

COVER STORY

ACTOR'S NEW ROLE: CANCER COUNSELOR

FROM THE WAY Kathy Gurland bounces around her DUMBO office, greeting patients with warm hugs, it's clear the 57-year-old loves working as a "cancer navigation consultant."

Not so obvious? The fact that a series of family tragedies led her to what she calls her "dream job."

So did a series of careers. Gurland, who moved to Manhattan after high school to pursue a stage career, spent 15 years performing and teaching musical theater before her father's untimely death served as a wake-up call.

"I realized I wanted to do something profound and meaningful with my life," she says. "And I knew I needed a college degree to do that."

Thus, at age 33, Gurland began attending NYU part-time while volunteering with various social-service

organizations. When she graduated seven years later, she launched her second career in earnest, working for alternative-to-incarceration and vocational rehab programs.

While the work confirmed her desire to help others, she wasn't entirely fulfilled, and she began contemplating her next move. Then her older sister Judy died from cancer.

"Her death provoked me to go, 'OK, let's take this to the next level,'" says the energetic Brooklynite. "I thought, 'Do you really want to make a difference on this planet?'"

So at 46, she returned to school for a master's in social work, studying end-of-life care and clinical therapy. That led to concurrent jobs running a private therapy practice and serving as a social worker in a Manhattan hospice.

Then Gurland's world was turned upside down again, this time by her younger sister Peggy's diagnosis with stage-four lung cancer.

This time around, Gurland found herself uniquely equipped to help. With an insider's knowledge of the health-care system and training in end-of-life care, she was able to serve as her sister's advocate, acting as a liaison between Peggy and her doctors, helping coordinate a plan of treatment and translating medical jargon. And though Gurland ultimately lost her sister after an 18-month struggle, she had an epiphany: "What I did for my little sister is greatly needed."

From that realization, a new career was born, running PEG'S Group (Personalized Education, Guidance and Support), a private practice serving people affected by cancer.



GUIDING LIGHT: Family illnesses set musical theater performer Kathy Gurland on a new path: helping families challenged by cancer.



Michael Sofronski; Alamy (inset)

Since she started two years ago, Gurland has served dozens of individuals and families, offering assistance that ranges from educating them about their rights and researching treatment options to assisting with details like transportation to simply providing therapy at each stage of the journey. Gurland sees the group not only as a tribute to her sisters, but also "a culmination of all my life

experience and skills."

The challenges are many, especially when it comes to marketing a business that's a pioneer in its services, and inherently depressing in its subject matter. But two years in, Gurland wouldn't trade her new job for anything — not even more time

at the Puerto Rican home she owns with her retired husband.

"Each time I finish up work with a client, it's like I've been on vacation for a week," she says, smiling broadly. "Being able to help others is like no other feeling in the world."

Career Fair Exhibitors

Thursday, May 20th, 11AM - 3PM at 370 Seventh Ave. (Affinia Manhattan Hotel)

Career Fair Exhibitors

New York Post Career Fair

The Affinia Manhattan Hotel

Thursday, May 20, 2010

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