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Ellie Anbinder, at an exhibition of portraits of breast cancer survivors at Boston's South Station.

“I believe in cure, I believe in awareness and all of those things. But I most fervently believe that if we can find cause, we can find prevention.”

*ELLIE ANBINDER (SED'62), founder and executive director of Art beCAUSE Breast Cancer Foundation, which funds research into the environmental causes of breast cancer.*

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## One Question About Breast Cancer: Why?

Cancer survivor Ellie Anbinder (SED'62) searches for the disease's origins

AFTER ELLIE ANBINDER was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1991, she underwent a partial mastectomy, reconstructive surgery, and six weeks of radiation. Some 20 years later, the cancer has not returned.

But as anyone who knows Anbinder can attest, she was not about to leave it at that. Long after her treatment ended, she grappled with the question: where had the cancer come from? She had no family history of the disease. She was conscientious about her health and had never skipped her annual mammogram.

"I kept having this feeling that breast cancer came from somewhere outside my body," says Anbinder (SED'62).

Outspoken, indefatigable, an advocate for women's issues, and an inveterate networker, Anbinder has made it her mission to find an answer. A decade ago, she and her best friend, Joyce Creiger (CAS'62), then owner of a Newbury Street art gallery, cofounded a public foundation that raises money to fund research into environmental causes of breast cancer. "I said to Joyce, 'Let's start a foundation,'" Anbinder recalls. "We'll fund research, and you can give me 10 percent of everything you make."

They called it Art beCAUSE Breast Cancer Foundation. "Joyce owned an art gallery, I owned breast cancer," Anbinder says. "She had the better end of the deal."

Since then, the organization has awarded \$85,000 in grants to researchers, including David Sherr, a School of Public Health professor of environmental health. After a decade of operating at the grassroots level, the group plans a surge in fundraising this year.

### "IF YOU DIE, I'LL NEVER TALK TO YOU AGAIN."

Anbinder was the mother of two grown daughters and the owner of the Business Group, a company that helped professionals network, build businesses, and exchange

sales leads and contacts, when she was diagnosed with a ductal carcinoma in situ. The cancer was caught early; it had not spread to her lymph nodes, and chemotherapy wasn't necessary.

"My response to all of that fit into the old dodged-the-bullet thing," she says. "It made me realize that I was very lucky."

The American Cancer Society estimates that 230,480 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer this year, and that nearly 40,000 will die of the disease. But only 5 to 10 percent of breast cancer cases are the result of inherited mutations or changes in the breast cancer susceptibility genes, such as BRCA1 and BRCA2.

"Here's the proposition that I'm trying to figure out," says Anbinder. "At the end of World War II, this enormous plastics industry came into being, and 30 years later, women, as they went through menopause, started getting breast cancer. Alarming. And another part that's really scary: breast cancer is the leading cancer death among young women from 25 to 50. So what's happened? Where is that coming from?"

In 2001 Anbinder, who had been active in the Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition, turned to her friend, the art consultant. Creiger owned the Creiger-Dane Gallery in Boston and had been involved in the establishment in 1975 of the Danforth Museum of Art in Framingham, Mass. The two had been friends since the 1960s. "We really have been buddies forever," says Anbinder. "The kind of best friend that, when I got diagnosed, she did one of those: if you die, I'll never talk to you again."

Creiger didn't think twice when Anbinder approached her with the idea for a foundation. "We did a number of big galas and raised money, brought together a board of directors, and created the foundation," she says.

In 2005, Art beCAUSE Breast Cancer Foundation awarded its first grant, of \$5,000, to the Newton,

**WEB EXTRA**  
Watch a slideshow of portraits of breast cancer survivors at [bu.edu/bostonia](http://bu.edu/bostonia).

### 1949

**GENE HODGE** (DGE'48, CAS'49, GRS'50) of Sherborn, Mass., writes, "I am now 87—a World War II disabled vet, B-24 crew-member in the Pacific."

### 1952

**JOYCE (ZIMMERMAN) FLOREEN** (CFA'52) of Fleetwood, Pa., opened Toad Creek Gallery in Topton, Pa., two years ago. Learn more about the gallery and see Joyce's paintings at [www.toadcreekgallery.com](http://www.toadcreekgallery.com).

### 1954

**HUGH L. DWELLEY** (SMG'54) of Fairfax, Va., retired in 1988 after a 27-year career in the U.S. Foreign Service. He returned to his hometown on Little Cranberry Island, Maine, where he cofounded the Islesford Historical Society. He recently published *A History of Little Cranberry Island, Maine* (Islandport Press, 2000). Email Hugh at [hldwelle@aol.com](mailto:hldwelle@aol.com).

**LEONARD M. THOMAS** (GRS'54) of Cambridge, Ohio, received Muskingham University's

Distinguished Service Award on June 17, 2011. Leonard is a conductor, arranger, pianist, and vocalist. He is best known for his 31-year association as accompanist, choral director, and principal arranger for Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians, the popular orchestra and chorus.

