

Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



Leslie Lindo Kondrotas,
DIAGNOSIS: STAGE 2 INVASIVE LOBULAR
CARCINOMA BREAST CANCER

The Basics:

- **Resides:** Pinion Hills
- **Occupation:** Stater Bros.-Clerk
- **Family:** Husband Shawn, 45, Her children, Shayne, 32, Lance, 31, Daniel, 27
- **Hobbies:** gardening, reading, crocheting
- **Philosophy:** Live life to the fullest every day, life is too short, love with all your might

It was Thanksgiving, 2014, and Leslie Lindo Kondrotas was putting on lotion when she felt a lump in her right breast. She went to the doctor in December for an ultrasound, diagnostic mammogram and needle biopsy. Initially, she was told not to worry, the result was benign. But the radiologist called that finding into question and recommended a surgical biopsy.

As a result, Kondrotas had a sentinel dissection and a week later, a lymph node axillary dissection. By January 2015, the new results came back positive. This time, Kondrotas was told she had breast cancer.

"I didn't hear anything after "cancer," Kondrotas said. "Thank God Shawn, my husband, was with me. I was a basket case after that. I couldn't remember anything they said after that."

Kondrotas was scheduled to have bilateral mastectomies on March 4, her birthday. "My sister got an emergency flight out from Okinawa, Japan, where her husband was stationed in the military, and my whole family was here," she said.

Kondrotas had already received an injection for relaxation to start the anesthesia process when the plastic surgeon who would do her reconstructive surgery intervened and called off the surgery.

Instead, surgery was postponed, and on April 10, Kondrotas began six rounds of chemotherapy.

"On my second treatment, I lost my hair, eyelashes, eyebrows. From head to toe, I lost everything," she said.



"I had to give myself Neupogen shots every day for seven days, every month. I was given steroids - I hated the steroids.

"I averaged two to three hours of sleep per night and I gained 50 pounds, (due to the medication)."

Kondrotas' medications included Doxorubicin, dubbed by patients, caregivers and others "the red devil" due to its toxic effects.

Kondrotas posted a photograph of herself receiving "the red devil" on her Facebook page, Leslie's Breast Cancer Journey, a detailed chronicle of her battle with cancer.

Kondrotas' chemotherapy ended in July, 2015, and her breast surgery, including placing expanders for reconstruction, was performed in September.

Kondrotas began her reconstruction in December, 2015. The expanders

had been placed underneath her chest muscles and would be filled a little at a time in order to expand the space where implants would be placed.

"I can't remember now - was it eight times for fills? They would go in and fill with a needle," she said. "They had to expand a little at a time."

For a while, doctors told Kondrotas' husband not to let people visit because her immune system was so compromised.

"(Not seeing) my grand babies, that was a toughie, they are my world," she said.

Kondrotas says part of her journey has been adjusting the treatment regimen.

"I was on so much medicine for anxiety, depression, the pain, to sleep," she said.

Kondrotas had a host of side effects as a result of her surgery and medications, too. Her Facebook page chronicles her lymphedema,

“I was on so much medicine for anxiety, depression, the pain, to sleep”.

axillary web syndrome, weakened and broken teeth, bone pain, and neuropathy, as well as general physical weakness and the mental toll treatment takes.

"I joined several of the breast cancer support groups on Facebook," Kondrotas said. "I was on them almost 24/7, just talking to other women."

Kondrotas is thankful Shawn was always by her side. "I could not have gotten through this without my husband."

Her entire family was very supportive. "I cut my long hair shorter in increments," Kondrotas said. "When it started falling out, I had my son Shane cut my hair in a mohawk, like his."

When Kondrotas decided it was time to shave off her remaining hair, it was a family event. "All my boys shaved their heads," she said. "My step-dad up north sent a photo of his shaved head, and even one of my girlfriends shaved her head. Shane even let me shave off his mohawk."

Family support also led to an annual event in Kondrotas' honor. "My son Shane is the president of a mini truck club," she said.

"The very first year I was diagnosed, he threw a fundraiser in my honor. It was huge. It's called Cruisin for Breast Cancer."

The American Cancer Society event is "getting bigger every year, and people are asking if he is going to have it again, so now it has become annual," Kondrotas said.

"This will be the fourth year. It will be held Saturday at San Joaquin Valley College on Mariposa Road in Hesperia. The very first one we

Caregiver Perspective



"When we first found out it was cancer, we were both shocked because we went from 'it's benign, don't worry about it' to 'oh, you have cancer,'" Shawn Kondrotas said.

"We didn't grasp what we were going to go through. When they explained it, she was very upset, I was hugging her, and I remember searching my mind for what can I say? I had lots of questions. I didn't know anything about cancer."

"At one point, the bad days outnumbered the good days, so we took the good days as we got them. We would go out when she felt good. People would act like the good days were how it was. I would say, 'She's putting on a good front for you guys right now. Trust me.'"

Most of all, Shawn says, "you have to keep faith. You have to remain positive. That's what kept me going."

"There is an end. You are going to get there. You are still alive. You have those thoughts at first: Is she going to die? You think about a lot of stuff."

"Then you get to the point where no, that's not going to happen. It's a fight. You have to fight every day."

Leslie's Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/lesliesbcjourney/>

had flyers and everything. Now we are sharing it and posting it on FB.

Kondrotas says her mental state was a big obstacle to overcome. "Some days I thought this is just depressing. I wanted to know what do I have to look forward to? Sometimes it would be very dark."

"There was a point where I got out of my shower, and I looked in the mirror, I was heavier than I've ever been, I had no hair and no boobs. I didn't feel like a woman."

"I didn't want Shawn to be embarrassed of me. Going to the doctor all the time, I hit a point where I wanted to commit suicide."

Now, cancer has changed Kondrotas' outlook on life. "I guess my view of the world and people has completely changed," she said. "I give people the benefit of the doubt now. I have empathy for people; everything has changed. You never know what somebody else is going through."

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