

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



## Adrienne Braxton

BRAIN CANCER - DIAGNOSED 2007

### The Basics:

- **Resides:** San Bernardino, works in Victorville
- **Occupation:** Regional sales manager for Holiday Inn in Victorville
- **Family:** Two daughters, Destiny Record, 31, and Desiree Record, 29, Mother Gwen Russell
- **Hobbies:** A cohost on radio shows: Braxton's Back and Ladies Night on Studio W, and shopping
- **Philosophy:** Live life like it's golden.

In 2006, Adrienne Braxton was living in Sacramento with her then-husband and two college-age daughters, Destiny Record, now 31, and Desiree Record, now 29.

"My youngest daughter had just got accepted to Pepperdine University," she said, and "We were very excited. We were suddenly empty-nesters. The weekend we dropped her off, we went on a cruise to Ensenada."

But in an intimate moment during the cruise, her now ex-husband



noticed a lump under Braxton's arm. "He knew immediately something was wrong," she said.

"My yearly OBGYN appointment was just after the cruise," she said, and during the exam, Braxton asked the doctor to check the lump. "She brought in a specialist from the breast clinic right then and there.

Following a mammogram, Braxton was told she had Stage I breast cancer. "The next thing I knew, I was in oncology," Braxton said. "Because they kept on saying it was early, we opted for radiation and lumpectomy."

Braxton left Sacramento in October 2009. "I had a clean mammogram on Christmas Eve," she said. "When I received the report in the mail, I framed it and hung it up because it was to be my last one. I was like 'Woo! I am clear.'"

By 2010, Braxton's life had changed dramatically. She was separated from her husband and was back in Southern California, where she had grown up.



"I had not established a doctor in Southern California. I was still going back and forth to Sacramento. I was having headaches," Braxton said. "I thought it was going because of what I was going through."

Gwen Russell, Braxton's mother, suggested she go to Kaiser in Fontana instead of returning to her doctor in Sacramento. She saw a doctor there the next day.

Braxton's medical records were with Kaiser in Northern California, "so the doctor did a breast exam and mammogram to have them on the record in Southern California," she said.

Braxton had what looked like "a big pimple" on her lumpectomy scar line that she thought was a keloid, an overgrowth of scar tissue.

"African-American women tend to keloid," she said. "He took a biopsy. That same day I had a mammogram. They told me not to leave Kaiser until I saw a surgeon," Braxton said.

"They said, 'The cancer has returned. We don't know the stage or if it has spread, but you need to have surgery,'" she said.

Eight months after her "all clear" report, Braxton was diagnosed with Stage 3 breast cancer.

"I was going through so much at the time. I was also going through a divorce. I just was emotionally drained and shocked," Braxton said. "The divorce took a back burner. I just went along with the punches, but I knew with cancer, I had to punch back for my life," she said.

That second diagnosis "really rocked the foundation of our whole, complete family. My

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*The tumor was the size of a small orange.*

daughters came home. My extended family -- sisters, best friend -- came in and filled in what my family couldn't do. ... and my best friend, Nichelle Gage Austin, moved in with me, Braxton said."

In June 2010, Braxton underwent a bone scan, CT scan and PET scan, and doctors determined she was HER2 positive.

The tumor was "the size of a small orange," Braxton said, and doctors suggested doing chemotherapy prior to surgery. She received a port -- a small tube through the chest used to infuse chemotherapy drugs -- and on July 7, she began a regimen that consisted of Carboplatin, Taxotere and Herceptin.

Braxton said she had chemotherapy for a year: once a week for six months, and then once every three weeks for the remainder of the year.

"November 10 is when I had a double mastectomy. I didn't realize the journey that was going to come along. ... I had a spot on my liver and a spot on my lung. Because of that I could not have plastic surgery right away. I had to finish with the Herceptin."

### Caregiver Perspective



When her daughter, Adrienne, was diagnosed with a recurrence of breast cancer, "I was really in shock," said her mother, Gwen Russell. "I noticed that she had begun to gain weight -- you know how you know your kids. I told her 'I think you need to go to the doctor.' She said, 'Mama, I'm ok."

"I said, 'No.' I made an appointment with my primary doctor to see if I could get her in, and sure enough, when she saw my doctor, he said it had come back," Russell said.

Like her daughter, Russell relied on her faith. "I am a Christian and I believe in God, so I had to surrender to God and be prayerful that he would bring her back, she said."

Braxton's fourth and last surgery was breast reconstruction, and for her, it was a 12-hour surgery. "October 2011, I had the TRAM flap -- where they take fat from your stomach and lift it to your (chest). I always say I hate that I had cancer, but I got a free tummy tuck," she said.

"I have a saying to myself: 'Be kind to Adrienne.' I don't let things in life stress me out. Bottom line: it is what it is. It all works out," Braxton said.

Braxton is a host on the radio shows "Braxton's Back," and "Ladies Night on Studio W" (<http://studiow.buzz>) or the android app IMG2). "I give back, I get involved," she said.



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