



Photography: Isabell Snyder, Los Angeles, CA

No 'Freak of Nature'

Singer-songwriter Anastacia found out firsthand that even women in their 20s and 30s can get breast cancer.

Now, she's using her celebrity to warn others.

"My plastic surgeon saved my life."

Doctors who specialize in tucks and Botox do not often hear those words, but international pop star Anastacia has her Manhattan-based plastic surgeon, Dr. Andrew Kornstein, to thank for much more than a svelte figure or a satin complexion.

"The most ironic part of finding out I had breast cancer was that I actually was getting a breast reduction," explains the Epic/Sony recording artist. Though not universal practice, Dr. Kornstein said he frequently requires mammograms to establish a baseline for post-operative comparison, as well as to stress the importance of monitoring breast health.

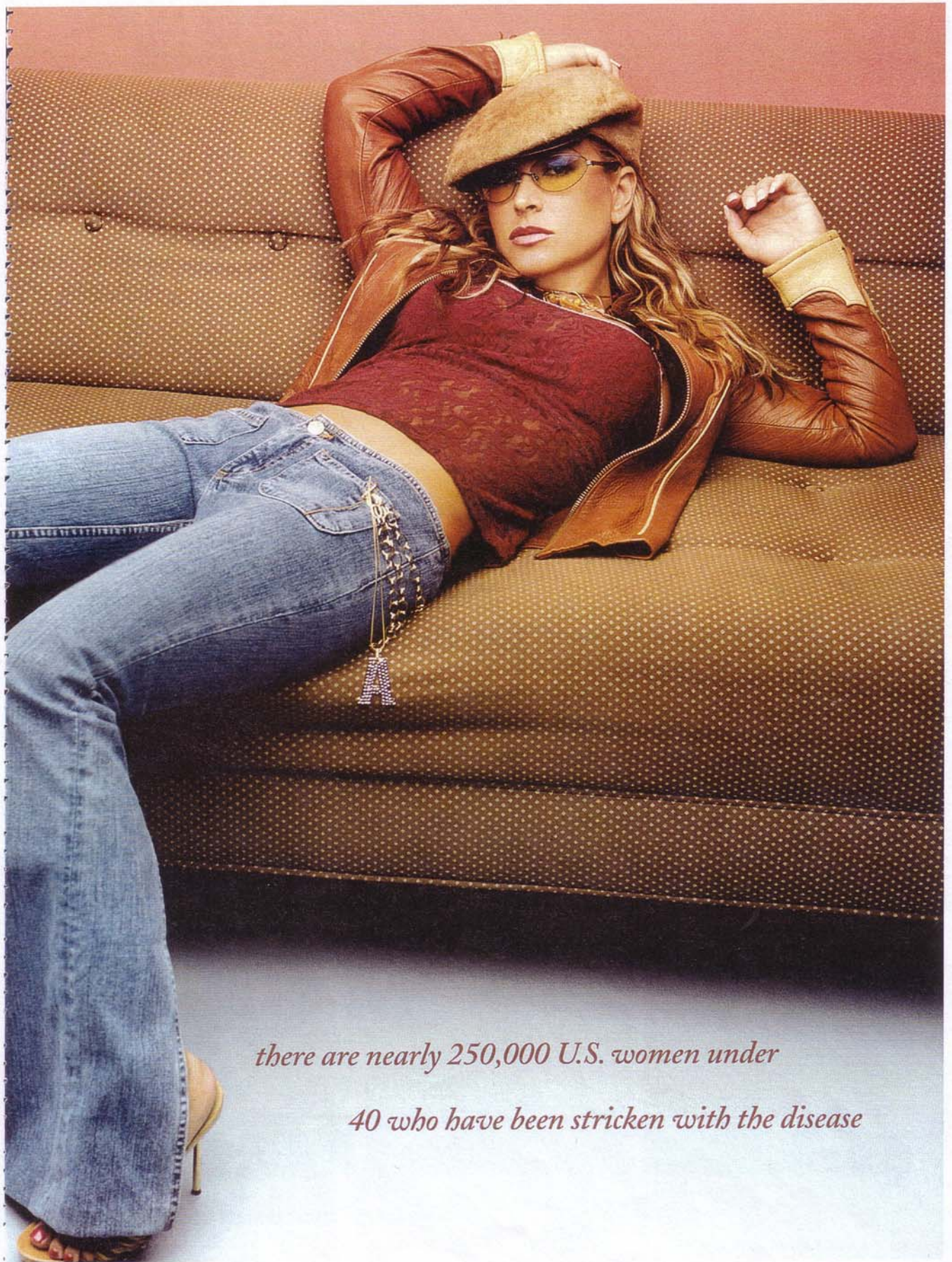
In January of 2003, cancer was the furthest thing from the mind of the young, sultry-voiced singer, whose 2002 album, "Freak of Nature," had debuted atop the European Hot 100. Anastacia had not habitually performed breast self-examinations, and

