

"MY MOM BEAT BREAST CANCER"



ACTRESS **BRENDA SONG** PUT HER OWN FEARS ASIDE TO HELP HER MOM RECOVER FROM A SERIOUS ILLNESS.

Fans of actress Brenda Song know her as the bubbly and shallow London Tipton, the character she plays on the Disney Channel show *The Suite Life on Deck*. On TV, London never seems to have a bad day, as she consistently looks fabulous in fashionable outfits while always getting what she wants.

But in real life, Brenda, 21, lives a much more normal life that's not immune to problems. And one day in 2005, the actress received some chilling news: Her mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. "When I first found out, I couldn't talk about it," Brenda tells *Choices*. "I felt completely hopeless and helpless."

Brenda, who was just a teenager at the time, had reason to be worried. Breast cancer is the second-most-common diagnosed cancer among women in the United States. Almost 41,000 women were projected to die from the disease in 2008, according to the American Cancer Society.

The good news for Brenda and her brothers and father is that Mrs. Song was treated for the disease and her cancer is in remission. Believe it or



BRENDA WITH COLE SPROUSE DURING AN EPISODE OF *THE SUITE LIFE ON DECK*.

not, teenage kids can help parents sick with cancer and other illnesses cope with their diseases and even recover from them. Brenda did just that by doing the following:

Being unselfish

Having a seriously ill mother is scary for anyone, let alone a teenager who is still growing up and is relying on his or her parents for support. Brenda went through periods where she cried and felt sorry for herself. That's normal. But Brenda also came to the mature realization that any anxiety she was going through was minor compared with what her mother was experiencing. "Why let my mom go through this alone when all of us in our family can help her get through it?" Brenda says.

WORDS TO KNOW

- Immune:** Protected
- Mature:** Grown-up
- For granted:** To not appreciate

Breast Cancer

Q&A

1 What is breast cancer? Cancer is a disease in which abnormal cells in the body grow in an uncontrolled manner. In breast cancer, the disease forms in the tissues of the breast, usually the ducts (tubes that carry milk) and lobules (glands that make milk), according to the National Cancer Institute.

2 Is it curable? Yes, especially if detected early. "The majority of early-stage breast cancer patients live," says Dr. Andrew Kenler, a surgeon at Bridgeport Hospital in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

3 Can men get it? Yes, although it's rare when that happens, as just 1 percent of men in the U.S. get breast cancer.

4 Should teens be concerned about getting breast cancer? Most breast cancer patients are adult women and not teens. But once the body hits puberty, which happens during the teenage years, doctors recommend that girls make regular visits to a gynecologist and also do monthly self examinations.

5 If a relative of mine has had breast cancer, will I get it? Possibly, but not definitely. About 20 to 30 percent of women who have breast cancer have a mother or sister who also had the disease.

6 What happens if I feel a lump? If you feel something abnormal on one of your breasts, see your doctor as soon as possible. Please understand that an abnormality or pain in your breasts doesn't automatically mean you have cancer.