

Explaining a mom's breast cancer to kids

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TEANECK — How does a mother diagnosed with breast cancer explain the disease to a young child?

That's the topic of a new children's book published by two breast cancer survivors who were honored Sunday at the Teaneck Marriott at Glenpointe during the annual gala of Sharsheret, a Teaneck charity that helps Jewish women diagnosed with the disease.

Rochelle Hirsch of New York wrote the book, "Lumps and Bumps," and Naava Parker of Englewood illustrated it.

"When I was undergoing treatment, I realized that so many of the women diagnosed with this disease are young mothers, and there was nothing out there for them, to help tell them what to say to their children and explain what was happening to them," Hirsch said. "When Naava said, 'I'd love to do a book,' that just planted the seed in my mind."

The idea melded two of Hirsch's primary interests: caring for children — she started a preschool in New York 18 years ago — and writing. "I always wrote," she said. "I used to have a business called Roasts and Toasts. I would ghost-write poems for people's parties. So it was a natural progression."

"The trick was how to tell the story in a way that would not frighten children, but which would tell them the truth," Hirsch added. "Children see through lies very quickly."

The book tells the story of one child's experience dealing with the disease.

"It's done in a very sweet, non-threatening way," she said.

Sharsheret chose to honor the authors and help launch the book to the public. The group also honored Suffy Rudman, a singer whose CD "Believe" is made up of "songs that inspire women who have gone through breast cancer," said Elana Silber, the group's director of operations.

Sharsheret functions largely as a support system for Jewish women with breast cancer. "We connect pairs of women who have common experiences," Silber said. "They want to speak with someone like them."

More than 800 women have taken part in the program, she added.

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