

The Fighter

Cancer survivor Lisa Vingerling puts her best heel forward.

When it comes to health vigilance, few have anything on **Lisa Vingerling**. Given her family's strong history of cancer, she'd been receiving ultrasounds every six months since the age of 23. So, naturally, when she found a cyst, she acted promptly—and, yet, her worst fears were confirmed: breast cancer at age 30.

"You don't hear anything after they tell you [that you] have cancer; you're just numb," Vingerling says. "My first question was, 'Am I going to lose my hair?'" The far more sobering follow-up: "Am I going to die?"

Taking no chances, Vingerling defied her docs by undergoing six rounds of chemo to their recommended four and opting for a double mastectomy. To take

her mind off of how badly she felt—and her drastically changing blonde bombshell appearance—she launched the nonprofit Pink Heals Foundation Inc. for women with similar struggles. Six years later, and Vingerling, now working in property management in Atlanta, is cancer-free, but still fully committed to the cause.

"While you're going through cancer, you feel like you're actively fighting the disease; you feel strong," says Vingerling, whose two sisters have also undergone double mastectomies. "But when it's over, and you're bald and puffy... it's this weird contradiction. I'd walk by a mirror and do a double-take because I felt like the person I saw on the outside didn't match the one I felt like on the inside."

These days the spunky fashionista is channeling her experiences and newfound outlook ("Today is all you have," she says) to support fellow female cancer survivors of all stripes, between the ages of 21 and 43, through her foundation. But, she says, "We're not your average cancer organization. Our goal is simply to help survivors transition from cancer back to their normal lives. We want to help women get back in their heels."

For this, she partners with the likes of Saks Fifth Avenue, Dior and Cancer Wellness at Piedmont to offer numerous feel-good events, among them dance and cooking classes, with eventual plans for national expansion.

"If one girl looks at this and sees herself getting her life back, it will all be worth it," she says. Someone a lot like herself. *@lisavingerling -Kelly Skinner Photography by Austin Holt*

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