

Hi, my name is Astrid Nicastrì and this is my story. In my twelfth year, my life was turned upside down and I found myself on a journey of learning how to right myself. In 1989/ 90, I had a severe attack. My parents called a doctor friend of ours and I was rushed immediately to the hospital. If I had not received medicine that night, I would have died. I was diagnosed with brain cancer. I had a malignant brain tumor called a medulloblastoma. When I came out of intensive care two weeks after surgery, I could not see, talk, control any of my movements, nor feel there was anything beneath me whether it be a bed or the ground. My 12-year-old mind was pretty much intact, but physically I was trapped in the body of a baby with a lot to learn. After extensive radiation treatments and a long hospital stay, my cancer was in remission.

In my thirteenth year, I had attended camp Fiesta. Later on, I became a counselor at the camp. My experiences at the camp had become such a part of me. I enjoyed the ability to give back to those who had helped me so much when I was in need. As a counselor, the reciprocal reward in a smile meant everything to me.

Despite the challenges and disabilities I faced physically, and some learning disabilities, I made it to college with the rest of my class. At Hollins University in Virginia, I received a bachelor degree in Expressive Art Therapy, including nutrition and creative writing. After graduation, I moved back to Miami. In 2003, I left for Tampa to attend University of South Florida and work on getting a Masters degree in special education/ varying exceptionalities. I wanted to be able to give a helping hand to those in need and felt that with my own background experience I had something to add and give to others, starting with a special understanding.

In 2006, when I was a little more than halfway through my Masters program, I received another attack. I had a brain tumor again, a meningioma, though fortunately benign. Though the tumor was the size of a fist, it was found just at the right time and in a very operable spot. Surgery and rehabilitation followed. I developed meningitis and was treated for that. I have to tell you that by now I decided that I had a very uniquely decorated head from my various brain operations.

Okay, I had a couple of flights of stairs to climb back up. My best outlook is forward, one step at a time. In 2007, I got a job working as a paraprofessional. The job did not last long. Near the end of 2007, I was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer, stage 3b – 4. The doctors said that I was on a precarious cliff of the cancer spreading past my right auxiliary lymph nodes and the rest of my body. In my current state, I was inoperable. I was given eight sessions of chemotherapy to shrink the tumor. I had a mastectomy of the right breast and removal of five of my lymph nodes. Afterward I received eight treatments of radiation to the affected areas, finishing in August 2008. I am in remission from cancer. And hear my words, I am going to stay that way!

I believe we all have obstacles in our life to overcome whether they are visible or not. I have come out of these challenges strong, positive, and empowered. I am also a strong believer in the wonder, magic, and beauty of rainbows. I see myself as a rainbow warrior, and I am going to fight every step of the way to keep my happiness and freedom from cancer!