



# She's been fighting cancer since 13, now this survivor trying to beat it

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Jaquelyn Scharnick, 25, a two-time cancer survivor just like her mother, smiles in her ad executive's midtown office.

When [Jaquelyn Scharnick](#) fell ill with leukemia at 13, she remembers asking, "Why me?"

The same question returned when she had a relapse two years later.

Now, at 25 and cancer free, "I know the question to ask is "Why not me?" Scharnick said. "Anyone can get cancer."

Including her mother, Patricia, a two-time breast cancer survivor.

Now the [Brooklyn Heights](#) resident and [Harvard University](#) graduate is using her public relations expertise to fight the dreaded disease.

An ad executive with the [Brunswick Group LLC](#), Scharnick is also secretary of the Pink Agenda, a two-year-old group that raises money for cancer research.

What makes the Pink Agenda different from other fund-raising groups is its target audience - young professionals, 25 to 35.

They have also been remarkably successful, opening chapters in [Chicago](#) and [Boston](#).

Better still, in the midst of a recession, the Pink Agenda this year is set to donate around \$100,000 to various cancer groups it supports.

"People think young professionals, the post-college, just entering the professional world, don't give to charity, but they do," Scharnick said. "We're successful because our group is run by young people and we know what young people want to do."

But not all of the group's supporters are in that range, Scharnick said. "I am sure we have people at our events 18 to 21 and 60 or older."

The Pink Agenda has held functions at popular [Manhattan](#) venues, including the Eldridge and the Lounge. Some 350 people attended its annual spring gala in May, Scharnick said.

"For all of the strides that have been made in the fight against breast cancer, young people have remained under engaged, and underutilized," she said. "That is what the Pink Agenda does. We reach out to young people in particular.

"It's a lot of great people doing fun things. We're all about proving fun and philanthropy are not mutually exclusive. You can raise awareness and money at the same time."

Scharnick grew in [Marion](#), Mass., the only child of Patricia and [William Scharnick](#). William was a teacher at [Southeastern Regional Vocational Technical High School](#) in Marion.

Her mother's job was "raising me," Scharnick said.

Her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer when Scharnick was 5, and again when her daughter was 12.

A year later, Scharnick came down with leukemia.

"I'd been having nosebleeds for weeks," she said. "They just would not stop and would not go away, no matter what anyone did."

Blood tests showed several abnormalities in her blood, including the platelets, the cells that clot, or stick together, to close wounds.

Normally numbering in the 150,000 to 400,000 range per microliter of blood, Scharnick's platelet count was around 8,000.

"That means, essentially, that you don't stop bleeding," she said. "It was terrible. I was shocked. As familiar as cancer was to me, because it had been a part of my life for years, I just thought that that kind of thing didn't happen to someone like me. I was busy, I was doing well in school, I had friends. I just didn't have time for that."

Scharnick was treated at the [Dana-Farber/Children's Hospital](#) Cancer Care, a partnership between the [Dana-Farber Cancer Institute](#) and [Children's Hospital Boston](#).

The treatment regimen meant Scharnick had to delay entering [Tabor Academy](#) prep school for a term.

The nosebleeds returned in the winter of her sophomore year and everyone knew what they meant.

By that time Scharnick had plunged into school life, playing squash and tennis and working in student government and on the student paper and yearbook staffs.

"[Doctors] treated it differently this time, so I was able to go to school half days," she said.

Treatments were daily, and meant a 90-minute drive each way from home. "I would go to school from 8 to 12, and then go to Boston," Scharnick said. "But it enabled me to continue maintaining a somewhat normal life, which was important to me."

When the school year ended in June 1999, Scharnick had a bone marrow transplant. But the transplant put her at home for a year - chemotherapy destroyed her immune system, and the new marrow needed time to rebuild it.

"I started to get out again in the spring," she said. "There were a lot of restrictions. When I was in the hospital I could not leave my room."

Folks at Tabor helped make her year bearable.

Scharnick worked on the yearbook while still in the hospital, and one teacher, Mrs. Lynch, had all her classes write Scharnick weekly letters - 30 or 40 letters would arrive at one time.

"It seems so insignificant, but when you're at home and removed from the things you miss, it means so much," she said. "Some of the kids would send me postcards from vacations."

She went to Harvard because "I'd wanted to go to Harvard even before I knew what that meant," Scharnick said.

After graduation she moved to [New York](#), holding several jobs, including at [St. Ann's School](#) in Brooklyn Heights, before joining Brunswick Group a year ago.

She joined the Pink Agenda shortly after it was founded in spring 2007.

The Pink Agenda has several upcoming events, including a promotion with Vado Pocket Video camera.

For more details see the Web site, [www.thepinkagenda.org](http://www.thepinkagenda.org) [Read more:](#)