

## Breast cancer survivor revved up about sharing her story

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Photo by Nicholas A. Hess - Karen Levy, a breast cancer survivor and motorcycle enthusiast, will participate in the Amazon Heart Thunder United States in early September, driving 1,000 miles through California with 20 other survivors to support more cancer research.

On a Wednesday in August 2004, Karen Levy of Emlenton was told she was getting a new job, a move that would allow the 42-year-old mother of one to reach a new place of contentment and stability in her life.

One day later, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

Despite the radical life change, Levy has learned to overcome, she still manages to keep a solid outlook, persevering for not only herself, but for her 19-year-old daughter, Maria.

Levy, a single mother, raised her teenage daughter to know the strength of continuing on after a tragedy occurs. Levy lost her husband when Maria was only 12.

"When I was first diagnosed, I thought I was going to die," Levy said. "But there was no way I was going to leave my child. I was going to be there for everything in her life and from then on I knew I was going to survive."

Levy underwent four months of dose-dense chemotherapy every Friday and suffered through a modified radical mastectomy, in addition to reconstructive surgery on her right breast and reduction on her left. Levy fought to keep her spirits high no matter the cost. Levy was able to make it through more than just a rough year with relentless support from many family members, friends and co-workers.

"I was once told by a long-time survivor friend to get up in the morning, put your lipstick on, a smile on your face and go," Levy said. "And that is exactly what I did."

A cloud of smoke

Levy, describing herself as somewhat of a "hell-raiser" in her younger years, took to the sport of motorcycling at 18. Levy enjoyed riding her 2000 Harley-Davidson Sportster to work almost every day from her Emlenton home. Although she said she never really feared anything, the prospect of living with cancer made her more than a little cautious.

In order to spread the word about her own personal crusade, as well as raise awareness about the importance of yearly mammograms, Levy has decided not only to live her own life to the fullest, but show what living with cancer really means to the women who have it.

"Being diagnosed with breast cancer isn't the end of the world," Levy said, donning a pair of black riding boots and a laced-up leather vest. "I think I was given this for a reason. And I just appreciate life more. You enjoy every minute you have on this earth because you never know."

Levy will 'hit the road' later this year, riding in a 1,000 mile motorcycle voyage through the California countryside, sharing the road with other empowered women for the journey of a lifetime.

The drive, founded in 2004 by two young breast cancer survivors, was initiated out of the purpose of spreading not only awareness and education, but inspiration for the thousands of women suffering with breast cancer every year in the United States. The group of about 20 women will ride loaned 2008 Harley-Davidson motorcycles in the Amazon Heart Thunder United States. They will begin their expedition Sept. 6 in Los Angeles and finish Sept. 13 in San Francisco.

The riders, who will navigate an average of 150 miles of freeway a day, will be meeting with the local women and survivors on pre-planned stops. The women will share their own stories with those of the resident communities.

"I am sincerely honored to be part of this powerful event," Levy said. "Riding to pay tribute to those who have lost the battle to breast cancer, to those who are still fighting, and for those who do not yet know it but will become one of the many diagnosed."

Riding strong

Levy, having developed a passion for helping others, also actively participates with the Relay For Life. She crochets blankets and the like for annual raffles which support further cancer research.

However, it is her love for motorcycles and desire to alert the masses about the importance of self-awareness that have parlayed her initial goals into something much greater.

"If I can help one person get out of a rut and not feel bad for themselves, then I feel like I have succeeded," Levy said. "That's just who I am."

Highly anticipating her departure in early September, Levy hopes to again contribute to such an amazing effort. Levy is considering attempting to bring the program to the East Coast, offering more local women a chance to interact.

And although she doesn't get to keep the loaned 2008 Harley-Davidson she will be riding for the duration of the trip, she is keeping her fingers crossed, hoping to purchase the bike by the end of the drive.

"Some people get (diagnosed) and they feel sorry for themselves," Levy said, admitting that shortly after her surgery, she tucked her drains in a fanny pack and took to the open road on her purple Sportster. "I'm the type of person that's always up for a challenge. And the more positive attitude you have, the better you will be."

Those interested in donating to support Levy can visit [www.amazonheart.org/AHThunder](http://www.amazonheart.org/AHThunder) and click on the "Meet the Riders" tab, choosing Karen Levy's name from the list of participants.