

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



IRMA LAZORWITZ, 66
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER IN 1997

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Victorville
- **OCCUPATION:** School cook for 23 years
- **FAMILY:** Lewis Lazowitz, 72, husband; Jennifer, 38; Dee Moore, daughter, 35; Tim Torres, son, 48
- **HOBBIES:** Bible study and church; craft fairs, makes homemade greeting cards; cancer support group at St. Mary; babysitting her grandchildren
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Every day is a blessing. I just thank the Lord for giving me more time.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Irma Lazowitz is a long-term breast cancer survivor. In December 1997, she was told she had cancer, and the doctor outlined her options. She chose to have a mastectomy, and her surgery was in January 1998.

"They took the right breast," Lazowitz said. "They took 11 lymph nodes and did

nothing else, no chemo or radiation.

"There has been no recurrence. I was fortunate, I didn't have to go through chemo. It is just a scary word.

"When I found out I had cancer, it was hard. You look at yourself in the mirror and I had one breast. My husband was a very good caregiver.

My kids were young. My daughters were in school. I am just glad to be a survivor.

"I felt a lot of love, that's what got me through it. People brought food; my house looked like a flower shop.

Lazowitz said the procedure, healing, and losing a part of her body were very difficult.

"I hated that drainage bag. My husband had to help me because I didn't want to deal with it.

"Even though people don't see it, you have to wear a prosthetic. It is uncomfortable sometimes but you have to do it.

"I can't go the store and just pick out a bra. You have to have the pocket (to hold the prosthesis). Prosthetics are heavy, you don't realize.

"I go to a special shop in San Bernardino. It is nice, it is one-on-one, private. They have a lot of selection, and it is just women, not everybody."

Ten years ago, she was treated for skin cancer on her nose. Now, her daughter Jennifer is being treated for breast cancer.

"(Recently) my daughter had a lump," Lazowitz said. "She went to the doctor and they said they had to remove her breast. She opted to have them both removed.

"After the surgery, they discovered it had spread to her lymph nodes. Genetic testing was negative.

"It is all so modern now. Some people can have reconstruction done during surgery, and she was lucky, she came out of surgery with breasts.

"The mother of my grandchildren is a cancer survivor. She had cervical and uterine cancer in April.

"This girl has been through hell and back. She gets so frustrated. She is still having side effects from chemo and radiation.

"She is in the hospital right now from another surgery. You tell people to hang in there, but they don't really know unless they experience it.

"I have two sisters-in-law who both had breast cancer, and they both had reconstruction. They are both in their 70s, and this was in

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the last four or five years.

"I found out within the last eight years that I had a biological father I didn't know I had. Cancer is crazy on his side.

"I have two half-sisters who had breast cancer, and he had a son that had prostate cancer. My mother's side hasn't had cancer.

Lazowitz said she is in a support group because "you have to stay connected to people.

"I am involved in Relay for Life and cancer support groups at St. Mary (Medical Center in Apple Valley). I can't ignore this, because I am a survivor and I need to give other people support.

"My friend Melinda has a Relay for Life team called Circle of Friends. I am her co-captain.

"There is a relay coming up in the spring at Victor Valley College. I just started making friends with the cancer people, and that's how I got involved in the support groups.

"There are a lot of people not involved in support groups. They don't have to feel like they are alone.

To other cancer patients, Lazowitz says: "Don't get discouraged. Just keep your faith, stay strong and fight. You have people out there who are fighting and praying for you. Don't give up."

Caregiver Perspective



Lewis Lazowitz said, when his wife was diagnosed with cancer, "The doctor said he had good news and bad news.

"The good news was everything will be all right. The bad news: Irma had cancer. I almost fell to the floor."

Irma was offered chemo and radiation or just surgery.

"I told her, 'I married you, not your body parts,' Lew said.

"We told the doctor, 'take the breast.'

"I was in the military then. Everybody said, 'Lew is a big breast man,' but I said 'no, I am a big Irma man.'

"At my retirement, one of them said, 'you are truly in love,' and I said, 'yes I am.'



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