



'YOU CAN'T GET ANY DARKER THAN WHERE I'VE BEEN'

Christina Applegate got double mastectomy after cancer was found in one breast. She plans to have reconstructive surgery. Photo by Reuters



Emotional Applegate speaks about double mastectomy

CALLING IT THE toughest choice she's ever faced, Emmy Award-winning actress Christina Applegate has revealed she had both breasts removed in a courageous battle to beat cancer.

"I'll face challenges, but you can't get any darker than where I've been," Applegate said in an emotional television interview.

The 36-year-old "Samantha Who?" star learned a month ago that she had developed early-stage cancer in one of her breasts. To end the nightmarish threat of the disease reoccurring and spreading — as she watched happen with her mom — she underwent a double mastectomy three weeks ago.

"I didn't want to go back to the doctors every four months," the blond beauty said. "I wanted to be rid of it."

"So, this was the choice that I made and it was a tough one," she said.

She admits she has had to fight a range of emotions.

"Sometimes I cry and sometimes I scream and I get really angry and I get really, you know, into wallowing in self-pity some-

BY BILL HUTCHINSON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

times," she told "Good Morning America" anchor and breast-cancer survivor Robin Roberts.

"And I think that's all part of healing, and anyone who's going through it out there — it's okay to cry."

Still, she believes, and doctors agree, she did the right thing.

"If this had been caught a year from now or when I was 40, I wouldn't probably be able to live through this or I'd have to undergo so much more than I have," she said.

Applegate, who is single but said she'd like to start a family someday, said her doctor has given her a clean bill of health.

"I'm definitely not going to die from breast cancer," she said. She also said her decisions mean she won't suffer like her

BATTLE VS. BREAST CANCER:

- A 2007 study in the Journal of Clinical Oncology showed the number of women opting for a double mastectomy to battle cancer jumped 150% in the past decade.
- More than 180,000 new cases of breast cancer are diagnosed annually in the United States.
- More than 40,000 American

women a year die from breast cancer.

■ Patients who test positive for the BRCA-1 or BRCA-2 gene have a 55% to 85% chance of getting breast cancer. Applegate tested positive for BRCA-1.

■ If cancer is found in one breast, there's a 65% chance of it spreading to the other.

mother, Nancy Priddy, who battled cancer twice and underwent two years of chemotherapy and eight surgeries, including a mastectomy and hysterectomy. Applegate, who had tested positive for the BRCA-1 breast cancer gene, said she'll have reconstructive surgery in the next eight months.

Showing the bawdy humor she did when starring in the racy sitcom "Married . . . with Children," Applegate joked, "I'm going to have cute boobs till I'm 90."

"I'll be the envy of all the ladies around the bridge table," she said, laughing.

Applegate encouraged other young women to have regular mammograms and said she is founding a program that will

help high-risk women afford MRIs and BRCA gene testing to catch the disease early.

"Besides me being really vigilant about it, it is the No. 1 reason that I'm going to live," she said of the MRI test that found her cancer early.

Dr. Rache Simmons of the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center in Manhattan said more and more women with conditions similar to Applegate's are opting for a double mastectomy.

Simmons said the advances in reconstructive surgery have allayed many of the fears women once had of losing their breasts.

"We can really do some wonderful things with reconstructive surgery now," Simmons said.

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We survived, too!

Growing number of women braving Applegate surgery

BY NANCY DILLON
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER

ACTRESS CHRISTINA APPLGATE gave it a celeb face, but the excruciating choice to have a preemptive double mastectomy is something more and more women are making.

"We're seeing probably six or seven times more prophylactic mastectomies now than 10 years ago," said Dr. Rache Simmons of the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center in Manhattan.

Some women aren't even waiting for a cancer diagnosis. Advances in genetic testing can tell whether they carry the so-called breast cancer genes associated with an 85% chance of developing the disease.

"Some women simply decide the risk is too high" and have their breasts removed even if they are cancer free, Simmons said. "Often these are women who've seen a mom or sister die."

Innovations in breast reconstruction also are a factor, especially with the Food and Drug Administration's rerelease of silicone implants, said plastic surgeon Dr. Gregory Laurenta.

'Some women simply decide the risk is too high.'

Dr. Rache Simmons

"There's more satisfaction and less depression afterward," when the patient, not the physician, recommends the surgery, said Dr. Deborah Axelrod at the NYU Cancer Institute.

Three women who made the same decision as Applegate share their stories:

■ **Stephanie Rivers** was a toddler when her mom died of breast cancer at age 36. She began vigilant screenings in her 20s and tested positive for the BRCA breast cancer gene last October.

"I knew right away I was going to get the surgery before I was 30," Rivers, 27, of Greenpoint, Brooklyn, said. Otherwise, "every six months I'd expect to get a diagnosis. I could never live like that."

Her recent double mastectomy and reconstruction at the NYU Cancer Institute took six hours.

Rivers can't wait to begin painting again — she stopped when she learned about the BRCA gene — and next month will begin a masters program in art.

"I was doing so much research and freaking out and feeling depressed. I didn't paint," she said. "It was all-consuming."

