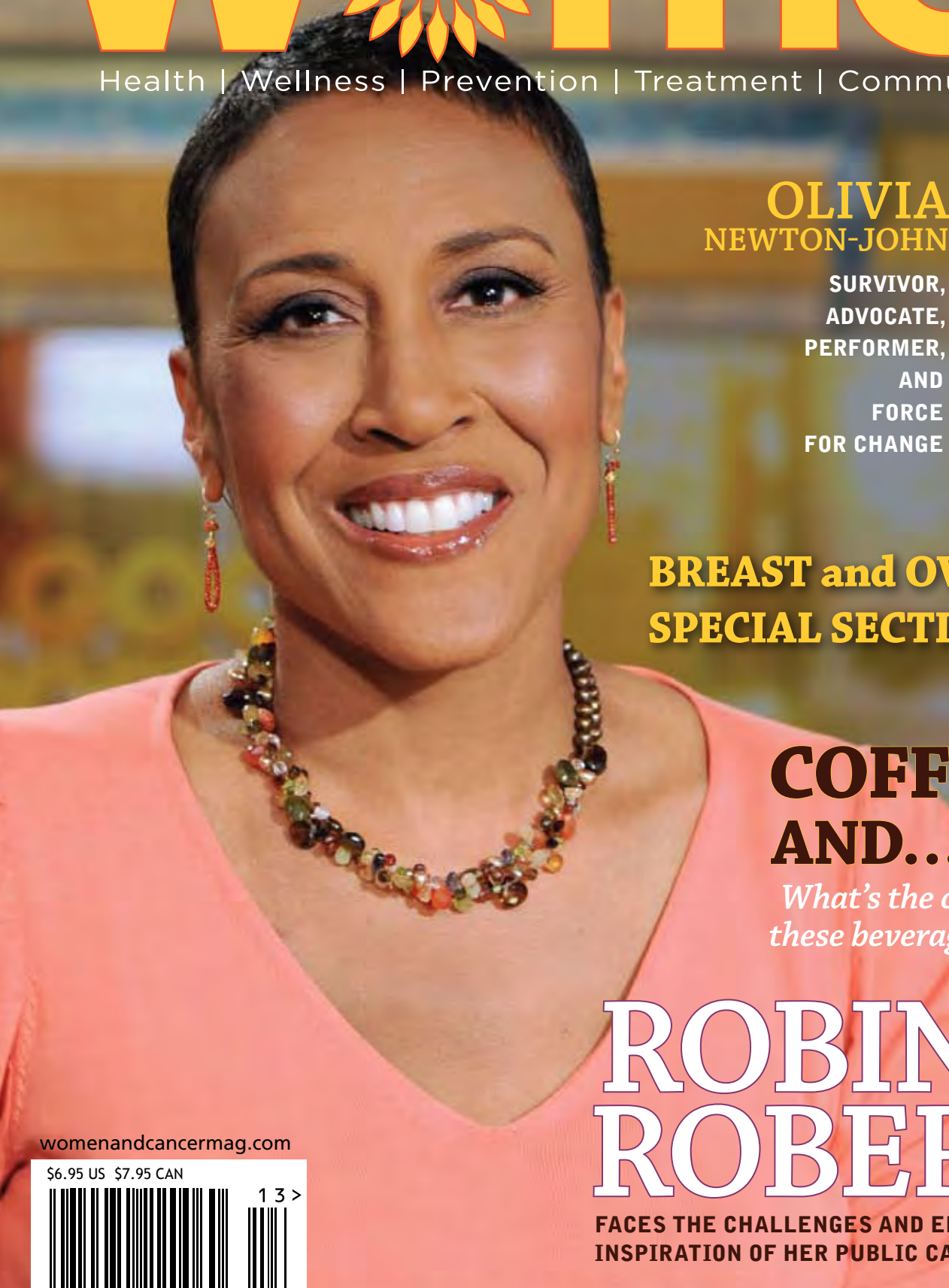


FALL 2008

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NEWTON-JOHN**

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ADVOCATE,  
PERFORMER,  
AND  
FORCE  
FOR CHANGE**



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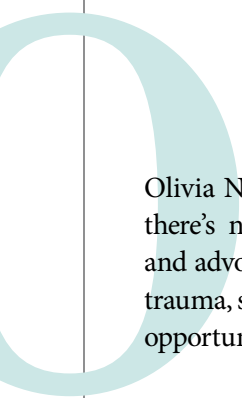
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# LIVING to THRIVE

BY DIANA PRICE

*Olivia Newton-John embraces the busy life that allows her to be an advocate, a performer, and a force for positive change.*



Olivia Newton-John prefers the word *thriver* to *survivor*. And there's no doubt that though the passionate singer, actress, and advocate has *survived* her share of physical and emotional trauma, she lives her life today as though every day were truly an opportunity to thrive.

