

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



MONICA ESTRADA, 49
DIAGNOSIS: ADVANCED BREAST CANCER

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Victorville
- **OCCUPATION:** Formerly worked in appliance sales for a major department store.
- **FAMILY:** John Estrada, husband; Robert Cruz, 72, father; Gloria, 67, mother; Clorissa Estrada, 19, and Corinna Jepson, 29, daughters; Tristan Estrada, 9; and Alex Estrada, 9, adopted sons
- **HOBBIES:** Jigsaw puzzles and spending time with family at their cabin
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Don't worry about the small stuff. I don't stay mad at anybody – life is too short.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Fifteen years ago, when she was 34, Monica Estrada was diagnosed with advanced breast cancer.

At first, she ignored her symptoms. Estrada was aware of a lump in her breast, but “I had the lump and I learned just to live with it,” she said.



Estrada had a lumpectomy, but doctors performed two surgeries trying to obtain clean margins around the tumor site. Her surgeries were followed by radiation and chemotherapy.

“They were shocked when I had it at 34,” Estrada said. “I was in a survival study at Loma Linda (University Medical Center) of patient survival rates beyond five years with cancer in the lymph nodes.”

The margins from Estrada’s first two surgeries were never completely clear, and about two years later, she had bilateral mastectomies. She was also treated for 10 years with the estrogen blocker Tamoxifen.

But in September, she began having trouble breathing. At first doctors thought she had pneumonia or asthma.

Estrada was prescribed a variety of inhalers, but none of them seemed



to help. Within a couple weeks, she was hospitalized at St. Mary hospital with pneumonia. Doctors examined the fluid in her lungs and told her they saw cancer cells.

“As soon as I found out, I called my oncologist of 15 years,” said Estrada, who was given a diagnosis of Stage 4.

“My husband was devastated. We thought, Stage 4, I am going to die right away. We found out I am not going to die right away.

“My doctor said, ‘don’t worry, we have new medication. We are so advanced now, we are going to get this.’”

Estrada receives monthly injections of Faslodex, which is “only for advanced cancers,” she said. She also receives medications to counteract the drug’s side effects, which include

bone demineralization and muscle tightness.

Estrada has an MRI every three months now. On Friday, she had biopsies to investigate areas that concerned her primary physician.

She said her oncologist thinks it could be areas of scarring or healing, and she will know the results soon.

Estrada and her husband, John have two daughters and two adopted sons. Additionally, they have been foster parents and also help young adults who have aged out of the foster system.

“My husband works a lot now so I can have the best insurance,” Estrada said. “It is so, so expensive.”

Estrada’s illness prevents her from working, and she is philosophical about it.

“I thought, what am I missing in life? God has a plan for me,” she said. “I was missing so much (because of work).

“I plan on making memories and reaching out to people. When I was working, I was always too busy.



“We thought, Stage 4, I am going to die right away.”

“We are members of Mountain Lakes in Lytle Creek – my happy place, my family loves it.

Estrada does jigsaw puzzles, too. “I have done so many thousand puzzles,” she said. “I have started putting the date when I started and the name of the person who helped me with it. I have a wall in the garage where the puzzles are.”

Estrada was able to find support through the American Cancer Society, too. “I’ve got to say, Look Good, Feel Better really helped me,” she said. I was totally bald and I always had thick pretty hair.

“When I lost all my hair, they told me to look around at the wigs. I found one that was long, pretty and thick like mine. It made me feel so much better when I put it on. That program was so good for me.”

“It happened to me, so I can show you not everybody dies right away. I am going to fight.”

Caregiver Perspective



When Robert Cruz heard his daughter had cancer, he thought: “Oh my God, we’re going to lose my daughter.

“That’s the first reaction you have. Gloria, my wife, was a nervous wreck and crying. It was a shock to both of us

“Gloria helped her with drains and bandages. We took her to chemo all the way to Hemet, I think three days per week”

Cruz tells cancer patients he meets: “You are not going to be alone. I also tell them to call Monica, she’s up to date on everything. The death rate is low now – you just have to get the right doctor.

“I reassure people it is not a death blow. There is so much stuff out there. Every day things are being discovered.”

The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

www.cancer.org or call 800-227-2345

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