

# SUPPORTING *the fight*

*DreamWorks producer Nancy Bernstein supports her own fight against colorectal cancer.*

BY AMY E. HAMAKER



**NANCY BERNSTEIN LOVES TO CREATE MILESTONES.**

The 52-year-old producer for DreamWorks Animation SKG enjoys the challenge of making all the details of a project fall into place.

Bernstein has an impressive professional resume. Prior to her tenure at DreamWorks, Bernstein spent 10 years at R/GA Digital Studios as head of production, serving as the visual effects producer on such films as *In the Line of Fire* and *Last Action Hero*. From there, she led Digital Domain's feature effects production on Academy Award-winning *What Dreams May Come* and Academy Award-nominated *I, Robot*.

As part of DreamWorks, she served as head of production at the company's Glendale, Calif., campus, and has served as visual effects executive producer on more than 30 films, including *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* and *A Beautiful Mind*. Now as producer, her most recent

project, *Rise of the Guardians*, premiered on Nov. 21, 2012.

But Bernstein's biggest milestone may be yet to come, and it's one she hopes to see. In December 2011, Bernstein was diagnosed with stage IV metastasized colorectal cancer, a disease that carries an average life expectancy of just two years. However, Bernstein is determined to stick around to help raise funds in conjunction with the USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center to create a cure, not just for others, but hopefully for herself as well.

**A Stunning Diagnosis**

Feeling ill during a trip to Mexico in October 2010, Bernstein went for a checkup. Other than slightly elevated cholesterol, however, everything seemed fine, so she scheduled a colonoscopy for after the holiday season and returned to her busy life, working and raising her then 3-year-old daughter.

When she returned for the test in February 2011, however, she received stunning news: a diagnosis of stage III B

colorectal cancer. "I had a 5-centimeter tumor that my doctors thought could have been growing for five years," she said. "There's no history of cancer in my family, so I was completely in denial about the magnitude of the diagnosis."

In March 2011, Bernstein began a six-week regimen of oral chemotherapy and radiation therapy. After a month of recovery, surgeons removed what was left of the tumor and some additional damaged, nonworking or no longer vital organs. She was deemed cancer free in November 2011.

The good news didn't last, however. In December 2011, scans revealed seven new tumors in her lungs. A needle biopsy confirmed the worst: Bernstein's cancer was back and had moved to her lungs.

Her doctors recommended that she move her care to a facility that performs extensive research for more aggressive treatment. Shortly afterward, Heinz-Josef Lenz, M.D., associate director for clinical research and co-leader of the Gastrointestinal Cancers Program at the



The heroes of Nancy Bernstein's latest film, *Rise of the Guardians* (pictured above), include the Tooth Fairy, Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. But in real life, Bernstein is determined to be her own hero—by funding research into colorectal cancer.

USC Norris Comprehensive Cancer Center, met with her to discuss her case.

"I was just blown away by Dr. Lenz's enthusiasm and his fighting approach," says Bernstein. "He's the only one who said a cure wasn't necessarily out of the question. I said to him, 'I intend to make you really successful—I intend to live.'"

**Funding Targeted Research**

Once the initial shock passed, Bernstein decided to help raise funds and awareness for colorectal cancer. But she needed a place to start.

"I work for an amazing organization, and Jeffrey Katzenberg is a great fundraiser," says Bernstein. "I asked him about how to go about it, and he said to find out where the money's going. When I spoke to Dr. Lenz, I asked which charities would support the work he was doing. He answered, 'We have programs set up at USC. You come here for treatment, and you should get the benefits of your fundraising.'"

The first program targeted is research into the efficacy of Avastin, a drug used

with chemotherapy to treat colon cancer by preventing the forming of blood vessels that bring oxygen and nutrients to tumors. Lenz's research aims to discover why patients become resistant to the drug. In addition, his group is testing whether the drug PRI 724 will enhance the efficacy of Avastin.

Bernstein hopes to raise \$200,000 to help fund this research. To that end, she worked with USC to develop a special Call to Cure donation website ([www.uscnorris.com/CallToCure](http://www.uscnorris.com/CallToCure)) and Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/calltocure](http://www.facebook.com/calltocure)). Her outreach is working: More than \$33,000 was raised

through the online donation form less than a week after going live.

Bernstein hopes to make an impact quickly. "Time is not on my side," she says. "I really do feel that when battling something like this, the more amazing partners you can have around you the better chance you have," she continues. "I found a great leader of my team in Dr. Lenz. He fights for me, and that makes me more willing to fight."

*For more information or to make an appointment with Dr. Lenz, please call 1-800-USC-CARE.*

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Image courtesy of DreamWorks Animation, SKG