

Surviving Breast Cancer

Written by Wendy Nilsen Pollitzer

Wednesday, 12 October 2011 09:18 - Last Updated Wednesday, 12 October 2011 10:37



Colleen Christensen, a woman who consistently gives back, takes a look at her own life and finds



s inner peace

She is a girl, and she fights like one! Her name is Colleen Christensen, and she is a breast cancer survivor. She is also a relative, so her story is especially cherished.

Dr. Patricia Thompson at Beaufort OBGYN diagnosed Christensen with breast cancer in 2006 at the age of 52. While examining an inverted nipple, Dr. Thompson explained to Christensen,

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“You have cancer.”

Shocked, Christensen could not comprehend what she'd just heard. She was healthy, ate raw vegetables every day and exercised. She'd been helping both of her sisters fight breast cancer. One endured a double mastectomy while the other battled a lumpectomy. Christensen was not supposed to have this dreaded disease as well.

But, she did. Richard Horton, her son-in-law, was the first family member to hear the news. He'd just happened to come to her office at Lifefit that day. He pulled her out of shock by repeating, “You're going to be fine. You can beat this.”

Dr. Burrus confirmed the cancer with a biopsy, and Dr. Newberry recommended a portacath be installed under the skin to deliver the chemotherapy directly to her veins. Thankfully, surgery to remove the cancer went well, and Dr. Burrus couldn't wait until Monday to tell Colleen. He called her Sunday morning and said, “We got it all.” Christensen received radiation as well to ensure the cancer's removal. She and her husband, Rhett, who had already lost three family members to cancer, could finally breath a sigh of relief.

Yes, she beat cancer. But, it would be months before Christensen would feel better. Psychologically, breast cancer was defeating her. She thought she had it all under control. She went to work daily, hid her depression from her family and co-workers and maintained what she thought was her sense of dignity. She was losing a battle, and she didn't even know it.

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One day, she called in sick to work, because she was crying uncontrollably. Her boss, Mark Senn said, "Well, it's about time. Take some time off and get some rest."

She confronted childhood issues that had been mentally blocked long ago and finally said, "Enough! I've beaten what could've killed me. Now it's time to start living."

She began to climb a ladder of emotional strength, and now she's at the top rung. She's determined to help those in need and find a cure for this deadly disease that is estimated to kill 39, 520 people in the U.S. in 2011.

She recently organized Pink Night Out at Charles & Company to benefit her team, the Beaufort Belles, at the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure on Daniel Island this weekend. A huge success, the event not only raised money, but also raised awareness in Beaufort.

For a woman who consistently gives back, she is appreciative of all those people who gave to her.

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“I have so many people to thank for helping me in my struggle with breast cancer. Drs. Burrus, Newberry and Thompson, who physically helped me tackle this disease; my wonderful colleagues at Lifefit at Beaufort Memorial for their unwavering support during my illness; Milbry Gnann, my mentor who would explain everything to me; and, of course, my family, who stood by me through it all,” explains Christensen.

Now at peace with life, Christensen hopes to educate and counsel those women who need spiritual guidance and reassurance that everything’s going to be okay. Her gift of compassion is her greatest attribute, and she’ll stop at nothing to give back. That’s just what she does.

I’m proud to call Colleen Christensen my aunt, for she is a woman of character, strength and grace. And, she fights like a girl!

Pink Night Out at Charles & Company

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