

# Sweet harmony for home care and patient

by Margie Schaffer

**BJC HOME CARE SERVICES** ■ Home care workers, like all health care workers, do their best to inspire patients to begin their own healing process. Sometimes patients, in turn, inspire the staff. Frances Ginsberg is one such patient.

Ginsberg is an American citizen who has been living in Milan, Italy, and working as a professional opera singer. It was while shopping in the outdoor markets to prepare an American Thanksgiving Day celebration for her Italian friends that Ginsberg first noticed an excruciating pain in her groin.

After consulting with doctors in Italy, Ginsberg underwent surgery for ovarian cancer. Following surgery, she was advised to begin chemotherapy, but not in Italy, due to the frequency of labor strikes that could interrupt services.

Ginsberg was no stranger to cancer treatment, having undergone breast cancer treatments several years ago in New York City. That diagnosis had brought about several opportunities then to help others while she was still recovering herself. During her radiation treatments, Ginsberg sang for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, an American Cancer Center fund-raiser and Ground Zero dedications. She also sang at the chapel used as a refuge for police and firemen looking for remains in the Ground Zero rubble as part of an hourly program seeking to provide solace to the workers. And she sang at Shea stadium during Breast Cancer Awareness Week.

Now, the shocking reality of cancer was testing her again. Friends from her hometown of St. Louis formed the circle of support she needed. Jane Roodman-Weiss, RN, a Barnes-Jewish Hospital oncology nurse and a friend since kindergarten, insisted Ginsberg would get the best care through the Siteman Cancer Center. Elizabeth Shocklee, who had flown to Italy to be with her during surgery, offered her home to Ginsberg.

After treatment through Siteman, home care visits were scheduled. "That's when I met people who became huge factors in my successful recovery process," Ginsberg says. "They were my strength."

The first was BJC Home Care social worker Laurie Albright. "Laurie is incredible," Ginsberg says. "I needed to secure Medicaid to continue care. The process to me seemed too intimidating to even start. Laurie is such a warm and gentle spirit. She made me believe that it was



Frances Ginsberg

possible to take the steps to get through the application process.

"Most of all," Ginsberg says, "Laurie was a constant support to just 'be myself.' I felt so comfortable with her. When I had worrisome thoughts, Laurie would listen quietly and reflect my feelings back to me like a mirror — telling me that it was my efforts that would make all things possible for me.

"Laurie helped me fill out forms and connect me with the people I would have to meet with," Ginsberg says. "She even, on her own, took care of a problem I had with my international calling service with my cell phone company. When Laurie found out it was my birthday, she surprised me with two international calling cards in a birthday card — totally of her own doing."

Then Ginsberg met BJC Home Care nurse Debra Williams. "I enjoyed a special bond with this wonderful lady," Ginsberg says. "She was such a comfort to me during our home care visits."

Ginsberg's opera background has been a boon to her recovery. She was mourning the loss of her hair until she realized that wearing a wig has been natural to her during stage performances. "Now it's just an extension of that," Ginsberg says. "And the deep breathing exercises I do for singing preparation have helped in the healing process. Music itself is so healing to me."

As a way of giving back to friends who supported her, and to Albright who inspired her, Ginsberg planned a private mini-concert for them. She sang to the group to express her gratitude for their tenderness and support that helped her make a full recovery.

Albright had positive impressions of her own. "Frances appears to have a beaming light within her. All of us, given such hardship, would hope to be able to use our strengths to heal as Frances has. Her voice is a beautiful gift — one this world needs and will enjoy."

At a fund-raiser for the St. Louis Ovarian Cancer Awareness organization, Ginsberg's singing talents were auctioned off to the highest bidder. She performed at a private dinner party that included David Mutch, MD, chief of gynecologic oncology at Siteman Cancer Center, a guest and her oncologist from Siteman.

"I have been so grateful for each success along the way," Ginsberg says. "I feel like I have so much more to contribute here. This experience has taken me back to my 'roots' in more ways than one. I have returned to my hometown of St. Louis. I have lost my hair and needed to regrow it. I have gained a new sense of my life.

"I feel more grateful, more joyful, more connected to life, my dreams and my goals. It's made my life more intense," Ginsberg says. "Thank you to everyone at BJC who has been a part of it." ■

Margie Schaffer, [mbs1023@bjc.org](mailto:mbs1023@bjc.org)