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I'M A SURVIVOR

BRA DAY LEX • SUSAN G KOMEN • ALLTECH NATIONAL HORSE SHOW

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Top Marketing Group
465 East High Street, Suite 201
Lexington, KY 40507-1938
859.543.TOP5 (8677)
859.514.1621 (fax)

TopsInLex.com | LexScene.com

Keith Yarber
President & Founder
kyarber@topsmarketing.com

Kristen Oakley
Publisher, TOPS Magazine
Sr. Account Manager
kristen@topsmarketing.com

Teri Turner
Advertising Sales Manager
teri@topsmarketing.com

Lisa Sheehy
Equine Features Editor
lisa@topsmarketing.com

Melissa Meatyard
Design/Layout, TOPS & Special Publications
melissa@topsmarketing.com

Amanda Harper
Design/Layout, LexScene Magazine
Advertising Designer, TOPS Magazine
amandah@topsmarketing.com

Danielle Pope
Associate Publisher, LexScene
Account Manager
danielle@topsmarketing.com

Kellie Corridoni
Account Manager
kellie@topsmarketing.com

Stevi Haskins
Account Manager
stevi@topsmarketing.com

Julie Wiley
Account Manager
julle@topsmarketing.com

Tammi Geierman
Event Manager
tammi@topsmarketing.com

Contributing Writers

Hallie Bandy, Laura D'Angelo, Cass Dwyer,
John Engelhardt, Blake Hannon, Amanda Harper,
Lauren Henry, Greg Ladd, Anne Gulllory, Michele Landers,
Beth Parker, Michelle Rauch, Mary Ellen Slone,
Kathie Stamps, Deanna Talwalkar,
Elizabeth Troutman Adams, Sue Ann Truitt

Cover Photo by Phillips Mitchell Photography

Contributing Photographers

Phillips Mitchell
Ron Morrow
Alex Orlov
Victor Orlov

Interns

Holly Brucken
Chris Elam
Ashley Harrington
Savannah Wafford

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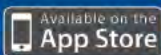


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Hands Help Heal

It takes tremendous inner strength and courage to fight and overcome breast cancer. Courage is a battle hard fought and sorely won. Courage comes in every shape, size and color. Courage is falling in love with the person you are without loving the way you look. Courage is not worrying about the small stuff and focusing on living life one day at a time. Courage is celebrating each cancer-free day. And Courage is allowing God, spouses, friends, family and co-workers to stand beside you along the way.

Each story on the following pages is bound by courage: the courage to fight, to live and to, as one of our survivors sagely says, "see the light in the darkness." The hands shown on these pages represent the support system that was essential in helping each of these eighteen women fight through breast cancer. Our TOPS Survivors represent two local breast cancer awareness groups: BraDayLex and Susan G. Komen's Outreach Groups "Colors of Promise" and "Ties that Bind." The BraDayLex women have a pink scarf connecting their support hands to themselves. The Komen Outreach survivors are represented by a pink Komen ribbon. Their stories are powerful and inspirational. Read on to find your own courage and inner strength.

*Introduction & Profiles by Lauren Henry
Photography by Phillips Mitchell*

GENEA ARRASMITH

OFFERS MUCH LOVE AND PINK HUGS



Support Hands: Husband, Phil; Sons, Dillon and Dustin; Son's fiancé, April; Like a son, Nick

2011 was a challenging year for Genea. She had thyroid issues, skin cancer and in October, she was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. Genea kept her crazy sense throughout her battle. She shares, "I took funny props with me to each appointment and surgery and sent pictures of myself to my husband and family members and friends, letting them know that I was fine and just as crazy as usual." Some of these props included gold teeth, big bras and crazy hair but Genea knew that if she kept calm, then so would her loved ones.

Deeming cancer a "speed bump," Genea documented her journey with photos from surgeries, scans and appointments and in so doing has positively impacted hundreds of women who are going through this process too. She proclaims, "Cancer had taken enough from me. I refused to let it take my spirit!" Genea has had wonderful surgeons, oncologists and nurses and has been blessed with the support of her family and friends. On her family she says "Cancer brought us even closer, as if that were even possible. I made a decision that although this was happening to me, it was affecting everyone around me and that I had to be strong so they would be okay."

