

Breast Cancer Survivor Finds Solace in Family and Online Support Groups



Lorie Getchius marked the first anniversary of her breast cancer diagnosis by getting a pink tattoo on her wrist. "At first, I didn't want anything to do with 'Pinktober,'" she says. "But I can't ignore what I have gone through and move through my life with blinders on, so I embrace it now." Getchius was diagnosed with Stage One breast cancer at the age of

47 following a routine screening mammogram. Since she has a family history of breast cancer, Getchius has always been diligent about getting annual mammograms. She had no physical symptoms leading up to her usual test, but she felt uneasy nonetheless. "On the way there I had a sinking feeling that I was going to be diagnosed with breast cancer," she recalls, noting that the mammogram took place on the birthday of her aunt who had passed away from breast cancer at a young age.

Breast cancer is often a silent disease, with virtually no symptoms, but it is often completely curable if diagnosed in its early stages. In 1980, the national five-year survival rate for women diagnosed with early stage breast cancer was about 74%; today that number is 99%. There are currently more than 3.1 million breast cancer survivors in the United States.

According to the New Jersey Department of Health, breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed among New Jersey women and the second leading cause of death, after lung cancer, attributed to cancer in the state. In 2013, more than 7,500 New Jersey women were diagnosed with breast cancer. The rate at which new cases of breast cancer are being diagnosed in Sussex County, as well as in the rest of the state, is stable, according to the National Cancer Institute and the Centers for Disease Control. The county's breast cancer death rate is also falling, in accordance with state and national trends. However, the disease contributes to the death of 1,300 New Jersey women annually. Access to breast cancer screenings and optimal treatments is an urgent public health issue.

Getchius revealed her situation to her three young adult children and her husband immediately. "There are no secrets with me. I blurted it out the day I came home from my exam," she says, adding, "My husband is a rock." Her children and her grandson were also very supportive during a difficult time. "My grandson is the light of my life. I have a lot to live for."

Getchius' cancer was diagnosed at an early stage which gave her the option of forgoing chemotherapy and radiation treatments in favor of a lumpectomy. However, Getchius took it upon herself to get screened for genetic markers and discovered that she was a carrier of the BRCA II mutation. "I said forget it, I'm not doing that!" Instead, she received a bi-

lateral mastectomy. "It was the best decision for me." Given her experience, Getchius endorses annual screening mammograms. "The fear is worse than getting screened. Just do it and get it over with!"

Getchius admits that being a cancer survivor has not always been a positive experience. "When you get the rug pulled out from under you, everything changes. I am very emotional, very pessimistic, and very scared now. My prognosis is that I am good to go, but it doesn't feel like it. Every cough, or sneeze or pain makes you feel like it's going to be something bad." She participates in several virtual support groups and has joined several Facebook groups dedicated to breast cancer recovery. "All of my support groups are online because you lose a lot of sleep, and you need to be able to reach out to people at two o'clock in the morning. This way you can plug into groups of people who are just like you. I have friends all over the world now."

Breast Cancer Survivors Sought for Public Relations Campaign

For the past seven years, Project Self-Sufficiency has spearheaded a public education effort, "Mammograms Save Lives," and offered breast health education with the goal of encouraging local women to take a proactive role in monitoring their health. Sussex County breast cancer survivors who would be willing to be profiled as part of the Mammograms Save Lives campaign are urged to call Project Self-Sufficiency at 973-940-3500 or 844-807-3500.

Free Mammograms Available

Project Self-Sufficiency will offer free mammograms by appointment to uninsured and underinsured women over the age of 40 as part of the agency's annual Health Fair on Thursday, November 2nd. Interested women are invited to call 973-940-3500 to schedule an appointment.

The New Jersey Cancer Education and Early Detection (NJ CEED) Program, with funding from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of New Jersey, provides funding to all twenty-one counties in the State for comprehensive breast, cervical, prostate, and colorectal cancer education, outreach, and screening. Men and women whose income is under 250% of the Federal poverty level and have no insurance are eligible for the program. Free mammograms and pap tests are also available through the NJ CEED program; follow-up diagnostics, including additional mammography views, breast ultrasounds, and biopsies can also be provided. Interested participants are encouraged to call 973-579-0750, ext. 1246. In addition, Newton Medical Center will provide a free mammogram for women who qualify through the Newton Medical Center Foundation's "Mammograms Save Lives" program. Those without health insurance are encouraged to contact Newton Medical Center's Education/Outreach office at 973-579-8340 for more information.

