

# Discovery feared too late

## Breakthrough small comfort for cancer patient

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CALGARY HERALD

**C**heryl Tilleman is glad to hear that scientists reversed the growth of breast cancer in mice, but she's no mouse.

Moreover, Tilleman needs a cure for cancer now.

Tired from the effects of her chemotherapy, Tilleman was low-key Monday in her response to news of a breakthrough in genetic research.

"It's interesting, but you hear of things like this all the time," the 42-year-old said.

"It's one more piece in the puzzle, and it all helps, but it's too far off in the future to have implications for me personally."

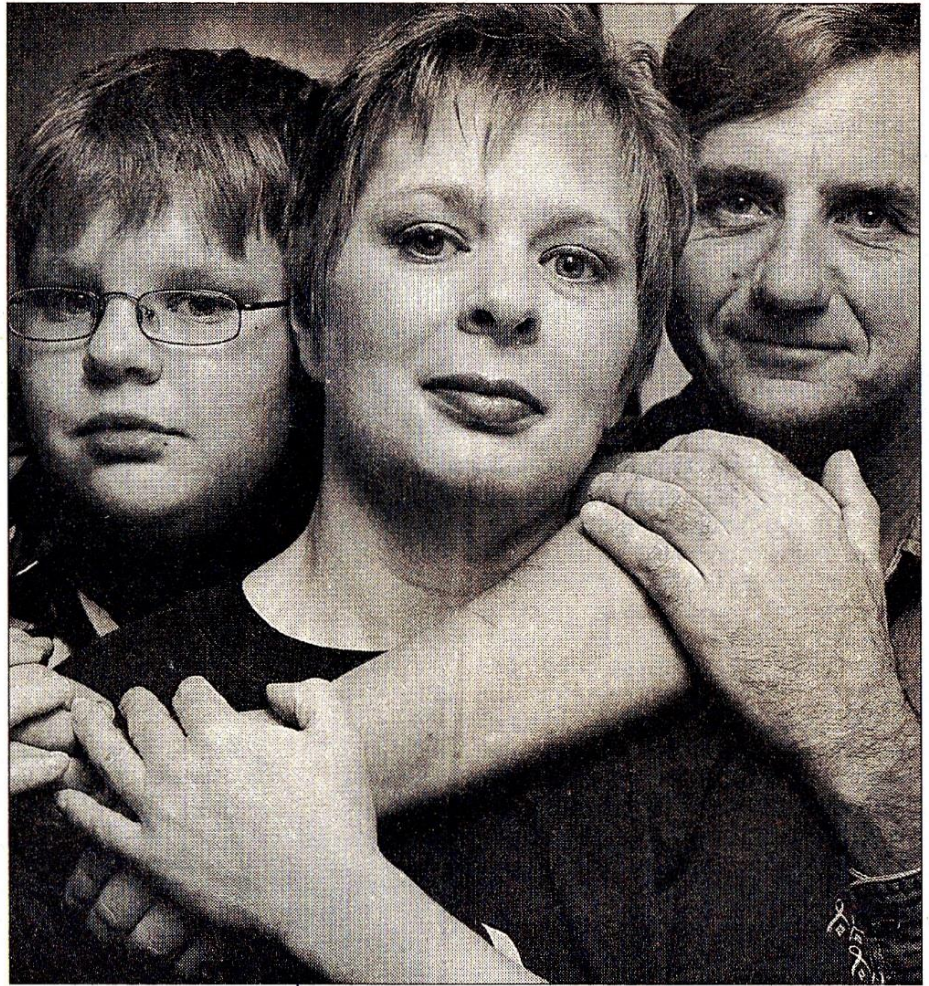
Tilleman was first diagnosed with breast cancer four years ago.

She finished treatment a year later, but the cancer returned in June, spreading to her liver and the lymph nodes in her chest.

Stories such as the one out of the International Breast Cancer Research meetings in California over the weekend could be misleading, said Tilleman, who co-chairs the public relations committee for the Sistership Dragon Boat team.

"For the general public, it creates unreal expectations," she said. "They think more progress has been made than there really has. For those of us dealing with it, it's good to hear, and to know that something is going on, even if it isn't going to have an impact for us."

The researchers, from McGill University in Montreal and the University of California at Davis, said that by triggering a genetic "switch," they



Marianne Helm, Calgary Herald

**Cheryl Tilleman, with her 12-year-old son Max and husband Harvey, says a new breast cancer finding is important, but likely won't help her.**

were able to make key genes active or inactive at will, halting and even reversing the growth of cancerous tumours.

Randy Johnston, a University of Calgary professor of cancer research, is intrigued by the announcement, but cautions that it's a long road from clinical results with mice to clinical results with humans.

"I don't think it's likely to help women who have cancer right now," Johnston said.

"But it will certainly help in understanding and treatment and prevention of cancer over the next five to 10 years."

From a scientist's point of view, Johnston said the findings are encouraging.

"All of my parents and grandparents died of cancer," Johnston said. "On a very personal level, (this news) is wonderful, in my opinion."

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