

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



CLAUDIA STONE, 68
DIAGNOSIS: LOBULAR CARCINOMA STAGE 1

CANCER DIAGNOSIS... NOW WHAT?

Suppose you are a new cancer patient. Where do you go for information?

“Finding support has always been a challenge,” said Claudia Stone. She recommends asking for a reference from a doctor, referrals from friends, or “go online and type in American Cancer Society.” she said

“When you are first diagnosed, it is like you are hit between the eyes: Cancer? I don’t know anything about cancer.”

“There isn’t a protocol that you can hand someone that tells them where to go,” “It isn’t follow the steps one through 10. I wish it was.”

“Through the seven years of remission, I decided it wasn’t enough to have monthly meetings. I stood up in the room one day and said I would like to start a social group.”

Stone offered her home, made monthly fliers and provided food. “I want this to become some place we could go where we could laugh,” she told them. “I don’t want it to be just about cancer.”

“It was a huge success, it has been going well over five years.

“Now they do that in restaurants, which I think is awesome. I used to call it Claudia’s Social but it is a social, and to this day they still have them.”

Stone downsized to a house in Barstow last year, and she is in the process of building ties to her new community. Liz McGiffin of the American Cancer Society asked her to facilitate a newly formed cancer support group there and Stone agreed.

“It’s been difficult,” she said. Maybe five people show up, but that’s OK. People get rid of the toxins that hover over their souls.”

Stone encourages people to join a cancer support group. “When we sit down initially, I make a short introductory presentation,” she tells them.

“I am here because I am a survivor who needs to reach out to you so that you can say: ‘I am not alone, I know somebody is here that understands.’

“There are a people who come to group meetings who have a huge extended family, but nobody understands the path that person is taking because it is not their journey.

“They say, I love you, I am here for you. Some family members don’t want to talk about it.

“I don’t want it to be just about cancer”.



26 years, and “it has been over two years now.”

Stone’s only child, her daughter Laura, was born with a congenital defect. “She survived 19 surgeries and died at 21 of kidney disease – an anatomical anomaly,” Stone said.

“I went through life’s ups and downs and all that good stuff. When I got cancer seven years ago, I did not have the benefit of a caregiver. What is left of my family all live in Florida. I didn’t have anybody.

“What became the most important thing was support. I found that through the cancer support group (at St. Joseph Health, St Mary in Apple Valley). Predominately my needs were emotional. I had to find something.

“I started going to that support group and I was able to share my journey, share their journeys, learn from their journeys, and hold their hands through the process.”

From the support group, Stone says she has “a dozen or so very dear friends. All I have are my friends. They are a huge part of my life.

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Barstow, previously Apple Valley
- **OCCUPATION:** Homemaker, formerly worked in sales, customer services
- **HOBBIES:** Crafting, creating greeting cards
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Live in the moment

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Claudia Stone says a breast cancer diagnosis seven years ago and her journey since then has not been so much about the medical aspect of the disease. Rather, it has been about finding new relationships that built a support system she did not have at the time.

Stone’s cancer was stage 1 and her tumor was small: 1 centimeter. She had a lumpectomy with clear margins, and “I didn’t have to worry about any other stage,” she said.

She had radiation at City of Hope and will continue oral medication for another three years.

But emotionally, “there has to be something to latch on to to help you through this life on Earth,” she said. “With me, the only way I could define who I am is I have been for all of this life of mine, a survivor – way beyond cancer. And I have done it alone.”

Stone has been “married three times, divorced three times,” she said. Her last marriage lasted



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