Evert’s Luck

Tragedy may have saved her life.

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Chris Evert, 67, ranked No. 1 in singles tennis for seven years in the ’70s and early ’80s, lost her sister Jeanne Evert Dubin to ovarian cancer in 2020. But that tragedy may have saved her life.

When Dubin was diagnosed in 2017, she tested negative for the harmful variants of the BRCA1 gene that are associated with cancer, so Evert and other family members were discouraged from undergoing genetic tests, according to ESPN.com. But recent advances in genetic testing identified the variant that Dubin did have as a risk factor. So in October 2021, Evert had her blood tested. She, too, had that BRCA1 variant.

In December 2021, she underwent a preventive hysterectomy, but post-surgery pathology revealed a tumor in her fallopian tubes. Further surgery revealed no lymph node involvement; her Stage I ovarian cancer had been removed during the original surgery. “I don’t remember being that happy in years,” says Evert, who is undergoing six weeks of chemotherapy to prevent recurrence.

Her early diagnosis is particularly remarkable because ovarian cancer most often goes unnoticed until later stages. According to Evert’s surgeon, Cleveland Clinic ob-gyn Joel Cardenas, MD, 70% to 80% of ovarian cancer is diagnosed at Stage III or IV. “Three months or so from now, she’d be Stage III or IV,” he says. His advice: “Ovarian cancer is rare. However, if a patient has a family history, we encourage genetic testing and counseling.”

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