

Vickie Whitt

Today is not promised, not even the next second. My name is Vickie Renee Whitt. I have lived my entire life looking forward to next days, never once imagining that the present seconds I belong to have more power over my life than my tomorrows. I am a firm believer that each person has a purpose in this life that is deliberately guided by God and it is merely up to us to find out what our reason to live for is.

I have always been a hard worker. I love passionately, work tirelessly, and live life to its fullest for the people I love. I am an active mother of two, a grandmother of one, and the wife of a wonderful man whom I lived with for 15 years. My employment at Aetna was necessary for my family's future. One day, however, I was notified along with 100 others that Aetna was downsizing some of their departments, and mine was one of them. I was told that I would be given a severance package and 90 days of health coverage. This news hit me like a ton of bricks. Suddenly my world was flipped upside down, I was devastated. However, my devastation did not last long and I found strength to carry on. I took my circumstance and used it as motivation to help others.

One month later, days before my health insurance would expire, I decided to use my health care benefits. A mammogram revealed I had stage two triple negative breast cancer, and this cancer was known to be aggressive in African American women. I was advised to start chemotherapy immediately to shrink the tumor in my right breast. I have never been afraid of anything, but this news knocked me to my knees. I began to question my purpose in life, which I had never done before. I was unemployed, uninsured, and now had breast cancer. All I could think of was my family and the potential danger of losing my home. I could not shake the thoughts about how and why this was happening to me.

The diagnosis brought my life and plans to a standstill as my journey with cancer began. I never knew what it was like to be sicker than I ever thought possible, to be so ill and fatigued that I could barely sit up. As those things happened during my treatments, it became clear that this would be one of the hardest battles of my life and I would have to fight with my life. This journey consumed the lives of everyone who loved me, and forced them to fight with me. Although chemotherapy was destroying the cancer cells in my body, it was also decreasing my white blood cells which are necessary to fight off infection. I also experienced chemo brain, ringing in my ears, fatigue, and neuropathy which caused tingling and numbness in my toes. I would also get a burning sensation up and down my legs causing some nights to be almost unbearable, but cancer cannot take from you what you refuse to give up.

After 6 months of chemo, 2 blood transfusions, 2 mastectomies, and bilateral reconstructions, I am now cancer free! During my fight, I never lost my joy, peace, laughter, or ability to smile even when chemo caused me to lose 16 of my teeth. Before my diagnosis I lived for the next days instead of the present moments. Today, I cherish every waking breath and have learned even to love the bad times. Through it all I learned I am part of a great support system and God showed me I was not alone. Through all this my family, the hospital workers, and various organizations were there for me.

Today I hold my head high knowing that I am a part of a huge community of people who proudly call themselves "cancer survivors". To me, cancer survivorship is not about getting through cancer without dying, but about thriving. This is just one chapter of my story, and every day I continue to write the next chapter as I fight for others, fight for laws to change, fight for health disparities, and fight for the cures. So please fight with me!