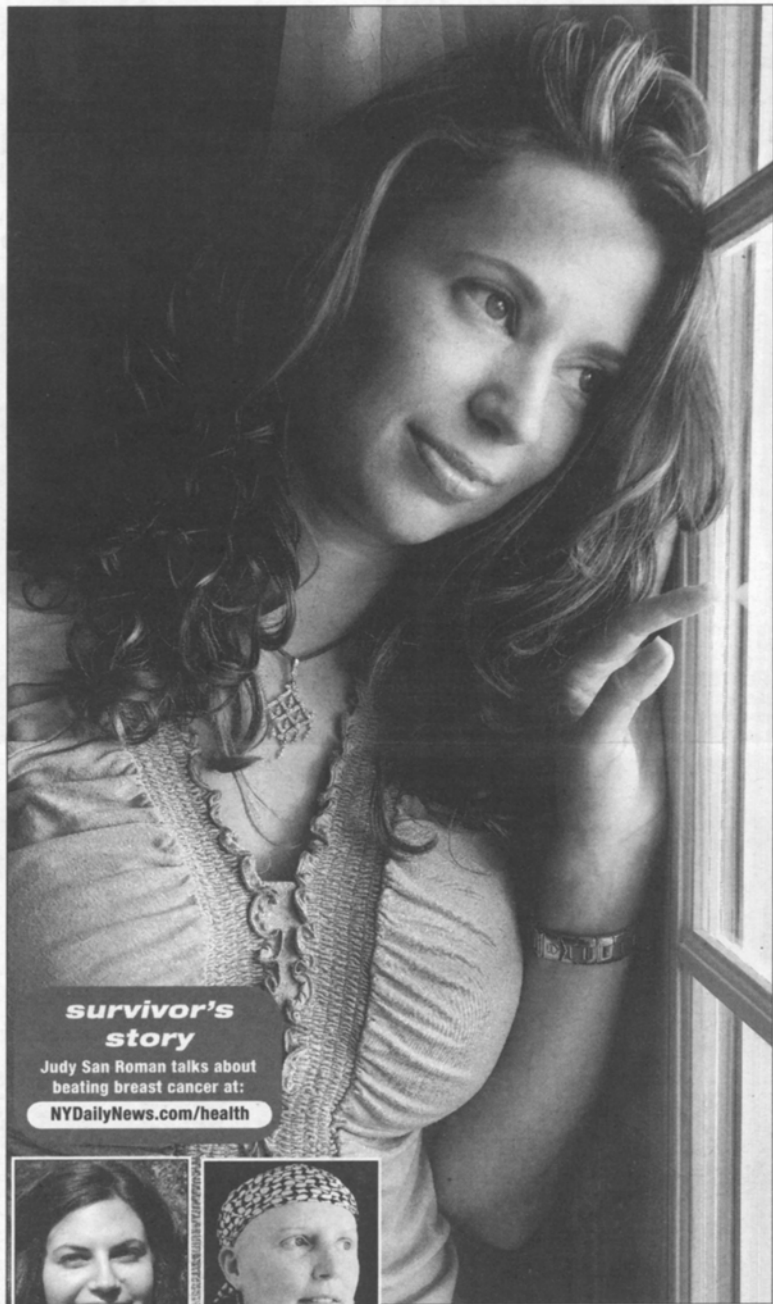
■ **Judy San Roman** of Howard Beach, Queens, said she "went numb for a few days" when doctors found a lump in her left breast at age 34. Her mother died of the disease at 42, and San Roman carries the BRCA gene.

Her doctor suggested a lumpectomy. She asked to have both breasts removed. He told her to see an oncology psychiatrist.

"The psychiatrist tried to talk me out of it. But I really did my homework," San Roman, 37, said. She scheduled her double mastectomy for April 6, 2005, and organized a party at the Joe Abbbracciamento restaurant in Queens the night before.

Still, she admits, "it was very tough to

walk into the hospital and have my breasts taken away."
■ **Laurie Hayes** has a 6 a.m. appointment today to have both of her breasts removed at the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center. And then she plans on having reconstructive surgery.



survivor's story

Judy San Roman talks about beating breast cancer at:
NYDailyNews.com/health



Judy San Roman, Stephanie Rivers (far l.) and Laurie Hayes reflect on their cancer battles.

Photos by Todd Maisel/Daily News (main) and Linda Rosier/Daily News (l.)

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■ **Laurie Hayes** has a 6 a.m. appointment today to have both of her breasts removed at the Iris Cantor Women's Health Center. And then she plans on having reconstructive surgery.

The mother of three from Kearny, N.J., was diagnosed with a small tumor in December and is a carrier of the BRCA gene.

"My surgeon said the genetic link was like God giving me a fortune cookie to see into my future. I remember thinking 'Screw you,

this isn't a cookie, it's cancer.'"

She started chemo but then met women in the waiting room whose cancer had metastasized. "They told me they wished they'd had a double mastectomy the first time," she said. "I don't want to be that woman back in the waiting room with regrets."

She also wants to be around for her grandchildren.

"My daughter is getting married next October," she said. "I'm going to be a beautiful mother of the bride with teenage boobs."

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