Genea was 49 when she was diagnosed and underwent 6 months of chemotherapy. She will continue taking the tamoxifen pill every day for another 4-9 years," she explains.

Genea advises against riding in a convertible at high speeds with a wig on if you want to keep it and reminds others that "this is only temporary, refuse to lose!"

ALYCIA FORD

FOLLOWED HER INTUITION

"Breast cancer has definitely changed my life," shares Alycia, stay at home mom and former RN. In May of 2010, she went in for a routine mammogram and received good results. During the months that followed, she began to feel a small lump develop in her right breast. She was 39 when she was diagnosed.

Alycia says her biggest challenges along the way were more mental. Her mother could not support Alycia through the breast cancer and moved out of state. Alycia and her husband divorced immediately after her chemo. Struggling through abandonment and divorce during her battle with breast cancer would have taken away the will to fight in most people, but it only made Alycia stronger. "During my battle, I did not do breast cancer things. I had a mastectomy, did chemo, and had reconstruction. Then I met my bra girls. I had never seen so many pink ribbons or breast cancer accessories, tattoos (won't say who), but I loved it," Alycia explains, "Here I was almost three years out, and for the first time I felt like a survivor. Every year without cancer should be a celebration, and from now on, it will be." She advises, "As soon as you are diagnosed, learn as much as you can! And get a reconstruction!"

She also encourages women to follow their intuition. "If you are uncomfortable with a doctor or feel that something just isn't for you, then find another doctor. This is your body and your disease. You have to be the one comfortable, no one else."



Support Hands: Alycia's own inner strength

HOLLY DAVIS

TURNED HER TEST INTO A TESTIMONY

When Holly noticed a small lump in her left breast due to soreness, a lumpectomy confirmed it was cancer. Holly was 25 years young when she was diagnosed.

What was the biggest challenge she faced? "I was pregnant with my third baby girl while battling breast cancer. Keeping her safe and making sure I was here to raise my girls became my main focus and biggest challenge." Holly had a mastectomy and four rounds of chemo while pregnant.

Though Holly is still undergoing hormone therapy, she has learned not to sweat the small stuff. "I am grateful for everything and every day," she says. "I tell my family how much they mean to me and have realized that hair will grow back and that fake boobs equal perky boobs."

Holly found peace, comfort and the strength to fight through Christ, and she had an incredible support team to boot. She shares, "My husband was my rock, my girls kept me busy and gave me reason to fight and my baby girl Kennedy gave me something to look forward to while my parents gave me endless prayers and cared for me throughout it all."

Holly advises others recently diagnosed not to lose faith and says, "Attitude is everything! Hold tight to God's promises and know that this is only a speed bump in the road of life."



Support Hands: Daughter, Kennedy

LISA CAUDILL

FOUND THE STRENGTH TO FIGHT



Lisa had just lost her husband of 31 years to cancer when at age 51 she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Lisa tells us, "I hurt for my children and wondered how much more they could endure." There was no doubt Lisa was going to find the strength to fight, and for her, that strength came from her children. Lisa is a mother of two, Erin and Stephen and a grandmother to three.

Fortunately, she only had to have a mastectomy with reconstructive surgery and did not have chemo or radiation treatments. Lisa is grateful to her children, immediate family and very close friends Ann and Lon Hays. She says, "I could not have gone through all of this without them. My family and friends had just gotten me through one of the worst periods of my life in losing my husband Mike and then they had to help me with cancer."

Today, Lisa has completed her treatment and she encourages others to enjoy life more. Lisa shares, "If I could go back 20 years I probably would have spent less time at work and more time with my family. Now, I am probably more compassionate and I look at family and friends as gifts not to be taken for granted."

To others who have been recently diagnosed, Lisa recommends "to focus on the action plan you have with your doctors, stay positive, have a good support system and take care of yourself as much as possible with rest, diet and exercise."

