increase awareness and action regarding issues like cancer followed. By limiting days out despite chemo, 3 surgeries, running (most of) the 5k, doing a supersprint triathlon, keeping my spirit up, and still making time to tutor and cheer at games, I'm proud to say I teach much more than Physics. I inspire kids to be strong, persevere, be positive, help others & always make the most of life.

## **Phillies**

### **Linda Camerota**

I was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 39, and had to undergo multiple surgeries & radiation. Since then I have been GOING TO BAT AGAINST BREAST CANCER by living life to the fullest and helping other women in their battle. I helped form an all breast cancer survivor dragonboat team, and we traveled to Rome Italy to compete, where we won a gold & a silver medal! I am a volunteer with several breast cancer organizations, travel to Washington DC to lobby for breast health issues, and review grants for breast cancer research programs. I also host & emcee many breast cancer fundraising events. What would make this really special for me is that I was a member of the Phillies "Hot Pants Patrol" at the Vet and it would prove to me how great life can be after cancer if I could once again be on the field wearing Phillies Pinstripes, even if they are pink!

## **Pirates**

### **Catherine Brennan nominated by Lisa Jenkins**

ZUMBA!, a petite spunky lady yells from the stage as she jumps and shimmies. Over 50 women fill the room mirroring her every move - hearts pounding, sweat dripping from their faces. This scene repeats itself 6 times a week throughout Pittsburgh's eastern suburbs. Who is this dynamic lady drawing crowds? It's 11-year breast cancer survivor Cat Brennan. Zumba is the bat she uses to go to bat for breast cancer. Through her Zumba classes Cat provides inspiration, education and awareness by sharing her story. Cat works one-on-one with her students who are fighting their own battle. She is involved in raising money for research through her annual Zumba-thon and walking with her team of "Zumbettes" in Pittsburgh's Race for the Cure. This year Cat will lead the Race's warm-up exercises. When Cat goes to bat for breast cancer and swings her mighty Zumba bat, she hits a homerun every time!

## **Rangers**

### **Leslie Sewell nominated by Heather Brooks**

Leslie is a single mother, a doctor, a baseball fan, a fundraiser, a fighter & survivor. Mothers Day will mark 5 years since she had a double mastectomy. She was a 38 year old mother of 6, fighting for her life against a disease that had taken her own mother. She endured chemo, radiation and 5 more surgeries with bravery and faith. During her own fight she still worked as a doctor, saving other women's lives, urging them to get a mammogram, like the one that saved her life. Today she goes to bat against cancer, raising awareness & funds, completing walks and even a half-marathon. She can be found at the ball field; driving kids to the game, hauling equipment, cheering from the stands or going to see the Texas Rangers. Cancer threatened to put Leslie out 5 years ago but she took a swing and knocked it out of the park. I can think of no one more deserving to be the honorary Rangers bat girl.

## **Rays**

### **Shari Elliott**

What did the doc just say "You have Breast Cancer!" He is reading someone else's results! I am 35 and was too young! Life has been a full of joy & more diagnoses. We were blessed with 2 boys now ages 8 & 9. It started again 8 wks after my son was born when I got to hear those words again-you have cancer! After more chemo, I chose to get on with my life and live everyday w/ purpose & intent. 6 years later the cancer returned. I am on chemo again to slow down the progression. I choose to live w/cancer instead of thinking of dying of cancer. My priority is to get the word out about prev. & early det. I volunteer & participate in numerous events(Komen's Race/Cure, 3-Day Walk, Cancer Society's Relay for Life, etc) I am a liaison with my docs office w/ women who have been recently diagnosed, and work w/local Wellness Centers to meet w/ young women. My goal- to hear the words WE FOUND A CURE!

## **Red Sox**

### **Amy Seich**

My father died of breast cancer in 1977. That's why my doctors chose to be aggressive with me, and by doing so, saved my life. In 1990, I was 32 and diagnosed with breast cancer. After a mastectomy, reconstruction, and 9 months of chemotherapy, I made a promise that I would be an advocate for early detection. I am now celebrating 20 years cancer free! Over the years, my family and I have raised not only awareness, but we have fundraised to keep breast cancer issues in the forefront through local Relays for Life, the PMC, support of the Susan G. Komen 3 Day Walk, and being the Daffodil Days Captain for the American Cancer Society to name just a few; It has become an integral part of my journey. A Hank Aaron quote: My motto was always to keep swinging. Whether I was in a slump or feeling badly or having trouble off the field, the only thing to do was keep swinging.

## **Reds**

### **Cheryl Veigel nominated by Jennifer Veigel**

My life was affected by Breast Cancer six years ago when my mother found a lump in her breast. Her tumor was fast growing and it spread to her lymph nodes. The surgery was set, and her fight began. This battle made me realize that my mother is a very strong and selfless person. She has been there to share her story and offer advice, support, and hope when needed. She helped me organize two successful Volley for the Cure events. With her help, we were able to raise over \$10,000. She also was actively involved in two Dig for the Cure events. My mom has a special place in her heart for the Cincinnati Reds. She and my father spent their honeymoon in Cincinnati and went to a game. It would be awesome if she was selected to attend the game on Mother's Day to celebrate her sixth anniversary of being cancer free.