In fact, Olivia has been thriving as an entertainer since her decision at 15 to take to the stage in her native Australia. Since then, with four Grammy Awards, an Emmy Award, numerous Country Music Awards, American Music Awards, and People's Choice Awards, 15 top-10 singles, five *Billboard* number one pop hits (including "Physical," "I Honestly Love You," and "Have You Never Been Mellow"), and numerous film credits that include *Xanadu* and the iconic role of Sandy in *Grease*, she has been winning over audiences around the world.

Throughout her career Olivia has exuded a positive personality and a soulfulness that have infused each of her projects with warmth and spiritual energy that for many of her fans have become her signature. Her passion for her work has translated into not only her creative projects but also the many advocacy efforts she has undertaken—ranging from environmental causes to health issues—to effect positive change in her own life and in the world around her. But Olivia's positive perspective has not come without cost.

In the summer of 1992, Olivia felt a lump in her right breast. "I had found lumps before," she says, "but this particular time I wasn't feeling well, and I didn't feel good about it." Her doctor recommended a mammogram, which did not turn up anything unusual, yet Olivia's instinct told her that what she was feeling was not right. Her doctor listened, and he performed a needle biopsy. Again, the result was benign. Still convinced that something was very wrong, Olivia and her doctor agreed that they would proceed with a surgical biopsy. Their final biopsy did indeed find cancer.

"I tell this story because I don't want to scare women—but in a way I do," Olivia says, reflecting on the important role that following her own inner voice played in her diagnosis. "I just didn't feel right about it, and my doctor thought he wanted to do further exploration even though those things were benign. So we followed that instinct. I encourage women to trust their instincts—ask your body, and your body will answer you."

Following her diagnosis, Olivia underwent a modified radical mastectomy and six months of chemotherapy before her treatment was finished. She endured the side effects of treatment, which included headaches, fevers, and fatigue; and she still remembers with a shudder the antinausea "cocktail" she was given at the time. It was her decision to integrate



Photo: Michelle Day

complementary therapies into her treatment plan that Olivia says really helped her through.

Working with her oncologist to ensure that none of the alternative treatments would interfere with the standard treatment protocol, Olivia had regular massage therapy as well as regular acupuncture sessions, which were especially helpful in alleviating her nausea. She also practiced yoga, meditated regularly, and consulted a doctor who was an herbalist. Each of these additional steps that she took to care for her health and her spirit, Olivia says, was integral to her healing. “It had to be more than slash and burn for me,” she says, of integrating a complementary approach.

Ultimately, Olivia’s treatment and recovery journey became a lesson in putting herself first. “I think one of the problems with women and cancer is that because we’re such caretakers, we don’t take care of ourselves.” In her own case, Olivia says, at the time of her diagnosis, her main concerns centered on everyone else. “My big worries were *What about my band? What about my audience? What about everybody else?*” Instead, she says, her illness forced her to refocus and take stock of her own needs. One session with a counselor granted her a particular visual image that became especially symbolic of her need to reevaluate: “A therapist told me, ‘You have to wean everyone off of you because your breast is your nurturing thing.’” It became clear that to ensure her own wellness, she would need to put herself first.

This was easier said than done for a woman who not only was used to taking care of her band and her fans—she had been busy preparing for a tour at the time of her diagnosis—but was also mother to a then-seven-year-old daughter, Chloe. At the time, Olivia made the difficult decision not to tell Chloe about her diagnosis. “The only reason I didn’t tell her was that her best friend had died of cancer the year before. That’s what cancer meant to her. So I didn’t want to terrify her.” Now, Olivia says, in retrospect, because Chloe was ultimately upset when she found out about her mother’s illness toward the end of her treatment, she thinks she would have told her earlier. But at the time, Olivia and her former husband instead worked out ways to keep Chloe entertained—they invited friends over and kept her busy in the days directly following each treatment cycle until Olivia was back on her feet. Still, Olivia says, Chloe was aware that things had changed: “Children pick up on energy in the house; she knew something was up and didn’t know what it was.”