Support Hands: Son, Steve and Daughter, Erin

LISA JOHNSON

EXCITED TO SEE THE WORLD



Support Hands: Husband, Bobby and Son, Dusty

At 43 years old, Lisa was waiting for her insurance to approve a breast reduction and needed her doctor to check an area that he had biopsied six months prior. She explains, "I found out I had breast cancer the day after my middle son left for basic training for the US Air Force. I had put off having my annual mammogram until he left."

She noticed the ultrasound technician kept stopping at one area and measuring and knew this wasn't a good sign. The doctor confirmed that the spot was indeed cancer.

Lisa shares, "I had a very busy life: working on my masters degree, teaching, carting boys around to fun events and enjoying my husband and friends. I had recently lost 25 pounds. I felt on top of the world. I could not understand how I had such a terrible disease inside my body."

Throughout the process, Lisa's friends and family were incredibly supportive. "My husband has always been my biggest supporter but he really stepped up for me during my illness. My sister is a 15-year cancer survivor and she is my inspiration."

Lisa says she wants to do it all. "I want to see the world. I want to see Broadway musicals! I want to direct and teach my students and help them be successful. I want to eat good food and spend time with family and friends. I want to see my sons get married and have granddaughters." Now 44, Lisa has resolved to do whatever she sets her mind to and is thankful for the doctors and friends God has placed in her life to help her through this battle.

MARSHA FRANKEL

LIVES FOR THOSE WHO HAVE LOST THE BATTLE

Marsha noticed pain in her right breast in February of 2003. She thought it was pain from lifting weights but noticed there was a lump. The Ice Storm of 2003 delayed her from getting into the doctor's office for a week. When she finally got there, she had a mammogram, biopsy and mastectomy all within a week's time.

Marsha's family remained upbeat even when she could not. She admits, "I was not a particularly positive cancer patient. My husband and children were my biggest strengths." When Marsha was too ill to attend her first son's high school graduation, he reassured her saying, "Don't worry Mom. This just guarantees you'll be around for my college graduation."

She went through eight treatments of chemo, a prophylactic mastectomy and three reconstruction surgeries before she was completely done.

A survivor for ten years, Marsha looks back and reflects. She says, "I learned a great deal about what matters in life. I learned how important it is to have hair! I learned that I hate to be pitied. And I have met and lost so many dear friends to this terrible disease."

Triumphantly, Marsha has seen her second son graduate law school, will see her oldest son get married, and will be able to help her daughter move into her college dorm this year.

Marsha notes, "I am blessed and lucky. We have a very long way to go before finding a cure for cancer. I cherish my life and live for all those who have lost the battle."



Support Hands: Husband, Joe

SHAWNA WALLEN

WILL NEVER SURRENDER

Tim McGraw's "Live Like You Were Dying" song has become Shawna's mantra after having breast cancer twice. Both times she found out during routine mammograms, the first occurring at age 40 and the second at age 43.

She says, "I love when I can laugh often and have adventures. You just never know how much time you have left. I try not to take that time for granted." Shawna maintains that there was no other choice but to fight. "My mother died when I was 19 from pulmonary fibrosis and that was devastating to me. I was going to do everything in my power to be around as long as possible for my own children. The thought of not fighting never occurred to me."

One of the challenges she faced involved the wig she wore until her hair grew back. She shares, "I can laugh about it now, but at the time, it wasn't so funny. My chemo treatment went from May to August, the hottest time of the year. The chemo was also causing me to have hot flashes. Imagine wearing the equivalent of a toboggan during the hottest part of the year, and having hot flashes on top of that. I would get off work, get in my car, rip my wig off, throw it across the car, and drive home with the air conditioning going full blast. I didn't care who saw my bald little head. I could not wait until my hair grew back. I will never complain about having a bad hair day, ever again."



Support Hands: Husband, Chris and Daughter, Chloe

SHERRY MITCHELL

ROCKS THE RIBBON AND KEEPS ON BELIEVING



Support Hands: Mother, Edie and Husband, Joe

When Sherry found a lump in her right breast, her gynecologist examined it and sent her for testing and to a general surgeon. The surgeon removed the lump in the front of her breast which was negative; however, she found several tumors that were positive. Sherry was diagnosed with cancer at age 36.