there were no symptoms, such as a palpable lump, to indicate something might be amiss.

The mammogram showed otherwise. Her diagnosis: Ductal carcinoma in situ, an aggressive form of breast cancer that can be treated successfully, but only if detected early.

"I was very naïve," says Anastacia, who had no family history of breast cancer and who, like most women, believed routine mammograms begin at age 40. "So much information is misleading," she says. "It is not [just] after 40 that you can get breast cancer. It has changed."

Though American Cancer Society statistics indicate that 94 percent of new cases occur in women over 40, younger women can and do get breast cancer. And the number may be on the rise: The Young Survival Coalition (YSC), a non-profit group dedi-



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cated to calling attention to breast cancer among young women, says that there are nearly 250,000 U.S. women under 40 who have been stricken with the disease, and one in every 251 current 30-year-olds will be diagnosed with breast cancer within the next 10 years.

Alarming, research also indicates that breast cancer can be more aggressive in younger women.

For Anastacia, coping quickly became a public process. "Two days after I found out I had cancer, my diagnosis leaked to the press," she recalls. Rather than retreat from the publicity, she seized the opportunity to educate other women.

"I am probably the vessel of the cancer gods," she muses. "I've been very vocal and extremely open with my fans." She's been upbeat, too. "Everything, no matter how tragic, happens at the time you need to learn something," she says.

In February, Dr. Kornstein worked alongside surgeon Alexander Swistel to excise the cancer and reconstruct Anastacia's left breast. She took a short breather before beginning intense radiation therapy. "I just needed not to be poked and prodded by too many doctors. I wanted to feel normal for a minute," she says.

During this interval, she wrote a song about her breast-cancer battle, "Heavy on My Heart." But the radiation treatment interrupted her creative process. "I expected to be able to work during radiation, and I just couldn't," says Anastacia. "I didn't expect that I would be so laid out, spiritually and vocally."

After radiation, her creativity rebounded and Anastacia's voice regained its powerful edge. Equally powerful is the message she is sharing with women about the importance of taking control of their health. Lifetime has named her the spokesperson for the network's *Stop Breast Cancer for Life* public-awareness campaign. The Anastacia Fund, established through the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, aims to bolster research on breast cancer among younger women.

"I'm not the typical poster child of what breast cancer looks like," Anastacia acknowledges. "I'm blessed to be in this position where people are listening to me." For starters, she is pushing young women to get mammograms, even if they have to forego other purchases because insurance does not cover the exam. She believes her fans are getting the message: "They are realizing that tomorrow is tomorrow, and today is all we've got."

For those coping with sudden adversity, Anastacia can also be an inspiration. "I'm feeling amazingly good," she reports. "It might have been a rough road for a minute, but I have come around the bend, and my life is still wonderful and filled with joy. My spirit is back—back in a little bit of a different way. I am wiser now. Every survivor I meet is so much stronger for the struggle."

Written by Kimberly Knox Beckius

