

I am currently three years out from my diagnosis with Stage IIA Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma (Breast Cancer). Losing both my parents and four of my sisters was extremely difficult, but none of these experiences prepared me enough for my diagnosis with Breast Cancer! Diagnosed at age 38, I knew very little about Breast Cancer and had no known family history of Breast Cancer.

I felt a 'lump' in my left breast while having a shower one day - I assumed it was a swollen milk duct because I had just stopped nursing my son Michael II. A few days later I felt it again and after about 3 weeks, it was more defined. My husband Michael suggested we get it checked right away. I ignored it for a few more weeks, hoping it would just go away! Eventually, I had the mammogram. After a second mammogram, an ultrasound and Biopsy, it was confirmed that I had Cancer. I was shocked! I was convinced that I was going to die.

I had breast preserving surgery (Lumpectomy), 4 aggressive cycles of chemotherapy and 35 radiation treatments. 'Chemo' was hard to take. It made me so sick. I forced myself to work everyday to keep my mind off the Cancer and for 3 years I waged a silent war with a lot of negative feelings inside of me. I felt hopeless, unattractive, depressed, confused and desperate at times.

My husband was and continues to be the greatest source of my strength. I would have not made it half way through this journey without him.

For a while, I suffered a deep sense of regret - I felt like I had let my children down, because I could not be there the way a mother is supposed to for her kids. My youngest child, was hardly a year old when I was diagnosed and going through treatment. I worried so much about not being there for his first day of school. My 10 year old daughter asked me (out of the blues) one day, if I will be at her wedding. I almost fell out of my chair! but I reassured her that I will do my best to make sure I am there for her every milestone - her graduations from school and college - and 'her wedding'!!!

I shunned away from Support Groups - I didn't have the courage to go there and meet other survivors. The fear was paralyzing me and I couldn't see how other people would help me. Eventually, I joined an online survivors' network and stayed glued to my computer every day - just so I could read about other survivors' stories - It was healing to know I wasn't the only one going through this. Then I met Paula Holland De Long at my first survivor's workshop. Paula is a Life Coach and a long time Breast Cancer Survivor herself. She was the first person I met physically that had survived cancer and was helping others to cope and move on with their lives. I was inspired and this was my turning point. I knew what I needed to do.

My family and I founded the Zambian Breast Cancer Foundation earlier this year and later in August I was appointed to Represent the Breakthrough Cancer Trust of Zambia in North America and Canada. The challenges in Africa for women diagnosed with breast cancer are huge. Most women have no access to life saving screenings or care and we are working hard to find ways to bring the most basic of needs for breast and cervical cancer patients in Zambia.

Cancer was not a blessing to me but it has opened my eyes to the challenges that women in the third world have to face when diagnosed with a disease like Breast Cancer. Just knowing about their challenges made my own journey with cancer feel so much easier.