Sherry says, "It was challenging to see the hurt, worry and concern that my daughter and family had as well as deciding on a plan of action to fight this horrible disease."

Regardless, Sherry resolved to stay strong and positive no matter what she would have to face. "My husband never left my side, my mother gave me strength and my daughter gave me the courage and will to fight when I felt weak," she explains. Before the decision was made to undergo a double mastectomy in June of 2009, she had several surgeries leading up to that point.

Sherry continues taking medicine daily but is grateful she did not have any chemo or radiation. She implores others to never give up and to believe in the power of prayer.

Sherry looks forward to helping with and supporting the local Relay for Life and continuing to enjoy time with family and friends.

SUSAN HOWARD

LOOKS ON THE BRIGHT SIDE



Support Hands: Friend and BraDay Lex Companion, Genea

Struggling through cancer and the death of her father were challenges for Susan, but she soon realized how important it was to have faith in God.

She was 49 years old when she was diagnosed during a routine mammogram. She shares, "The first person I called was Genea Arrasmith. I had followed her battle on Facebook and she immediately came to my house and cheered me up even though she was still taking chemo treatments at the time."

Though her family was there for her every step of the way, Susan considers Genea her biggest supporter because she had been through what she was going through. "Genea was such an inspiration. She had such a wonderful attitude and was there any time I wanted to talk or ask a question."

Susan's mother gave her the positive attitude to look on the bright side of things and she found out how much her husband and children really care for her. On top of things, she has been overwhelmed with how much love and support she has received from her friends and family.

Susan encourages others to research your type of cancer and to assess your options. She says, "Go see a Plastic Surgeon before your operation and learn everything you can before making a life changing decision." She further motivates newly diagnosed women (and men) by saying "Cancer doesn't have to be all that bad! The ladies at my church threw me a 'No More Chemo' party and as crazy as it sounds, cancer can be fun!"

BOBBIE NIEHAUS

FOUND HAPPINESS IN HELPING OTHERS



Support Hands: Husband, Tom

Learning that she may not be able to have a baby after treatment was the greatest challenge for this Breast Cancer Warrior and mama to three fur babies. Even so, she decided to tackle the battle head on.

Who have been her biggest supporters? "My husband has stayed strong and stayed beside me throughout it all, waiting on me hand and foot, and my friends and family have been such great supporters."

Bobbie was diagnosed at age 31 and has endured 2 biopsies, a double mastectomy and chemotherapy. She is currently undergoing breast reconstruction and is having treatment involving Herceptin and hormone therapy.

"I have realized I have so much to live for because of cancer and that life is too short," Bobbie says. "I want to get involved and become the next young women's spokesperson of breast cancer awareness." She is indeed actively involved in raising awareness for the cause volunteering weekly at the Kentucky Pink Connection, a non-profit organization helping women who have been diagnosed, and has been involved with several other events. On top of this, Bobbie has helped organize two support groups for young women in Lexington called S.O.S. or Strength of Survivorship beginning October 8, 2013 and Rosie's Ring which started on September 3, 2013.

She urges others to remember, "You have cancer, cancer does not have you."

GLORIA CONNER

DISCOVERED AN INNER PEACE

Gloria was always a believer, but because of her bout with cancer, her faith became stronger than ever. She explains, "The day I was diagnosed, I prayed for the strength to do what I had to do and stayed in prayer until I was able to get up and face all of my challenges."

Gloria's new inner peace helped her through surgery, chemo and radiation without panicking. "God gave me a sweet peace that carried me and I thank Him every time I think about what He did for me," she says.

Gloria is a survivor of nearly 11 years and is more appreciative of her family, friends and life's little blessings. She tells us, "I can appreciate the small things in life like a positive older person, a child laughing, a beautiful day, a piece of yellow cake with caramel frosting and my grandson talking to me."

Gloria's biggest supporter has been her son who turned 25 the day her diagnosis was confirmed. She gushes, "He picked up my meds, mopped the kitchen floor, ran the sweeper, shopped and took me to treatments. The best part was that he would sometimes surprise me by just showing up at my treatment center!"

