

Fall/Winter 2009

# Courage



## Elizabeth Manley-Theobald's Olympic Dream Revealed

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# Flooded by memories of her mom, Elizabeth Manley-Theobald preps for Olympic spotlight

By Shannon Bain

**T**his February skating sweetheart Elizabeth Manley-Theobald will be realizing another one of her Olympic dreams – but this time she won't be lacing up her skates to do it.

The Olympic silver medallist will be joining CTV's Olympic team, and will work alongside veteran sportscaster Rod Black, and figure skating icons Jamie Salé, David Pelletier, Jennifer Robinson and Victor Kraatz, to provide commentary for the figure skating competitions at the 2010 games in Vancouver. And, while Manley-Theobald is about to realize her dream of becoming a TV sports commentator the opportunity is proving to be bittersweet for the 44-year-old.

"I am thrilled to be part of the Olympic games and I am excited to get started," explains Manley-Theobald. "But, I am just really sad that my mom won't be sitting on the couch watching me on TV."

It was just over two years ago that Manley-Theobald found out that her mom Joan was diagnosed with stage three ovarian cancer. "My mom and I were attached at the hip. When she was diagnosed with ovarian cancer, there was no question; I was coming home from Philadelphia. I was going to be there with my mom every step of the way."

Manley-Theobald says being a career athlete and competitor helped her deal with the fear that a cancer diagnosis brings with it. "The competitor in me really took over and I just focused on keeping things moving and going – my reaction was really delayed."

In fact, it wasn't until December 2007 that the realities of her mom's disease sunk in for the skating star. She watched in horror as her 71-year-old mom began to swell, and doctors



**Elizabeth helped her mother through diagnosis and treatment 'every step of the way' until her mother succumbed to the illness.**

were forced to change her chemotherapy treatment. When that option was unsuccessful doctors were forced to put in tubes to help expel the fluid build-up.

It was at that point that Manley-Theobald noticed a shift in her mom's normally upbeat personality. "I saw my mom's attitude change; she was on a high at the beginning. We were going to beat this disease. But eventually the fight took its toll."

In April Joan was placed on the interview list for a new drug therapy,

and it was discovered that she had developed fluid in her lungs and rib cage. Manley-Theobald felt helpless as she watched her once vibrant mom slowly slip away as she stopped eating and refused to get up. "I went through a whole series of emotions," recalled Manley-Theobald. "I had literally moved into the hospital to be as close to her as possible."

Just a few short months later, at the age of 72, Manley-Theobald's mom succumbed to the disease she so bravely fought for over a year.



The Olympic silver medalist has many figure skating memories.

John Major Photography

“I felt very guilty when mom passed away,” said Manley-Theobald. “I dove into my work. It was my way of handling the situation.”

In fact, Manley-Theobald says the death of her mom caused her to lose herself. She added 35 pounds to her usually petite frame, and didn’t take care of her own emotional and physical needs.

Today, Manley-Theobald is back at the top of her game and looking forward to starting a family with her husband Brent once her Olympic duties are fulfilled.

She credits healthy eating and a more active lifestyle with her new found strength and positive attitude.

She is proud to report that she’s lost 24 pounds thanks to that healthy lifestyle, and is working at losing another 13 pounds before the new year.

With her new found confidence she has made her triumphant returns to the public spotlight. Nationally she is the spokesperson for Herbal Magic and the Winners Walk of Hope for ovarian cancer. Here at home she is lending her name to An Evening with Abigail, a fundraiser benefiting the Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation.

***“Getting involved is helping me help others, but also helping myself. Speaking out and making women aware is helping me stay connected with my mom.”***

– Elizabeth Manley-Theobald

She will serve as one of the honorary patrons for the Pink Carpet Gala in October. At those public appearances she is taking on the role as an advocate for early detection and screening – encouraging women to see their doctors and have their mammograms and pap tests regularly.

“Getting involved is helping me help others, but also helping myself,” explains Manley-Theobald. “Speaking out and making women aware is helping me stay connected with my mom.”

This February when Manley-Theobald takes to the airwaves for the 2010 Olympic Games she will be thinking about her mom, and about the achievements the two have made.

“My mom and I had talked about my doing Olympic coverage for years.



It’s something that I have been working towards my whole career. I have to think that my mom is up there watching me and pulling some strings.”

