



MS didn't stop Henriette Mantel from winning Emmys.

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An Interview with Marisa Lee, Founder and President of The Pink Agenda

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Nikolai Hamel: Many people have breast cancer, or have lost family or friends to the disease, but they don't start breast cancer research funds like The Pink Agenda. What inspired you to do more?

Marisa Lee: That's an interesting question because before my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, she spent nine years battling **Multiple Sclerosis**, and during that period, I maybe donated \$25 here or there, and that was about it.

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I spent my time in high school primarily serving and fundraising for programs that supported education and at-risk youth and did more of the same in college. I spent the year following my college graduation living with my parents and helping them adjust to my mother's new diagnosis. In 2006, I moved to New York City to work in international trade finance and knew that I wanted to do something to give back-but not just to throw something else on my resume. I wanted to do something substantive, and something that I felt passionately about.

One night my college roommate, Vivian, took me out for drinks. After a few cocktails I went home to watch an episode of Grey's Anatomy that had been TiVo'd. It was the episode in which George's father is battling both cancer and a serious heart condition.

They open up his chest to operate on his heart and realize the cancer has metastasized to most of his major organs. Instead of a healthy pinkish-red hue, all of the man's organs are covered in this black nastiness. I instantaneously made the connection that what I was seeing on TV could just as easily have been the body of my own mother, and that was just unacceptable to me. I proceeded to have a lovely breakdown, and woke up the next day having decided that I would throw a party to raise money for breast cancer.

The organization was borne when someone wanted to write us a check for \$5,000 and I had no place to deposit it. Within 72 hours, we were an incorporated organization in the State of New York.

I should also mention that I no longer watch medical drama or reality TV shows.

NH: What does the president of an organization like [The Pink Agenda](#) do exactly? What role do you play?

ML: In October you do a lot. It is my job to be the face of the organization for at least the next five years. A lot of what potential donors and volunteers buy into is my story because, for one reason or another, they can relate to it. I am responsible for always being available to attend events, give speeches and interviews, and, if possible, to write for and about the organization. It is also my job to attract new talent, new leaders, new mentors, and new donors to The Pink Agenda (TPA). This month I will spend time at events in Boston, Chicago, and New York for TPA.

On an annual basis, I'm charged with setting our internal agenda. I'm currently in the midst of drafting our long and short-term development plans, and our business plan. I'll also work with the treasurer on our budget. Once drafted, everything I create is reviewed and critiqued by the other officers, and ultimately voted upon and adopted by the board.

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