

**PROFILES OF HOPE 2015: SUZANNE WHANG**  
By Karen Zarsadiaz-Ige, LACDMH Public Information Officer



It's been a long time coming... The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health's (LACDMH) Public Information Office (PIO) has started taping its continuing Emmy Award-winning series, *Profiles of Hope*. The first story in this upcoming, long-awaited series will spotlight television host, actor and stand-up comedian Suzanne Whang.

The *Profiles of Hope* series is made up of 10-minute inspirational stories, featuring individuals who share how they overcame stigma and various obstacles to eventually lead them to a road of *Hope, Wellness and Recovery*. This latest round is part of a large anti-stigma and social inclusion campaign to create awareness, education and discussion about mental health. Our campaign partners include Fraser Communications and Showreel Productions.

You may recognize Whang for her familiar voice as the host of HGTV's *House Hunters* for nearly a decade. Currently, she is starring in a new sitcom called *From Here on Out* on Here TV, and she just completed filming the movie *Dinner with the Stankershets*. In the past, she has done a variety of work as a host and actor in several shows, including TV's *Censored Bloopers* (NBC), *New Attitudes* (Lifetime Television), *FOX After Breakfast* (Fox), *Arrested Development* (Fox/Netflix), *Dexter* (Showtime), *Las Vegas* (NBC), and *General Hospital* (ABC). Her list of credits also includes roles in films such as *House Sitter* with Steve Martin, *Constantine* with Keanu Reeves and *Material Girls* with Hillary Duff. Beyond all these roles, she's also a double award-winning stand-up comedian who has produced her solo shows and performed improv on stages across the country.

Off stage and screen, Whang is a keynote speaker, published author, political activist, metaphysical minister and a stage 4 breast cancer survivor and thriver. She is now completely cancer-free. Her story is what led her to *Profiles of Hope*.

During the *Profiles of Hope* interview, Whang spoke about her memorable childhood in Virginia and the influence her grandfather had on her. He was a well-known Korean

minister known to mix humor into his sermons. "I think I lead a big life because of him," she said.

After getting her Bachelor's degree in Psychology at Yale University and her Master's degree in Cognitive Psychology at Brown University, she moved to Boston where she ended up pursuing acting and modeling.

Years later, after all her roles and gigs, she landed the job that most people know her for. "The thing that put me on the map was *House Hunters* on HGTV," admitted Whang. "I became a household name because of *House Hunters*."

In Fall 2006, life changed. She felt a lump in her left breast which later tested positive for breast cancer. Whang opted for surgery but found a lump in the same spot a year later. Because of the first surgery's results, she opted out of surgery again and sought alternate treatments. Unable to tell her close friends about her cancer diagnosis, she found herself feeling alone and neglected by a boyfriend who was not very supportive during her private cancer fight.

After three months of intense physical pain and insomnia, and keeping her cancer secret, she broke down one night at 3AM. "I lost it. I was throwing things, breaking things," she explained. "I just lost it. I'm done. I can't do this anymore. I know... I'll kill myself. It will end this pain forever." After spending time plotting, she could not find a way. Instead, she looked at her dog, Bonsai, and saw how terrified he had become of her. She woke up hours later and realized a night of restful sleep is what she needed. "When I woke up, I realized I didn't want to kill myself anymore... After a good night's sleep," Whang said.

She finally let out the secret that she had been keeping, and told everyone about her cancer diagnosis. She found herself flooded with support and love – even got help with her medical bills. Family and friends came over and helped her get through her treatments. She credits her support system for literally loving her back to life. "Not talking about things doesn't help anybody," Whang explained. "This was a wake-up call on being kind and loving myself first... I had to learn to ask for help and love and receive it."

Now completely cancer-free, she has creative outlets for her emotions. "It really did teach me a lot. I'm grateful to be alive, vertical and pain-free. I bask in gratitude for everything around me. I'm happier and healthier now than I've ever been before... Every day is a bonus round."

The multi-talented actor, comedian, host and cancer survivor-thriver not only taped a *Profiles of Hope* segment but also a public service announcement (PSA) for LACDMH. The *Profiles of Hope* segment and the PSA, both featuring Suzanne Whang, are the first of three that will debut soon.