

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



**YVETTE TORO, 66**  
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER

## The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Apple Valley
- **OCCUPATION:** Teacher at Lakeview Leadership Academy
- **FAMILY:** Daughters Maile Manness, 36; Jaimie Stewart, 29; and Amanda Toro, 27; Gregory Stewart, Jaimie's husband; Jason, Maile's husband
- **HOBBIES:** Travel, Bible studies
- **PHILOSOPHY:** I am a lot more thankful for the little things. I need to let go of some of what bothers me.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In December 2017, during a routine checkup, Yvette Toro asked her doctor about having a mammogram. She was told that at her age she did not need a mammogram every year.

But Toro's secondary insurance paid for her to have such exams, and she demanded a mammogram anyway.

"There was something 'off' in the mammogram," she said, "so they wanted to do an ultrasound.

"They only checked the right side and sent me for a needle biopsy.

"(The radiologist) was so good. He said after the biopsy, 'It looks like cancer.'



Toro's pathology report upheld the radiologist's opinion.

Her doctors suggested removal of her right breast. Instead, she insisted on double mastectomies, which would involve a longer surgery doctors said she didn't really need.

Toro had stage 1 cancer in her right breast. But there was a surprising finding in her left breast: stage 2 cancer.

"They said it was an 'incidental' cancer on the left side," Toro said.

"I was so thankful that I pushed through and didn't relent - I wanted them both off. I felt like it was another little gift from God - I somehow knew.

"I did not have chemo or radiation. The oncologist said at my age, it would do more harm than good.

Toro received her diagnosis in January and had surgery in April.

"I worked until March," she said, "I was beyond exhausted and I couldn't take it anymore.

"I went back in August for a few days, then back out for reconstruction in September."

"I was off about two months all together (including summer break).

"I went back a month after reconstruction and I am still working.

"I love to travel. I will be going to Spain in March as a chaperone with students through Education First Tours.

Toro says her family and faith kept her strong.

"My girls rallied around me. My biggest fear until having the genetic testing done was the possibility of passing it down.

"That came back negative and I was elated. I raised them myself, I am a single mom. Now, one has two children, one has one.

"My oldest did a lot of research. Jaimie was at my side for two months. My youngest was there for the entire surgery and also came to visit when she could.

Toro said Jaimie came from Tucson, Arizona, and "did everything for me.

"The first time she was here for two months, the second time for one month.

"Her husband, Gregory, is in the Air Force. He has been a hero on two fronts: One, because of his military service



*"I was beyond exhausted and I couldn't take it anymore"*

- they are all heroes; and two, because he supported his wife coming to help me.

"I am grateful for my brother, because I was so upset about my kids being upset. He came and stayed the whole seven hours.

Toro praises her longtime friend, fellow teacher and cancer survivor Denise Roderick for her positive attitude and willingness to reach out to others.

"I watched Denise and didn't realize how bad it was because she is positive, thankful, all smiley," Toro said. "She is a woman of faith. I never knew how bad it was until I got it. And who was there for me? Denise."

Toro said she went to a support group for a short time, and "I signed up for Relay for Life this last year, but didn't make it because of the surgery."

She believes cancer patients "need to take control.

"I didn't know when they took your lymph nodes out, you were at higher risk for lymphedema," she said.

"I didn't know how uncomfortable reconstruction was. I think so much of this we have to find out for ourselves.

"I didn't realize how many women that I work with have had cancer.

"My surgery was almost seven hours. I had a mild brain atrophy - that can happen if you are under anesthesia too long. I didn't know.

I try to keep involved and learning and growing. I feel like I have to exercise the brain.

## Caregiver perspective:



Jaimie Stewart said when she first heard her mother Yvette Toro's cancer diagnosis, "Initially it was really scary. I don't think I reacted well. I felt a little paralyzed by it.

"I started doing research and made mom keep us updated. It has always been very scary for me because I have been so close to her.

"I tried to do everything for her so she could just heal.

"I didn't want her to have to get up for any reason."

"Just be there for them and don't be scared to talk about it. I didn't want to burden her with having to think about it."



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