Throughout this difficult period Olivia relied on the support of family and friends. In addition, she remains tremendously grateful for another connection that her oncologist made possible. “My oncologist put me in touch with another woman who had been through [breast cancer], and we spoke on the phone; that was a great source of support.” Despite her gratitude for the support she received, Olivia says, she recognizes now—as she did then—that a formal support network of some kind would have helped. In addition to the expected stress of the diagnosis and managing a career and a family at the same time, Olivia lost her father the same weekend she was diagnosed. She, like so many women, had a lot on her plate. “I would have liked something more, but I didn’t want to have to go home and then go to a different place with strangers.”

It is exactly this sentiment that has, in part, inspired Olivia’s participation in one of her most passionate projects: the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Center (ONJCC) at Austin Health, in her hometown of Melbourne, Australia. Approached by the hospital to lend her name to the project several years ago, Olivia agreed on the condition that they would incorporate a wellness center into the project’s design, a place like the one she wished she had been able to have during her own treatment. Now, she says, what began as a little seed has become a major part of the project. Wellness has become a focus of the center, which has developed a core, nonmedical program that provides patient-centered support and complementary therapies to patients diagnosed with cancer.

Olivia’s excitement is obvious as she talks about the project: “It will be a healing, beautiful place right in the hospital, where patients can go for everything from yoga to massage to conversation or a cup of tea,” she says, describing her vision for a center that truly nurtures patients and caregivers.

Her commitment to the ONJCC recently took Olivia farther than she perhaps ever expected to go—physically—to express the importance of her vision of cancer care. In April 2008, joined by friends and colleagues from the entertainment, sports, and private sectors, Olivia embarked on a 21-day trek along the Great Wall of China. Sponsored at a dollar a step, participants in the Great Walk to Beijing raised funds for the ONJCC. The trek, Olivia says, was a transformative experience. “It was life-changing, difficult, challenging, illuminating, scary...words can’t describe,” she says. The physical toll that the walking took each day was met with

## OLIVIA'S SELF-CARE TIPS

- ♥ **TAKE CARE OF YOUR WHOLE SELF: BODY, MIND, AND SPIRIT.** "I THINK THAT'S SOMETHING THAT I STRESS BECAUSE WOMEN WHO ARE TRYING TO BE EVERYTHING FOR EVERYONE TEND TO PUT EVERYONE ELSE FIRST."
- ♥ **CHOOSE A POINT PERSON FOR PEOPLE TO CALL TO FIND OUT HOW YOU'RE DOING.** "CHOOSE SOMEONE ELSE TO GIVE UPDATES SO YOU'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT YOUR CANCER AND YOUR TREATMENT ALL THE TIME AND SO YOU CAN FOCUS ON YOUR HEALTH AND WELLNESS. BY PICKING A SISTER OR A FRIEND TO GIVE PEOPLE NEWS, YOU'LL FREE-UP TIME, AND YOU NEED THAT TIME FOR YOU."
- ♥ **EXERCISE DAILY:** RESEARCH SHOWS THAT REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY REDUCES BREAST CANCER RISK AND MAY IMPROVE CANCER SURVIVAL.
- ♥ **ACCEPT HELP.**
- ♥ **DO SOMETHING FOR YOURSELF SPIRITUALLY, CREATIVELY, AND EMOTIONALLY EVERY DAY.**
- ♥ **LISTEN TO YOUR INSTINCTS.**

Olivia and Leeza Gibbons pause during the recent Great Walk to Beijing.



Photo: Andrew Raszevski

### Olivia and friends complete the 21-day Great Walk to Beijing.

sometimes equally challenging emotional moments as each member of the team dealt with the personal experiences with cancer—their own or those of a loved one—that had drawn them to the challenge. And yet the bonds forged by the combined exertion of body and spirit brought the group together in a way that they could never have imagined. “To walk for three weeks in another country—and on the Great Wall, which is challenging because it’s broken down and steep—was just an amazing time. We’re forever bonded, that group,” Olivia says.

