

**IT'S THE TRUE IDENTITY** of Wonder Woman has now been revealed: Leslie Ezelle, a designer, mother of four kids (and mom to three dogs, two cats, two turtles and one hamster), former Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader, wife to Libby—and a breast cancer survivor. **She is also the new face of gay**, having recently come out on episode 3 HGTV's *Design Star* by mentioning her wife, and challenging mainstream America's view of what a lesbian looks like, and what a lesbian family looks like.

**"It blew their minds, especially with the Dallas Cowboys cheerleader thing," says the irrepressible Texan.** Ezelle's blended family (a daughter of her own and Libby's three children from a previous heterosexual marriage) also made a splash in their Dallas community, but that was to be the least of their challenges. "We got married in 2008 in Cape Cod, where it's legal, and that same weekend the market crashed, and then I was diagnosed with breast cancer. So, wham, bam, thank you ma'am."

TWO LESBIAN BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS ARE FIGHTING THE DISEASE IN A CREATIVE WAY.

## Keeping ABREAST

BY MERRYN JOHNS

Ezelle struggled for two years with six surgeries and six weeks of radiation, but is still thankful. "I always say I got the best type of breast cancer you can get: it was found early...but I just kept getting handed these cards, like, you're not done yet." Ezelle suffered through numerous infections and while in hospital, she would put makeup on and hide the IVs, she even had her hairdresser pay a visit and do her roots—for the sake of the kids.

"I didn't want them to worry. It was depressing and hard and we got through it and I started having these soul-searching questions burning inside of me about what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wanted a design show, combining my background in theatre and my love of performing with what I do for a living, which is design."

**Breast cancer ended up being a motivator for Ezelle.** "I wanted my kids to see that breast cancer will not define me. I will come back from this, even better, and do exactly what I want to do in life. I'm going after my



**dream.** And did she ever. She got that design show and while others may regret their life being placed under the microscope of reality TV, Ezelle relishes it. "It's like walking around and having a soundtrack," she says—a boost except for when the camera "shows all the pores in my nose," she jokes.

But the design star hasn't stopped dreaming. Ezelle wants more, all in the name of visibility for lesbians, lesbian families and breast cancer survivors. Consequently, she was thrilled to be made this year's Susan G. Komen Honorary Chairperson for The Race for the Cure, and raised \$30,000.00 in just one month.

For this October, which is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, she has also embarked on her most ambitious design project yet. **She sat for a series of photographs that evoke the iconic images of Marilyn Monroe—except this blond bombshell wears a pink ribbon—in part of her goal to bring sexy back, even after breast cancer.** "I've been cut on so many times I feel maimed. Like I'm not a woman. You lose that part of yourself and you think you're never going to get it back. But you can feel sexy after breast cancer."

**And to symbolize this fighting spirit on a monumental scale she has put her artistic skills to use and designed an eye-popping installation: a super-sized bra, 13 feet high by 7 feet wide, made of metal straps and hanging on a metal branch signifying the "tree of life."** The bra sculpture, a symbol of feminine power, will tour Dallas and hopefully the country, raising awareness about breast cancer. **Whether you are a breast cancer survivor or not, Ezelle has this life lesson for you: "Get busy living, for life is fragile!"**

(komen.org) ■

## GIVING CANCER A TKO



**FATHER "COUGAR" PERRY, 35,** was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer in July 2010. And that wasn't the end of the bad news: She also tested positive for the BRCA2 gene mutation, which meant she was at high risk for developing breast and ovarian cancer prior to menopause. On August 3, 2010, she had a bilateral mastectomy (the removal of both breasts) and removal of five lymph nodes in her right armpit. She started aggressive chemotherapy followed by radiation therapy, five days a week for six weeks straight and then physical therapy to prevent lymphedema and swelling in her right arm. Her body is a battleground, but she will not be defeated. To keep her spirits aloft, Perry started the CHAMPION project, which documents her painful, yet powerful journey in a series of feisty photographs, soon to be made into a book. "My objective with CHAMPION is to put a face to cancer," says Perry. "When I was diagnosed I wanted to see photos of other women who had a double mastectomy without reconstruction and were in my age group. I couldn't find any, so with the help of my photographer and roommate, Bryce Ward, I started to photograph my journey." The book is ready for publication and Perry is looking for support and publicity. You can get behind her project on her Facebook page, Champion: My Photo Journey with Breast Cancer, and look out for her web-page which launches for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Perry has a heartfelt message for curve readers: "Know your family's medical history on both your father's and mother's side. And get a mammogram if you haven't had one yet. This is especially important to women who have a history of breast cancer in their family. Do not wait. It's all about awareness, prevention and detection!" ■



HELE GARDNER

BRUCE WARD