

# Faces of Hope



In 2002, my world was turned upside down when I heard the words, “You have breast cancer”.

I had received my annual mammogram a year before which did not reveal anything unusual. By self exam one day, I felt a painful lump in my breast and a mammogram and ultrasound revealed a tumor. There is a misconception that breast cancer is never painful. My cancer was very aggressive with lymph node involvement and because of my family history I chose to have bilateral mastectomies. I also had chemotherapy and later reconstruction. I received my care at MUSC and the Hollings Cancer Center and was very fortunate to be treated by many wonderful doctors and nurses.

After my surgeries and chemotherapy, I was physically healed but felt something else was wrong. I still felt fatigued and depressed. I then realized I needed to be healed not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. I became aware that the body, mind, and spirit are all one and that true healing happens when they are all in balance. The psychological blow of my breast cancer, the loss to my femininity that I grieved, and the anger that I felt of “why me” was overwhelming. When you go through chemo and lose your hair and your breasts, you have to really look inside and discover your inner beauty. Your perception changes as to what true beauty really is. Also, my chest muscles and flexibility were weak, so I began taking a Middle Eastern dance class to try and strengthen myself again. At the first class I was surprised that the women in class were all ages, shapes, and sizes. I found all the women in the class to be beautiful in their own special way and confident in their bodies, and the female bonding and support was overwhelming.

After taking classes for a while, I joined the Palmetto Oasis Middle Eastern Dance troupe and felt that I was called to share my experiences to help other women, so I started a dance therapy class at the Hollings Cancer Center. Dance therapy is the use of movement as a way of treating social, emotional and physical problems. The class is of benefit not only to cancer survivors but other women who are having a difficult time in their life and need emotional healing. It does not matter whether you can dance well or not. It is a place to get away from everything, laugh a lot, and bond with other women. I also started teaching a dance class at Camp Bluebird which is a wonderful camp for adult cancer survivors.

I have been cancer-free now for five years. I speak about breast cancer to anyone willing to listen. I want to make sure that every woman is aware of this disease and the need to be vigilant with yearly mammograms and more importantly self exams. Many women have told me that they are afraid to have a mammogram because of what it might reveal.

The truth is that although finding out that you have cancer is very scary, early detection drastically increases your chances of beating the disease. It is far better to find out early and have a fighting chance, then to wait until it is too late.

In summary, God is the real star of my story. Not only did I get a second chance at life, but I found one of my purposes in life in teaching, and have met so many wonderful people who have enriched my life greatly. Going through cancer destroyed my immortal “security net” but it also gave me a new appreciation of life. It has brought me closer to people and has given me the joy of waking up each morning and enjoying every single moment of the day. It has heightened my senses and enabled me to see the true beauty in other people and in nature.

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