



What Would Susan Do?

Think before you pink.

By Matthew Zachary

I compose this essay on October 31st, 2007 – the last day of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. (NBCAM), thirty one long days of advocacy saturation and ceaseless corporate cause tie-ins compounded by a never-ending, relentless avalanche of branded color inculcation.

Last week, on my public radio program, one of our field oncospondants, Kairol Rosenthal, did a segment about how Halloween was pissed off at breast cancer for hijacking it's orange ownership of the month and summarily replacing it with pink. I can empathize with Halloween, who also said that he can still take solace in the fact that quintessential seasonal products such as candy corn, pumpkins and marshmallow Peeps remain orange...but perhaps only for now?

Here on this final day of the pinkification of our entire cancerverse, we can look back and reflect on the end results. My dog is pink. My front lawn is pink. My car is pink. My power sander is pink. My local national park is pink. My cell phone is pink and I am actually hemorrhaging pink blood from my eyes and ears.

By now, if you don't know it's NBCAM, you've been living under a rock or in a cave with the terrorists in Afghanistan. And considering they have satellite feeds and broadcast capabilities, I'm willing to bet even they know it's NBCAM – and they're probably as sick of it by now as I am. Yes, it's about awareness. Yes, it's about advocacy. But, come on!

I personally don't need pink Cheerios, pink Ritz crackers, pink tire pressure gauges, pink stamps, pink Ramen noodles, pink staplers, pink bagels, pink laptops. pink pencils, pink Helios or the ubiquitously nauseating pink ribbons to "get it" that breast cancer is a serious disease – but when the five-year survival rate is 97% for women in their 60s and 50% for women in their 20s, maybe – just maybe – it's time to think.... before you pink.

I'm sick of pink.

And so that's where I pick up my stick and poke it at all things pinktastic, pinklicious and pinkdicious. This is "old and busted" vs. "new hotness" at it's finest stickpokingness.

So allow me to speak to all of the young adult breast cancer survivors out there about what I consider to be a scathing and blisteringly ridiculous pinkocracy in breast cancer.



Susan G. Komen was an actual person. This isn't like Otis Spunkmeyer, Aunt Jemima or Mrs. Butterworth. She lived and breathed and died of breast cancer in 1980.

Do you know how old she was when she died? Given Komen's demo, you'd think she was in her 50s, 60s or 70s. No. Do you want to know how old she was when she died?

She died at the age of **36**.

Yes, Susan G. Komen was a young adult when diagnosed and treated,

So how in the world did one young adult's breast cancer experience spawn twenty seven years later spawn the largest pinkocracy for "little old lady land"?

I suppose the answer could be as simple as:

- 1) *Since most women who get breast cancer are Boomers or Seniors, it would only make sense that they would be the primary base constituency. OR*
- 2) *The idea of segmenting cancer diagnosis into age groups and identifying the unique generational, biological and sociological differences in what it means to be diagnosed in your 30s vs. your 60s was a cry in the dark.*

Question: *If a breast cancer tumor falls in the woods, does public policy make a pink sound?*

Are we supporting this fight with our local representatives, with congress, with the people who control governmental research funding and drug approval policies or are we just fighting this fight with pink M&M? And if an organization as large and powerful as Susan G. Komen is working towards policy, then why haven't looked back to where it actually began – with a group of disheartened young women in their early 30s – and realize they've created legions of loyal followers who are nothing like Susan and advocating for causes, research and policy that in effect exclude women who are just like Susan?

Have they completely turned their backs on young women with breast cancer – because it looks that way to me. Agree with me or not, my job is to spark dialogue. Let's get Komen in the hot seat because they raise nearly a billion dollars every year to fund research and give out grants – but are any of those monies allocated for young adult programs, research, clinical trials or psychosocial support?

If the answer turns out to be "No, Komen has not invested in the needs of young women with breast cancer", then that begs the question; *Why on God's green earth would passionate young breast cancer survivors in their teens, 20s and 30s want to help an organization that overwhelmingly ignores their demographic?*



Seriously? Are you that inculcated? Think before you pink!

Why aren't you raising money instead for young adult organizations who actually care about you, whose support programming actually benefits you and whose core mission is to help you?

One of our foundation's regional chairs – Jennifer Coy out in Denver, which evidently is the Komen fundraising capital of the universe – has bared personal witness to the twenty-six year old breast cancer survivor racing for the cure, raising well into five-digits of money and pouring their hearts and souls into Komen, when, in fact, none of that money may actually help HER – the young adult with breast cancer.

Jen, if you're reading this, we'll have you as a correspondent on The Stupid Cancer Show soon enough to tell us more about your tales of interest from the mile high city.

Now don't get me wrong – Komen does some really great things. They serve a purpose, there's no doubting that. But they come across as just huge, bloated, beaucroatic and out of touch. That said, you can't fault them for bringing a national cause into the mainstream, but, seriously gals – it would seem that you don't know when to quit and that, on the slippery slope surface, you may have lost sight of how and where you started.

And, at the end of the day, ask yourself, "What would Susan do?"

Does your cancer charity actually care about you?

We're on our own. And as I like to say, GenX cancer will only be fixed by GenX. If we're the generation that invented Google, Facebook and Second Life, we should be able to take care of our own. This is our fight. We have the sheer numbers, the voting power and the influence to change the rules. This is why we fight – because remission is not a cure and survivorship is all the rage. Stupid cancer. Survivors Rule.

Donna Martin Graduates!