Like the trek, in each public role that she takes on in the name of cancer advocacy—for the ONJCC and the other organizations she’s involved with—Olivia is very aware of the powerful role that her voice can have as someone who is thriving on the other side of a cancer diagnosis and as a celebrity with the platform to be heard. “If I can be a beacon for someone who’s going through it, that’s terrific. I see that as a good thing.” Especially, she says, because she was herself granted the gift of a guiding light 16 years ago when she needed hope. “I had just finished a

year of treatment, and I was visiting my mother in Australia. She had taken me to her favorite restaurant, and I ran into a woman in a bathroom. She said, ‘Oh, Love, I read in the paper that you had breast cancer, and I had it 20 years ago and I’m fine.’” That one moment, Olivia says, was life changing. “I just thought, *Wow, she had it all those years ago, and she’s fine.* It was really positive; and I thought to myself, *One day I hope I can do that for somebody else.*” Now, she says, knowing that she can help more than one person is a gift. “I know that some people don’t want to be public with their experience—don’t want to be reminded of it—and that’s their choice. But for me it doesn’t remind me in a negative way—it’s positive that I’m here.”

Olivia’s desire to make a difference as an advocate has also inspired her participation in the launch of the Liv Kit, a product designed to enhance breast self-exams. The kit includes a soft, latex-free polyurethane pouch filled with a small amount of non-toxic lubricant that you place over the breast while you perform your self-exam. The aid, according to promotional materials, “allows breast tissue to stay in place during an exam

*continued on page 76*



Photo: Andrew Raszevski

Olivia and Diane Heavin, Co-founder of Curves International, during The Great Walk to Beijing.

and lets your fingers glide smoothly across your breast. By reducing friction between your fingers and the skin, it makes for greatly increased sensitivity.” Olivia’s goal, she says, is for every woman to have a Liv Kit, and, thanks to a partnership with Curves International ([www.curves.com](http://www.curves.com)), the centers that focus on women’s health will be giving away 1 million units free of charge to members beginning in October 2008.

So, amid what appears to be a superhuman commitment to advocacy and fundraising, how does Olivia find time to unwind? Well, quite handily, she happens to have a spa of her very own, a healing retreat called Gaia, near Australia’s Byron Bay. The spa was created when she and her business partner and friend, Gregg Cave, both had dreams about a piece of property they had visited together near Olivia’s farm. “We wanted a place for our friends to come, and out of those dreams that we both had was launched Gaia, which is a healing retreat. It’s the most beautiful healing sanctuary.” Olivia laughs at her good fortune as she finishes the story, amazed at having created such an oasis for herself that has also become a business success: “It was created as a place we would like to go, and we just won the Condé Nast award for best spa in Australia!”

In hearing the joy in Olivia’s voice as she describes the pleasure she takes in each of her projects—creative, philanthropic, and business—it’s clear that this is truly a woman who fully

embraces every opportunity. And if there is a thread to connect all these opportunities that inspire her, it is—of course—music, which still fuels her soul and remains her greatest passion.

Whenever she has confronted difficulty or physical challenge, music has been the greatest source of spiritual and emotional healing, Olivia says, and in her journey with breast cancer it played the same role. “I went to Australia to recuperate after treatment, and I started waking up with songs in my head. I’d get up in the middle of the night and put them on my little tape recorder, and that turned into an album [*Gaia*], which wasn’t intentional—I had just done it for myself. I created music because music is healing and an outlet for me.”

When, in 2005, Olivia faced another very difficult time—this time emotionally, following the disappearance of her boyfriend—she again turned to music. “I wrote *Grace and Gratitude*, which is also a healing CD, as much to heal myself, but hopefully it will help others,” she says, explaining the therapeutic effect that the creative process continues to have for her. And now, in commemoration of the Great Walk to Beijing and her dedication to the ONJCC, she has released another album with the intent to inspire healing: *A Celebration in Song*, a compilation of duets, was produced to benefit the cancer center ([www.greatwalktobeijing.com](http://www.greatwalktobeijing.com)).

Each of Olivia’s albums—as expressions of her inner life—has allowed us to feel as though we know a bit more of her with each release. Now, with *A Celebration in Song*, she has brought together the elements that truly fuel her passion: we hear her love of her native country, we feel her passion for her advocacy work, and we experience her abiding joy in the music that has shaped her life. In combining her love for music and her desire to make a positive change in the world, the album truly represents Olivia’s guiding motivation, and it seems a fitting testament to her defiant wish to “not just survive—but thrive.” ❀

For information about the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Center, visit: [www.OliviaAppeal.com](http://www.OliviaAppeal.com).