



## **CORRINE STUART**

### **Breast Cancer Survivor Story**

I come from a strong family whose lives were touched by cancer when my father lost his battle with prostate cancer in 2003, which was only one year prior to my own cancer diagnosis. I had been very conscious of the fact that I had a higher risk of developing cancer since my father's diagnosis and resulting death. Because of this, I was very diligent in getting regular mammograms and performing the recommended self breast examinations (SBE). I had two previous scares (one in 2001 and again in 2002) when I experienced a discharge from my left nipple. I had surgery on my left breast in 2002 and had a lump removed. I was very relieved to learn that the growth was benign.

I was very surprised when I discovered a lump during a SBE in December of 2004. This lump felt very different than what I experienced in previous years when I had similar symptoms. Also, I had just had a normal mammogram in October of 2002. I immediately called my provider and went in for an examination within 2 days. That visit got the ball rolling and I soon saw an OBGYN provider for an ultrasound which was inconclusive and then I was headed to see a surgeon for a consultation. We had a discussion of what the lump could be and then he asked if he could do a biopsy. Without hesitation I said yes. The lump biopsy results were benign, however, the surgeon had the medical intuition to question these results as he didn't like the way the lump appeared.

By mid-January 2005, I had a lumpectomy and my worst fears came true - the results indicated that I indeed had cancer. Later in January, I had my lymph nodes removed and it was then that I started my first chemo treatment. I had 4 series of chemo treatments and because my numbers looked so wonderful, I only had to do 4 treatments instead of 8. Afterwards, I endured 6 weeks of radiation. As a testament of my strong will, I kept working during my treatments. I had my treatments on Wednesdays and worked most Thursdays and Fridays. I have to say that I worked with such a fine caring group of people that they picked me up, took me to my treatments and my family returned me home afterwards. Sometimes, if I felt sick, I took Friday off, rested through the weekends and managed to work that following Monday.

If I had to tell somebody what I learned from my experience, it would be that you must stay positive. I found that I had to share what was going on with me; so I shared with my friends, my church and my family. Basically, I shared with everyone that I felt safe sharing with. Since my diagnosis, 5 other women in my church family have been diagnosed with cancer. I know a lot of women don't like to discuss it or share it. But this fact I know, we need to share, discuss and have open conversations about breast cancer. Since I was diagnosed, I have met young women in their late 20s and 30s who have had double mastectomies. We should teach our young girls about breast cancer now and promote early detection. These conversations may save their lives.



In 2010, I again experienced symptoms, had a lump removed in my left breast which was benign. Due to my past history, my doctor recommended 10 years of treatment instead of the usual 5 years and I am still on medication today. This is something I will have the rest of my life.

The hardest thing for me to do was to tell my mom and my sons I had cancer. As I said in the beginning of my story, my dad lost his life in 2003 from prostate cancer. You see, cancer doesn't just affect the individual, it affects the entire family. I was very lucky my provider was proactive, aggressive, and didn't wait to retest me. Because of this, I found my cancer relatively early.

Women should be proactive in pursuing their treatment. It's ok to disagree with a doctor if you feel they aren't helping you. I would encourage people to think about how the doctor makes you feel when you go to them. It's a journey that I wish no one has to go through, but if you do, you need to be surrounded by your loved ones and people who are warm and positive. With this support, you will be able to get through this as I did.

It's ok to say, "I'm afraid and I don't know what's going to happen." It's also ok to say, "I don't know if I can do this." I said those things. But with my support group's help, I had both the strength and courage to seek medical help and have the lumps checked out. I just have to say that I recommend you keep a positive attitude throughout your cancer treatments knowing that it is can very difficult to remain up-beat. The medications may make you sick but just know that they will help you to recover. Having cancer and beating cancer changes both you and your outlook on life. Every day is a new day.

***"Early detection leads to survival!"***

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