Gloria suggests to newly diagnosed individuals to stay as busy as you like while making sure you get plenty of rest, giving your body time to heal. "Stay positive," she says. "Don't spend time worrying, spend time living!"



Support Hands: Son, Coy

LESLEY LEWIS-HAMILTON

EMBRACED HER REALITY

Lesley was a single mother of a seven year old son at age 28 when she was diagnosed. She says, "I had to figure out how to keep stability in my son's life while battling breast cancer."

Fortunately, Lesley's family and friends rallied around her, becoming her biggest supporters. Lesley explains, "My mother was very supportive in my decisions of treatment. My family and friends kept me in prayer and they kept me motivated to recover. My oldest sister would drive from Lexington to Louisville to take me to all my doctors' appointments and chemotherapy treatments."

"I have always been a happy person and enjoyed life," shares Lesley. "This experience has made me more in touch with reality. I don't question what challenges may come into my life. I just ask God to direct and guide me and I just live for God."

On whether or not to share your experience, Lesley suggests, "I do think you should share your story, because I believe everyone's story can bless another person. I also feel that people should not base their life and recovery on another person's history and experience. We all are unique and God has a different plan for all of us. Enjoy your family, friends and especially enjoy your life."



Support Hands: Symbolizes mother Estella, now deceased

MARLETTA MCDERMOTT

LOVES WHO SHE HAS BECOME



Support Hands: Friend, Khreonna Jones

With a family history of breast cancer, Marletta is an advocate of having mammograms on a regular basis. In fact, she was diagnosed with ductal carcinoma in situ in her left breast on April 17, 2012 during a six-month check up. Ten days later, she had a bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction surgery.

Now, she says "I am more beautiful than I was before, and I am ready to live and love life again." Marletta shares that this experience can easily make women feel alone or unhappy. The hard part for her was coping with the loss of her breast and feeling like people looked at her as if she didn't belong.

But Marletta was surrounded with love and support and fondly remembers how her co-workers responded. "They raised money by having fundraisers and donations made in my name to ensure that I was occupied while I recovered with different types of puzzles, color books and hand sanitizer (which I still have plenty of)."

Marletta is also grateful to her beautiful kids, family and friends and a special friend who as she says, "will always remain anonymous, but makes me feel special and loved." Marletta is creating a collage of her reconstruction stages with pictures to follow her transformation and is hopeful that her story will positively impact those who are newly diagnosed.

She says, "I see every day as a blessing from God and I am proud of the new me."

MATTY SURAMEK

CHERISHES EVERY DAY



Support Hands: Best friend, Amornpan

While living in Thailand, Matty's best friend Amornpan had been pressuring her into getting a mammogram for years, but she always found a way to put it off. Finally one day in 1994, Amornpan scheduled and drove Matty to her appointment. Matty was 44 when diagnosed.

She says, "I thank my dear friend every day for her foresight and tough love. I consider myself incredibly blessed to have remained cancer-free since then." Matty says, "not only was Amornpan my best supporter, my husband Guy and daughter Mae were a rock to me going through this time."

Despite being frightened to the core upon first being diagnosed, Matty found the strength to go on. She shares, "I couldn't stop picturing my daughter without a mother and I was worried that the news might devastate her and impact her studies at Berea College."

Matty and her husband moved to Kentucky in 2011 to be closer to her family after her husband's debilitating heart attack. Today they all live under one roof and believe life is too short and too precious to live 2000 miles apart.

At first, Matty says "I thought that having breast cancer was like having a death sentence. I'm so glad I was wrong." She is reminded by her scar to not take one single day for granted as she purposefully chose not to get reconstructive surgery.

NANCY GARTH

LET'S GOD GUIDE HER STEPS IN LIFE

"Your faith will be tested, but it is during the challenging times that God carries you through," shares Nancy. "It is because of God's grace and mercy that I am still cancer free and that it was detected early."

Nancy was 50 years of age when it was determined that two atypical cells found a year prior were in fact cancerous. Fortunately, the cancer was detected early enough that Nancy did not require chemo or radiation.