## **Rockies**

### **Alma Hubersberger**

I thought my life would never be the same when I was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 63. I had recently moved to Denver. It was a devastating time. I had the lumpectomy, opted to do radiation for 5 days 2 times a day, and 4 chemotherapy treatments. I lost my hair and all of my energy and was unable to focus on much of anything-I called it the brain fuzzies. Being an active person, I enrolled in a water aerobics class and I began taking long walks. I was determined to get my mind and body back to where I was. My 3 year cancer free anniversary was in November 2010. I have lost 25 pounds, do water aerobics 2 to 3 times a week, walk every day, bowl once a week, and work part time. I count my blessings. I would consider being the "Bat Girl" for the Colorado Rockies an honor and an ultimate positive event as a breast cancer survivor.

## **Royals**

### **Susan Krigel nominated by Ari Krigel**

From early in her career, our mother, Susan Wayne Krigel, devoted herself to helping others beat cancer. Then, at age 47, while working at the Cancer Information Service and freshly accepted into the clinical psychology PhD program at UMKC with an emphasis in health, Susan was herself diagnosed with breast cancer. Her first year of graduate school included several surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation and her daughter's wedding. After six years of hard work and finishing her internship at the University of California in San Diego, she currently works as a post-doctoral fellow in the Breast Cancer Survivorship Center at the University of Kansas Cancer Center. She loves the KC Royals (her family has been season ticket holders since 1969), and it would be a huge thrill for her to serve as an honorary bat girl on this special day. Vote for our Mom!

## **Tigers**

### **Amy Maurice nominated by Jim Maurice**

Life changes all people but not all people change lives. When breast cancer hit, my wife Amy Maurice was changing lives as a teacher, wife, friend and mom of triplets. Amy's done big things in the fight: just a few months post chemo her team raised \$12,000+ for the Komen 3Day and she led groups on the Race for the Cure & Shades of Pink walk. Amy's done little things too while trying to cope with her new reality: comfort for a newly diagnosed woman in the waiting room; after each treatment there was a new mom, sister, daughter she'd listened to, cried with. One new friend called her an angel! Amy continues to grow and get stronger in this battle; she hopes to organize a mentoring project to help those like herself and so many she's met. An ear, a crying shoulder, a voice for those who don't know where to turn next. In short, Amy will change lives. Thanks for reading, good luck honey!

## **Twins**

### **Carrie Johnson**

You have breast cancer, absolutely a woman's worst nightmare. Ten years ago at age 32, I heard those words. Luckily, I found my lump early. I didn't have a choice to get breast cancer, but I did choose to GO TO BAT and I came out swinging as my own advocate. The past ten years I have told my story to everyone I can, always mentioning: breast cancer doesn't know your age, your family history, and the huge importance of early detection. I TEAM UP each year with the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure and the Breast Cancer 3-Day. These foundations provide hope to everyone affected as we are all on the same field together to eradicate breast cancer. My family and I are die-hard Twins fans, especially my mom. On Mother's Day, she would be so proud to see me as the Twins' Honorary Bat Girl representing all women affected by this disease.

## **White Sox**

### **Tasha Huebner**

Little did I know when I first helped put together a team for the Komen 3-Day that in 2008, I myself would be diagnosed with stage II breast cancer...thus racing for a more personal goal, of survival. Raising thousands of dollars in our journey was memorable, memories that came flooding back to me that summer of 2008, when I found comfort in not just going to White Sox games, but also in forming Team in Bacon for the Komen 5K. Cancer treatment and a bad bike crash left me wearing a sling, sporting a badly bruised face, tired, yet smiling, as we raced and felt part of something bigger than ourselves. Since then, I have spent countless hours spreading the word about Komen, volunteering with Imerman Angels, and being part of the local leadership team for YSC, while celebrating Mother's Day in my heart not just with the White Sox, but with all the other young women touched by breast cancer.

## **Yankees**

### **Dayna Varano nominated by Kimberly Frost**

I want to nominate my best friend. We took part in our first Komen walk in college never thinking one of us would fight for our own life one day. Diagnosed w/stage 3 breast cancer on Valentine's Day 2007 while also battling a brain tumor for 16 yrs. We watched her go thru surgeries, chemo & rads, but were unprepared to watch her host multiple fundraisers throughout her treatment & up until today. Seeing her at podiums bald tired & burned was hard but she never complained. She has her own foundation providing toys to kids who've lost a parent to cancer. She's a mentor/advisor for breast cancer organizations, publically speaks on early detection, maintains a line as an emergency point of contact person, as well as many other positions, including her most important role as a mom of four. To see her represent Susan G. Komen & her beloved Yankees would be a dream come true for her.