

# New Book Praises Locals In Breast Cancer Battle On LI...

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effort to raise awareness, embarking on their own battle against the disease, which would eventually lead to the creation of Breast Cancer Help, Inc. These women are now being called "kitchen revolutionaries" by author Joan Swirsky, whose book, "Map Of Destiny: Pinpointing A Cancer Epidemic On The Kitchen Table," chronicles the journey Pace, along with 18 other local women, took to bring the topic of breast cancer to the forefront of the media and political arena.

"I thought this story was the perfect embodiment of the expression that one person can really make a difference," Swirsky said of why she chose to highlight Pace in her book. "She was so trailblazing ... She really revolutionized the fight against breast cancer."

The book is factual, yet personal, as it reflects a number of Pace's recollections about what led her to become one of the strongest voices of breast cancer awareness on Long Island. The author touches on Pace's early years, which Swirsky said were pivotal to Pace's later activism. Growing up in Bedford Stuyvesant, Pace said she was never shy about expressing her opinions.

"It was a tough neighborhood," she recalled. "Nobody intimidated me, ever. I wasn't afraid to say what I thought." That disposition led her to later stand up at town meetings, and eventually in front of state officials, asking for answers as to why so many Long Island women were being diagnosed with breast cancer.

One of Pace's main concerns was the connection between the environmental

impacts and breast cancer, particularly the drinking water. "We wanted to put the pressure on the government to clean up the environment," Pace said.

Together with doctors and health department officials in Suffolk County, Pace was able to formulate a survey for West Islip residents that asked about their health histories, their line of work, what their sources of water were and whether they had breast cancer, among other things. Just five months after her diagnosis, Pace brought the idea of publishing it to Lou Grasso, then-managing editor of *Suffolk Life Newspapers*. Grasso agreed, and the questionnaire was published on the cover of *Suffolk Life's* West Islip edition in August of 1992. According to Pace, the response was overwhelming.

"It was amazing," Pace recalled, adding that it was the first preliminary geographic system study ever done, and that doctors from Stony Brook University, including her own oncologist, Dr. Michael Feinstein, worked on the project. From the survey, Pace and her neighbors mapped out the results on the kitchen table, with Pace stating that despite what many scientists have said in the past, she believes the survey was the first step towards proving breast cancer clusters do exist on Long Island.

Swirsky noted that she has extensively researched the triggers and instances of breast cancer on Long Island as a clinical nurse specialist and as a health and science reporter, writing for publications such as *The New York Times*. "This book is based on my investigative experience and credible docu-

mented science," she said, adding that although there is much debate within the scientific community as to the causes of breast cancer, she lists several studies to support Pace's theories that the environment could be a factor.

However, the book is more than medical findings and numbers to Swirsky, who had a scare of her own in 1991 when she went to have a biopsy. "I discovered a lump on my breast," she explained. "Just being a woman on Long Island, you can never count on good genes or a good diet anymore. There are too many unexplained causes of breast cancer on Long Island."

Although the lump was benign, Swirsky said the experience gave her a greater appreciation for the women who face the disease. Pace, who is now 65 and has been in remission since 1992, went on to form the West Islip Breast Cancer Coalition with the same neighbors who helped her with the survey.

Pace also was involved in the creation of the first breast care center in Suffolk County, and later founded Breast Cancer Help, Inc., which aides Long Island women and their families as they battle the disease, and also funds research in the fight for a cure. The organization recently received a \$250,000 grant from US Congressman Peter King (R-Massapequa Park) to obtain its own building, as Breast Cancer Help, Inc.'s main office is currently located at the Long Island Help and Wellness Center in Lindenhurst.

"We've grown so much so fast," Pace said, adding, "This could not have been accomplished without the volunteers who helped and are still helping me."

While she explained that she is happy with some of the technological progress and studies that have been done, she still feels the desire to push for more funding and awareness. "We need to go further," she said, adding that while she is grateful for the success she has had in getting the message out, the journey there was not always a smooth one.

"There were plenty of times when I wanted to throw in the towel," she said, noting that her local parish priest, Father Thomas Arnao, was vital to her continuing the fight to raise awareness. "He gave me so much encouragement," she said of Arnao, who later became the co-president of Breast Cancer Help, Inc.

"She's a woman of great faith," said Arnao, who is now the vice officialis for the Diocese of Rockville Centre. "When she was diagnosed, she called me. I remember saying to her, 'What possible blessing can we find in this?' Could she be able to use this to help encourage other women? ... And she did."

"I think it was the anger that kept me going, because I was on a mission," Pace explained, noting how she was able to transform her negative anger into a positive response to her illness.

As for the book, Pace said, "I hope they will be inspired not to take no for an answer, and to go with their gut feeling ... People should know that [breast cancer] doesn't have to be a death sentence."

Those interested in the book can visit [www.mapofdestiny.com](http://www.mapofdestiny.com). For more information about Breast Cancer Help, Inc. call 226-1772 or visit [www.breastcancer-helpinc.org](http://www.breastcancer-helpinc.org).