

SUMMARY: Of course I wouldn't have a lazy, couch-potato type breast cancer. No, mine was triple-negative, invasive ductal carcinoma, 3/3, aggressive. Just as driven, resilient, and crafty as me. To beat it, I would have to play dirty.

STORY: Cancer doesn't fight fair. It tries to take away everything that makes you feel like yourself - your breasts, your energy, your hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes. It will try to take away the things you love doing by sapping your strength, flexibility, and optimism. What we must remember, in the midst of our struggle for survivorship, is that nothing can be taken away from us without our consent. Post-diagnosis, you must decide: are you going to get busy living, or get busy dying? Because this fight is to the finish, and if you don't win, cancer will.

The thing about cancer is, it's an easy way to die. If you want to check out, no one will blame you. They will blame the inadequacy of drugs, the insurmountable persistence of the disease, or bad luck. You can give up on life, and not even look like like you are. What is scary about cancer is how easy it is to concede when the fight hasn't even really begun yet.

I was diagnosed with Triple-Negative, Invasive Ductal Carcinoma at 34, just two months shy of my 35th birthday. My cancer had developed very quickly and seemingly out of nowhere, from a lump that suddenly changed shape and spread to a lymph node in just eight months. I was lucky enough to keep my breasts, but my diagnosis, coupled with 2008's economic downturn, send me into a financial tailspin as job opportunities dried up and my home's value plummeted. I was 3000 miles from home, living on a farm in Kaua'i that I could no longer care for, facing a treatment plan that would make it virtually impossible to get a steady job. When I finally started chemo the day before Christmas Eve, I had no idea just how rough the months ahead would be.

Midway through AC, I faced gallbladder removal surgery. When I was done with that drug, I started Taxol and was plunged into a 4-day depression that had me considering Sylvia-Plath-like scenarios of crawling under my house to die and leave my troubles behind. Had it not been for the intervention of a Stage 4 survivor who said, very seriously, "You have to call in the troops. You can't do this alone," I might not have made it.

After three cycles of Taxol, my house still hadn't sold. I had a bout with bronchitis and moved back to California to live with my sister and finish chemo. A month later, I developed shingles on my tailbone and was tempted to ask God, "When are the locusts coming?!" I was starting to feel like my life was a litany of misery, and realized that if I didn't find a reason to keep going, I wouldn't make it, and the last six months would be for naught. Thankfully, being back in California had reminded me of who I was, of the fighter and incurable optimist I had always been. Cancer had tried to take away my identity, and I had nearly consented in the face of so many challenges.

Five years is the survivorship milestone that lets us exhale. Make it to five years without a recurrence, and we can make it to ten. When I was 27, I did my first marathon and triathlon, along with two other short races. All my friends were bemoaning their approaching 30th birthdays, and it occurred to me that if I completed one event every four weeks for the next two years, I could finish "30-by-30" and actually have something to look forward to when the birthday came around. By the time it did, I had seven triathlons, three bike rides, a half-marathon, three 199-mile relays and a dozen or so trail runs under my belt. My 30th birthday rocked.

Facing an uncertain future I haven't been that optimistic about, I've decided that a "40-by-40" is in order. There are 4 major fundraising events for breast cancer in the U.S.: the 2Day (Avon) and 3Day (Komen) walks, the Komen Race For The Cure, and the Making Strides Walks through ACS. In addition, there are hikes benefitting the Breast Fund, Marathons through Komen, and Relays For Life that benefit local ACS offices, who sponsor "Look Good, Feel Better" programs. In the next five years, I plan to do one of each every year, and then some, to complete 40 by my 40th birthday and raise \$40,000 for the cause (more info is available at <http://www.teamaprilonline.com> and <http://teamapril.blogspot.com>).

Breast cancer has also given me an opportunity to reach out to other women going through what I'm going through via YouTube. I've struggled with my self-esteem in the wake of lost hair, eyebrows, and lashes, and found myself bordering on agoraphobic - terribly dangerous during a cancer fight, since human contact and enjoying the outside world are so key to staying strong in the fight. I conquered my fear of friends seeing me vulnerable by making a

series of videos of me doing my makeup from scratch on YouTube, and help other women be inspired to have the courage to "put on their game face" and get out into the world too. I was so buoyed by the process of reaching out to others through my video journals, I went to a ropes course with my sister and ziplined from a tower 60 feet up with a team of 7 guys! (my YouTube channel is <http://www.YouTube.com/aprilcapil>)

Crucial in my recovery have been the support of other cancer survivors, who reminded me that this is not a one-time battle, but a prizefight, requiring a knockout in the first round, to prevent second and third rounds. I must enter the ring with the attitude of Muhammad Ali, believing I am greater than my cancer, and Tiger Woods, who, in an unguarded moment admitted that he never worried when players faced-off against him, but instead wondered, "Why do they even bother showing up?" I must have the hope of Michael J. Fox, the persistence of Christopher Reeve, and the sheer defiance of Lance Armstrong. Only then will I be able to show not just my cancer, but other women, that we can live stronger, and longer, than it can.