Though she had the support and love from her family and friends, particularly her sister and husband, overcoming cancer was not without challenges for Nancy. She explains, "With me just being married and caring for both my elderly parents (mother with Alzheimer's and father with lung disease) in addition to working a full time demanding job, I felt overwhelmed, stressed and was in denial."

In November 2007, Nancy attended a women's conference on the meaning of being blessed, she joined First African Baptist Church and was baptized November 11, 2007. Nancy exclaims, "What a difference that made! Once I gave it all to God, he carried me and gave me the strength to deal with the pressure and demands in my life," she affirms. "He put people in my life to help me through and He can do it for you as well."



Support Hands: God

SANDRA BLAIN

NOT SLOWING DOWN FOR CANCER



Being an independent woman, one of Sandra's greatest challenges has been telling her family, friends and co-workers that she has cancer. As the President of Al Torstrick Insurance Agency, Inc., Sandra says, "My biggest challenge currently is balancing work responsibilities with taking care of myself."

In July of 2013, Sandra had a lumpectomy and her initial treatment of chemo in mid-August. Sandra is currently 60 years old and has seven more bouts of chemo followed by radiation before she will be treatment free. Nevertheless, she maintains that her life has not changed, other than working treatments into her schedule.

Who has been Sandra's biggest support? She answers, "My husband Brad has been with me every step of this journey and my children and extended family have given me support and strength. Further, she attests that everyone has been supportive of her and that her staff has been great, including a survivor whom she has often leaned on during this time. Sandra adds, "One of my friends is going through chemo now so we are able to support each other."

She says, "I haven't slowed down enough to concentrate on the future. I expect to live a full life and watch my grandchild(ren) grow."

Support Hands: Husband, Brad

TRISH WHITE

FOUND LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



Life as she knew it changed instantly for Trish when she found out she had cancer at age 61. Her biggest challenges included telling her family and figuring out how this would affect her work, church, and finances. She also worried whether it would be passed on to her daughters.

Though she had a difficult time getting through chemotherapy before having her lumpectomy surgery, Trish, a personal banker at Central Bank and Trust, found the strength to fight by surrounding herself with family and friends who love her. She says, "I had a great support system beginning with my husband who was with me through everything, my daughters, my sisters and sisters in law and other family members as well. My Pastor and church family were there to pray for me, bring me dinners and more."

Trish advises those who have been diagnosed with cancer to look to your Faith first and foremost and to keep all family and members of whatever faith you are involved in close to encourage you. She says, "You have to look at the positive aspects of the disease. For me, this included that it can be curable so get treatment right away, there has been much research about cancer bringing better treatment than there was 20 years ago and that there are many survivors to learn from."

Though she is still undergoing treatment, she is confident that you can find light in the darkness.

Support Hands: Husband, Ralph

TONYA JACKSON

BECAME A FIGHTER THROUGH HER SUPPORT GROUP

Being a mother to young kids, Tonya struggled to balance normalcy with the emotional chaos she was experiencing. "No matter what you say or how you say it, kids respond to what you do," she explains. "Therefore, I was determined that my kids would not be afraid of the unknown so my husband and I explained the disease and treatment to them."

She continues, "Also, I tried to find as much humor in the treatment as possible, which meant the kids were included in the head shaving party—which was a blast!"

Now 50, Tonya was 36 at the time of her diagnosis and completed her last treatment in 2000 including a mastectomy, reconstructive surgery and eight rounds of chemo. "Initially, I was uninformed about the disease and treatment and that lack of information caused me the most fear," she shares. Thus, Tonya got involved with a support group and the results were transformative. She adds, "When I met those survivors, heard their stories and felt their sisterhood bond, I became a fighter. In fact, I left my house to go to the meeting basically in tears but when I returned home, I was singing Gloria Gaynor's 'I Will Survive' with all of her moves!"

What is her advice? "Most importantly, keep your sense of hope and humor throughout. Everyone will be serious around you and you'll need to stay faithful, positive, and lighten the moments."



Support Hands: Husband, Jamie and friend, Phyllis