



WOMEN who
DARE



At a Circle of 10 event: Kirsten Carriol, Fern and Marcus Moufarrige and Guillaume Brahimi. Left: Erica Packer.



Sanchia Brahimi, Dr Alessandra Muntoni and Kellie Hush.

BRAVE
HEART

ERICA Packer is working for a brighter day for breast-cancer sufferers.
By KELLIE HUSH

ERICA Packer is on the phone from Los Angeles, where she's spending a "lazy" Sunday at home with her three children, Indigo, Jackson and Emmanuelle, playing Monopoly. "I always say to my eldest daughter that she's cheating, but really she's just kicking my butt! I'm a bad loser," she says with a laugh.

We last caught up in December at an event Packer was hosting at the Sydney restaurant Guillaume. The evening was to recognise the now 21 generous women who make up the National Breast Cancer Foundation's Circle of 10, for which Packer is an ambassador. Circle of 10 is the brainchild of philanthropist Sanchia Brahimi and NBCF non-executive director Deeta Colvin. Each Circle member commits \$20,000 over two years, and to date, the initiative has raised \$450,000 for two research programs. The first Circle has funded Dr Therese Becker's research into understanding how dormant cancer cells awaken and become metastatic, while the second backed Dr Elgene Lim's research into identification of breast cancer subtype-specific tumour proteins, using lymph nodes of women with early breast cancer.

"Asking people for money is difficult, but it's worth it," says Packer, 38. "The research they are supporting is really amazing. Every time it gets hard to ask, you think of our children and finding a cure and how it is for the greater good."

The reason Packer refers to "our children" is because we both have a strong family history of breast cancer. I was diagnosed in 2013, with my mum, Leonie, aunt and a paternal cousin all breast-cancer survivors. Packer's older sister, Jo Hunter, is a breast-cancer survivor but, shatteringly, the insidious disease took their cherished mother, Sheelah Baxter, aunt and grandmother. "Our mum was given a couple of months to live when she was diagnosed with breast cancer at 52 and she was like, 'No! This isn't going to get me. I'm going to beat this.' And she lived for

another 13 years," Packer says. "Jo was diagnosed in the last 10 months of my mum's life, so we were dealing with quite a few bad results at that time. When we got the news on Jo, she was 39 — it was absolutely devastating. Mum was getting sicker and just wanted to know her daughter was going to be OK. It was a very tough time."

Packer says she is very vigilant about her health and urges other women to be, too. "They say our family may have a [breast cancer] gene but not the genes they know about at the moment, which is why research is so incredibly important. The NBCF's goal — to have no deaths from breast cancer by 2030 — is such a wonderful goal, so our daughters and other people's daughters survive and breast cancer is no longer a death sentence."

Packer could have packed up her bags in Sydney and headed to Hollywood to live a *Real Housewives of Beverly Hills* lifestyle, but that isn't her. She has one foot firmly planted in Australia with her work for the NBCF and UNICEF's maternal health campaign, and one in LA with her young family. And a new love ...

Packer is tight-lipped about her reported romance with musician Seal, though they have been photographed all over the globe with their combined brood of seven (Seal has four children with his ex-wife, model Heidi Klum). "Life is very good right now and everything is making me happy. I have to say, I have met an amazing man and my kids are happy and healthy, and life is really good and I am very grateful," she says.

We talk fashion — she loves Céline and Saint Laurent right now — and whether it is impossible to be unhealthy living in LA. "I'm not into the LA hipster thing, because I'm daggier than that. It's very hard not to be affected by the healthy lifestyle here, so I train a lot and I look after myself better than I used to," she says. "A friend of mine is trying to get me into SoulCycle, who has become a SoulPsycho. I went once and I thought I was going to have a heart attack, so it has taken me a long time to get back. Right now, being a single mum with three kids keeps me busy enough."

For more information on Circle of 10, go to nbcf.org.au.