

## THE REALITIES OF LIVING WITH METASTATIC BREAST CANCER



ANYBODY WITH METASTATIC CANCER WILL TELL YOU THAT THE FIRST FEW MONTHS, UP TO THE FIRST YEAR IS VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE YOU JUST DON'T HAVE THE HOPE. I WENT FROM SCAN TO SCAN AND THAT'S NOT A GOOD WAY TO LIVE. SOMETIME I HAVE LOT OF HEADACHES, MY BODY HURTS, MY BRAIN. HOT FLASHES, THEN I'M COLD, THEN I'M HOT. MY BODY WAS CHANGING IN WAYS I WAS NOT UNDERSTANDING AND HAVE NO CONTROL OVER. CHRONIC DIARRHEA THAT COMES ON LIKE URGENTLY, NO PLANNING AND SEVERE STOMACH CRAMPS. LOST MY HAIR. I GAINED A LOT OF WEIGHT. I GOT A RASH ON MY FACE, IT LOOKED LIKE ACNE AND I HAVEN'T HAD THIS KIND OF ACNE SINCE I WAS TWELVE. ONCE IT BECAME METASTASIZED TO THE LIVER AND IT WAS DISCOVERED THAT THE ANTI-HORMONALS WEREN'T GOING TO WORK ANYMORE, WE ALSO DISCOVERED THAT I HAD DAMAGE TO MY FEMUR. I WASN'T ABLE TO PUT ANY WEIGHT ON MY LEG WHATSOEVER. IT'S A VERY PAINFUL SURGERY, A PAINFUL THING TO GO THROUGH. THERE'S A TITANIUM ROD IN THE MIDDLE OF IT. THEY CALLED ME AND LET ME KNOW, HEY, YOUR L- FIVE BROKE. HOW DID IT BREAK? WELL, YOUR CANCER IS BACK. IT'S IN MY SPINE, ALL THE WAY UP, IT WAS IN MY STERNUM, IN MY COLLARBONE, IT'S IN MY LYMPH NODES IN MY NECK. WE'RE LOOKING AT TWELVE TO TWENTY-FOUR MONTHS. THE CHIN TO WAIST BACK BRACE AND THEY WERE SCARED THEY COULD JUST BREAK AT ANY MOMENT AND PARALYZE ME. AND THE INFUSIONS WOULD TAKE UP MOST OF MY DAY, BETWEEN GETTING BLOOD DRAWN AND SEEING THE DOCTOR AND WAITING TO GET A SEAT. THOSE THINGS ARE ALL PART OF MY LIFE THAT I'LL NEVER GET IT BACK BUT I ALSO UNDERSTAND IT IS MY LIFE. WHEN I FOUND OUT SHE WAS METASTATIC, OF COURSE I DIDN'T WANT TO HEAR THAT. IT WAS ALREADY HARD ENOUGH KNOWING WHAT SHE'D GOT DIAGNOSED WITH AND I LOVE MY SISTER AND I ONLY HAVE ONE SISTER SO I JUST WOULDN'T WANT TO BE WITHOUT HER AND NOT HAVING HER IN MY LIFE. I CAN'T BE TAKEN AWAY FROM MY KIDS. O-K, IT WOULD BE BAD IF I PASSED IN A YEAR, IT WOULD BE SAD IF I PASSED IN FIVE YEARS. IT MAKES ME JUST AS SAD IF I'M NOT THERE TO SEE MY GIRLS IN THEIR WEDDING DRESSES. MY SON WAS PETRIFIED, JUST IN PLACE. I WAS PETRIFIED. I HUNG UP THE PHONE, I EXCUSED MYSELF, SAYING I HAD TO GO TO THE BATHROOM. I WENT INTO MY ROOM AND I DROPPED TO THE FLOOR, BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT TO UPSET HIM. BECAUSE MY KIDS ARE MY LIFE. SHE SHOWED UP TO MY HOUSE, SHE SURPRISED ME BECAUSE SHE HAD SHAVED HER HAIR, SHE SHAVED HER HAIR AND SHE SHOWED UP, SHE SAID "HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY." ONE DAY SHE TOLD ME, YOU KNOW WHAT HURTS ME THE MOST IS MY HAIR. SHE SAID NOT SO MUCH THAT I HAVE BREAST CANCER, BECAUSE AT LEAST AFTER THE MASTECTOMY I CAN JUST COVER MYSELF UP AND I FEEL NORMAL BUT WITHOUT MY HAIR, I DON'T. IT'S LIKE YOU'RE WALKING AND YOU'RE DOING FINE AND ALL OF A SUDDEN YOU'RE ON A TIGHTROPE OVER THE GRAND CANYON. AND SOME DAYS, I WANT TO JUMP BECAUSE MY PAIN IS SO HIGH. WHEN I WOKE UP AFTER THESE NIGHTMARES OF HAVING BREAST CANCER, I STILL HAD IT, IT WAS A NIGHTMARE THAT JUST WOULD NOT GO AWAY. IT IS A DIFFERENT TYPE OF CANCER AND IT'S A CANCER THAT IS STILL KILLING PEOPLE AND THAT'S THE HARD THING TO SAY, IS THAT IT'S NOT CURABLE AND IT DEFINITELY TAKES A VILLAGE TO HELP SOMEONE GET THROUGH BREAST CANCER OR LIVE WITH IT BECAUSE IT DOESN'T JUST END, IT CONTINUES. THE HARDEST THING IS, A PERSON, I MEAN I'VE BEEN THROUGH SO MUCH BUT IT IS SO HARD TO LIVE EVERY SINGLE DAY, IT'S HARD TO DO WHAT I NEED TO DO TO BE A GOOD MOM, A WIFE, IT'S JUST HARD TO BE ALIVE. WE NEED PEOPLE OUT THERE SHOUTING FROM THE ROOFTOP. WE NEED MORE STUDIES, WE NEED MORE DOLLARS FOR RESEARCH.