

Thank you

By Cheryl Schoonmaker

I want to give a special thank you to my family, friends, and community. The contributions you have graciously donated to my kids and I help in both a physical and mental aspect. I feel honored and blessed to live today, experience today, and give thanks to all of you today.

Cancer comes to so many in so many ways. I would like to share my story so that you can take the knowledge and save others.

Late fall of 2011 I felt some strange electric pains darting through my right breast. I didn't think that much about it until suddenly I felt a small lump. Due to the holiday busyness I did not address it. Just before Christmas, Dr. Nangle who was my Dad's General Dr. squeezed me in for an appointment. He knew I had no insurance and said Merry Christmas and gave me the appointment at no cost and scheduled a mammogram. I called Julie Delaney at the Cayuga County Health Dept. for help to see if I qualified for a free yearly mammogram. She set me up and took care of everything. Three days before Christmas I sat in a chair next to a complete stranger staring at my mammogram pictures of probably one pretty bad case of breast cancer. It looked as if fireworks had exploded in my right breast. The Stranger looked at me and said, "you need to see a doctor who deals with cancer asap. This is a very large growth that needs to be taken care of." Later that day I called Julie at the Health Department in tears and asked if there is any help out there that will cover cost or a loan or something, anything. She said don't worry we will find a way. Enjoy your Christmas Holiday with your kids and family.

Julie connected me with a local surgeon Dr Geer and her very caring and generous staff. The first step is to confirm the type of cancer. The biopsy proved that I had Invasive Lobular Carcinoma a less common form of breast cancer and HERs2. The next step was the placement of a port. Which I still find quite annoying, but someone's good idea.

I was sent to another local doctor Oncologist Dr Boufal where we discussed a time line for what needed to be done. My first step was to undergo chemo to shrink the area down so that it would be small enough to take out. Then following surgery there would be radiation and then on to chemo again. And that would be the end of the story except after several tests, I received the not so good news the cancer had spread to lymph nodes the liver and the bone. I have stage IV cancer.

Wow could this really be happening? Cancer generally does not run in our family how could this be? What about the kids? How am I going to tell them? How would my parents feel if I passed before they did. Crazy as it seems I am still worried that I would disappoint them. The Cost. My head was spinning in all the wrong directions. I was adding stress on stress at this point.

The Cayuga County Health Department came through with covering medical expenses which has been a great relief. I continued to work every free minute and when I was not working I was at a Dr offices or in bed sleeping off the chemo. I started some special stress treatments that I pay for myself. They have proved to be quite beneficial. Stress seems to be a major contributions to any ailment today. My friends and work bugged me about doing

a fund raiser. I continued to say absolutely not. I am fine. I have help. I'll be OK. I do not need help. Not to mention it would be an admission that I'm sick.

Enduring several types of chemo January through August was tough but did the job of shrinking much of the Cancer. Many were shocked to see the reduced size of the cancer. It was close to a miracle. That was the good news, the bad news was that the chemo put a lot of stress on the heart. It put me on halt in September for continuing with Herceptin, which was to help keep the cancer at bay and me alive. I am now undergoing what I call a heart tune up.

September 6th 2012 I had surgery to remove the area in the breast, and four Lymph Nodes. As usual diagnosis was good news, bad news. The good news was they got what they went in for. The bad news was that the area around shrunk up tumor was showing cancer cells. My next step is yet to be determined, in the mean time I continue to live my life.

Another young woman who recently had breast cancer told me to keep it close to home. You start going off to big cities and you end up a number. There is no doubt keeping it in Auburn has been the best thing for me. I cannot even begin to tell you how great and professional the care has been. I may not remember all their names but they remember mine. I found out that I am one of many of the hospital's special cases where a board of professionals review, analyze, and discuss options and the best course of action. It makes me feel secure that I'm getting this type of attention. Many heads together come up with great solutions.

I have found myself a bit stretched. The amount of work missed running around to and from appointments, the test, chemo and surgeries has been a financial burden and my savings are depleted. I never thought about how much time it all takes. You need a good support system. My children Bailey, Bob and Brett, my parents, Vanessa all the rest of my family have helped me with many so many ways. My brother Sam has thrown me some huge surprises that will definitely relieve some stress, totally donated roof from Dana Botindari and Chris Geherin, Builders Choice, and Erie Material, and Rizzo Construction donated the use of equipment for the septic system.

It was after I found out that my heart needed a serious tune up, in more ways then I knew, I agreed to a 50/50 drawing to help with costs. And then there was Bomber's delicious donations of his flipping chicken that somehow made it into the mix. I felt it was time to allow things to happen. My family, and friends, Debbie, Judy, Bomber and boss Keene have gone out of their way to help. I have a great support system. This cancer is hard on me but it's really really tough on my family and friends.

I would like to stress how important it is to get checked. The Cayuga County Health Department has free screenings for men and women who do not have insurance. So there is no excuse in the world for anyone not to get checked. Learn by my mistake of not putting my health first. Don't wait. When you feel that pain or something just does not feel right get checked.

Thanks for taking time to hear my story and I hope this will save you or your love ones. Remember your Health always comes first.

I thank you for your gracious gifts. They have helped strengthen and encourage my faith and hope.