### 1956

**LIZ GRIBIN** (CFA'56) of Needham, Mass., showed her work in June at the Jonathan Frost Gallery in Rockland, Maine, where her BU roommate, **NAN DOW MULFORD** (CFA'56),



Since 2005, Ellie Anbinder's foundation has awarded \$85,000 in grants to researchers.

Mass.-based Silent Spring Institute, which focuses in part on identifying links between the environment and breast cancer. Since then, the foundation has given progressively larger grants: two awards totaling \$22,500 to SPH's Sherr, \$15,000 to a scientist at the University of Rochester, \$15,000 to a Tufts University researcher,

and, in 2011, \$30,000 to the Silent Spring Institute.

Sherr, who serves as a medical advisor to the foundation, says such organizations are unusual. "It's kind of surprising that other agencies have not understood the significance of prevention and the environment in the context of breast cancer," he says. "The system seems to be biased toward therapies, I think, because that's where the money is."

Sherr is studying the role of a protein called the aryl hydrocarbon receptor (AhR)—found in the cells of humans and most animals—in triggering the development of cancerous cells.

"There are three things that cancers do," he says. "They grow too fast. They don't know how to die. And they have an identity crisis: they don't know who they are anymore, so they don't stick around in the organ in which they originated. They start invading and metastasizing to other organs."

His research has shown that in the breast, for example, environmental pollutants such as PCBs, dioxins, and hydrocarbons bind to, and turn on, the AhR. Once the receptor is hyperactivated, he says, it induces cells to grow aggressively and spread. And, he notes, the AhR remains activated even after the environmental chemicals have been metabolized and excreted from the cells.

Sherr is working on ways to block the AhR activity.

If his approach works, it could be used to treat other cancers as well. "If you look at the AhR in other kinds of cancers, you find it's hyperactivated in lymphomas, leukemias, myelomas, prostate cancer, lung cancer, ovarian cancer," he says. "We're trying to stay focused on breast cancer and not to get too excited yet about the potential relevance of our studies to these other types of cancer."

#### JONAS SALK MOMENT

In addition to raising money for research like Sherr's, the foundation has been collaborating with Massachusetts photographer David Fox on a portrait project. In the last few years, Fox has taken scores of black-and-white portraits of survivors of breast cancer. Anbinder's group has created an exhibition and calendars. The 2009 calendar featured one man and 11 women, including Bridget Mooney (CAS'05), who was diagnosed with breast cancer a week after she graduated from BU. The 2010 calendar featured all men. The portraits have been shown at the New England Institute of Art, Boston's South Station, and the Massachusetts State House. There are plans to produce another calendar, of survivor families, and to publish a book.

Ed Westerman (CGS'66, COM'68), principal of Westerman Consulting and a member of the College of General Studies Dean's Advisory Board, is a member of the foundation's board and a former chair. He says the group's fundraising has two goals: hire at least one administrative staff member to help Anbinder, and, of course, fund research. "We want to be giving \$50,000, \$100,000, \$150,000 grants," he says. "That's where you begin to make a major difference in research."

Anbinder, who was honored for her work in 2009 by The One Hundred, the Massachusetts General Hospital Cancer Center's annual fundraiser, says her plan this year is to raise \$200,000 and to give a substantial amount of it away.

"I believe in cure, I believe in awareness and all of those things. But I most fervently believe that if we can find cause, we can find prevention," Anbinder says. "Essentially, I'm looking for my Jonas Salk moment."

CYNTHIA K. BUCCINI

CYDNEY SCOTT

is the director. Friends can email Liz at [gribin@hamptons.com](mailto:gribin@hamptons.com).

**JOHN GARLAND THAYER** (STH'56) of Limestone, Tenn., is a retired educator and a United Methodist minister. John recently published *Moments of Mystery and Wonder* (Vantage Press, 2010), a collection of true stories about moments of divine grace that he experienced, as well as 23 of his poems. John visits homebound members of First United Methodist Church in Johnson City. He and his wife, Jean, have four children and seven grandchildren.

#### 1957

**VICTOR DYE** (STH'57) of Skokie, Ill., is a clinical psychologist and an affiliate therapist at the Family Institute at Northwestern University. He recently married Joyce Richards. The two met in 1953, but later went their separate ways, each marrying and raising a family. They reconnected in 2008.

**RICHARD NOYES** (SED'57; '62) of Chicago, Ill., and his daughter, **PAMELA (NOYES) ROBERTSON** (COM'80), coauthored *Guts in the Clutch: 77 Legendary Triumphs, Heartbreaks, and*

*Wild Finishes in 12 Sports* (BookSurge Publishing, 2009).

#### 1959

**SHIRLEY LAW JACOBUS** (SMG'59, SED'64) of Potomac, Md., published *We're Eating What? A Memoir, Recipes, and How-To-Guide from America's Longest-Running Gourmet Group* (PublishAmerica, 2011).

**LAEL MORGAN** (COM'59; '88) of Saco, Maine, published *Wanton West: Madams, Money, Murder, and the Wild Women of Montana's*