

## Arts &amp; Entertainment

## Breast cancer survivor tells her story through laughter

LISA QUEEN

lqueen@insidetoronto.com

**H**ave you heard the one about the comedian who gets breast cancer, undergoes painful treatments, sees close friends abandon her in her time of need, loses both her parents within two years and breaks her leg when two dogs barrel into her at a park?

Nope, there's no punch line.

That's the true story of Marla Lukofsky.

But while her journey has often been difficult, the North York comedian has found humour through the pain.

Lukofsky will share her story, which she's titled 'I'm Still Here...and so is my Hair' at a charity fundraiser this week.

"This is a story where people are going to cry sometimes and laugh for sure," she said.

Lukofsky is the opening night keynote speaker for the annual One Dream-One Hope-Many-Colours symposium. The event is hosted by the Olive Branch of Hope, a non-profit organization that provides support and services to women of colour and their families whose lives are affected by cancer. The charity also supports breast cancer research.

While living in Los Angeles in 1998, Lukofsky discovered a lump in her breast the day before her 42nd birthday.

She went to her doctor, who



**HER STORY:** North York's Marla Lukofsky is the opening night keynote speaker for One Dream-One Hope-Many-Colours symposium. It takes place today and tomorrow at the Genesis Banquet Hall at 4220 Steeles Ave. W.

recommended a mammogram, although she had passed one with flying colours just a couple of months earlier.

Although the test didn't reveal anything, the technician suggested an ultrasound which showed a lump.

A lumpectomy the following week proved the lump was malignant.

"It was a small lump but it was aggressive," Lukofsky said.

She began difficult chemotherapy treatments, made all the worse when some friends abandoned her.

"Some cancer books talk about that, 'You will be surprised who leaves and who rallies around.' Some people can't deal with it. You need things when you have cancer

and some people don't want to be needed," Lukofsky said.

"A few people stepped up to the plate and it surprised me who they were."

The North York native moved back to Toronto, doing the odd stand-up comedy job and picking up voice work for radio commercials and as Good Luck Bear on the Care Bear

cartoon series.

Unfortunately, adversity followed her home.

Her father, Lou, died suddenly in June 2004. Her mother was diagnosed with leukemia the following year and passed away in February, 2006.

Lukofsky was then sidelined for weeks when two dogs ran into her in a park and broke her leg. She used the time to pen her memoirs.

While Lukofsky has faced hardships, she is able to tell her story with both honesty and humour.

This is a comedian who can perform the story of the *Wizard of Oz* in less than a minute. She jokes that she inherited her father's eyes, her mother's mouth and both her parents' noses. She laughingly says the symptom she focused on most when her oncologist told her what to brace for was possible weight gain.

Lukofsky is amazed how her combination of laughter and tears touches audiences, with many coming up to her afterwards or sending letters later telling her how they share her experiences.

"I don't use humour as a coping mechanism. It is an innate part of my personality," she said.

The symposium is today and tomorrow at the Genesis Banquet Hall at 4220 Steeles Ave. W.

Tickets are \$45, which includes opening reception, breakfast and lunch. Special packages are available for recently diagnosed survivors.

Call 416-256-3155 or email [olivebranch@theolivebranch.ca](mailto:olivebranch@theolivebranch.ca)