



YOUR STORY “Your Experience”

1 in 8 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in their lifetime. **Telling your story is a powerful tool to create change, provide hope, and inspiration to others.** PINK “ME”™ asks for your permission to share your story with others to help raise awareness, improve access to health care including Breast Cancer Treatment and Survivor Health and Wellness Programs.

Learning that I had cancer impacted my life in a major way. I am the mother of 3 children, and I have 1 grandson. I have been separated for about 6 years; I was the head of my family. And in an instant, everything fell apart. I had always worked hard to try to give my children a good start in life, and I was overcome with fear that I might die and leave my children all alone.

Many years ago, I lost my father to cancer, so I had already experienced how difficult it is for your whole family to go through this - and now it was happening again with me.

My oldest daughter came with me to all my appointments, chemotherapies, surgeries, etc. She was the only one who was working, since my other children are in school. She supported me both financially and emotionally.

These times have been very difficult; the treatments are very hard. The chemotherapy I've had has been devastating, it's had a heavy impact on both my body and mind. I had no motivation or energy to do much of anything; I just focused on praying to God to heal me. I went through chemotherapy, had an operation, did radiation, took more chemotherapy, and finally had another operation.

And what a shock it was when they did a genetic test and I came out positive for a gene called BRCA-1, which causes breast, womb, and ovarian cancer, among other things. So now I have to undergo even more operations, one to take out my ovaries (I already had my uterus removed 5 years ago) and then 3 operations to remove my breasts and reconstruct them.

I've gone through a lot of hard times because of all this. It's been tough both psychologically and economically, since it's all very expensive and in the early months I didn't have medical insurance; they did about 5 MRIs, several CT scans, installed a port in my body for chemo - and I had to pay for all that, on top of all the co-payments for doctor visits, studies, chemotherapy, radiation, operations, drugs, gasoline, etc. Not to mention all the expenses I had to pay for my house: water, electricity, gas, insurance (health insurance, home insurance, car insurance, etc.), school for my son and daughter, food, clothing, etc.

Cancer doesn't just affect the person who has it; it impacts the whole family. And it's a matter of life and death.

Getting cancer is the most awful thing that can happen to you in life; you really feel like the world is closing in on you.

You have no control over what's happening to you; I lost a lot of weight, I lost all my hair, I couldn't eat anything, or hardly at all, I had no motivation or energy to do anything, my whole body ached, my hands and legs fell asleep, my hands got so dry that I was almost bleeding - my toes still go numb sometimes and I can't feel them.

I've had a lot of anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. I've had to attend classes to try to control the panic attacks. I've had to see a therapist for my depression and anxiety.

I still have a lot of sequelae from all the treatments.

I'm going to have another surgery on February 1 to remove my ovaries because of the BRCA-1 gene they found.

Later they will do a mastectomy and remove both of my breasts. They still haven't given me a date for the 3 operations I'll need to remove and reconstruct them.

And then, when I'd already been going through hard times, Covid-19 happened and kind of put our lives on hold, since now I can't go to work because of my high-risk condition.

COVID-19 has already hit my family; my 2 daughters and my grandson caught it in November of last year. It's made everything even more difficult, because my daughter has been out of a job for a long time; she works in a restaurant and they have shut it down several times.

Thank God they are all fine and have recovered from COVID-19.

I thank God that we are still alive, and I'm thankful that there are places where we can get help, where people provide support of various kinds, like economic assistance, help with food, resources, etc.

I am grateful to you for your beautiful work, which is so important to people who in situations that are really hard to overcome.

May God bless you for your kindness and help.

Thank you,

Al Me.

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