

Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



ALBERTA HALE CRIGLER, 69
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Pinon Hills
- **OCCUPATION:** Retired journalist, horse trainer
- **FAMILY:** Relatives in Kansas and California
- **HOBBIES:** Music
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Keep putting one foot in front of the other; don't stop trying.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In 1993, I became a member of the biggest group nobody wants to belong to: The Cancer Club. That's how I framed it in my mind, and it is what I often told people.

Twenty-six years ago, when I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer, it was the Dark Ages compared to where we are now

with diagnostics, treatments and outcomes.

My prognosis was "guarded," and of course, my family was devastated.

During the seven months following my diagnosis, I got a second opinion, had two rounds of chemotherapy, had bilateral

mastectomies, and then had four more months of chemotherapy.

After that, I was prescribed estrogen blockers, which were par for the course in those days if a woman was premenopausal.

About six years out, my oncologist discontinued the medication, said I was healthy for now, and to come back if and when I got sick again. That was the last time I saw her.

Fast forward 26 years, and I am still here. But I will never say I was "cured."

Why? I don't want to jinx myself. Just ask Olivia Newton-John if breast cancer can come back years later. It can.

That was the experience I brought to the table when I was asked to write for the Survival & Hope series in the Daily Press. The project has been quite a journey for me.

The only interaction I had with other cancer patients back in 1993 was in the waiting and chemo rooms during my treatment.

We would talk, and we knew we were all sisters in the same battle.

But I did not want to be defined by cancer. I wanted to be ME. I did not want to be lumped into a group of people who were marginalized by a disease.

I wanted my life back. I didn't want people to feel sorry for me or to avoid me because they didn't know how to interact with someone who had cancer.

I have to think most people battling cancer feel exactly the same way.

Now, when I meet someone else who is a cancer survivor, I realize we have a common and unique bond.

We are comrades in arms who have fought for our lives. We tell our war stories, compare experiences, and we are closer for it.

During the last year, I have heard amazing stories of people's battles to survive.

Some return to their old lives, some have discovered new interests and activities, and some have had to adapt to limitations as a result of their illness.

All of them are thankful to be alive, and most of them have been moved to give something back to others.

Survivors are a testament to the human spirit, not because they are super heroes, but because, more often than not, this journey makes you discover your better self.

I have heard many stories about how survivors have relied on their faith, philosophies, and love for their families and friends to survive.

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Some engage in creative activities, others have embraced holistic practices, dietary changes and exercise to heal.

Many are involved in Relay for Life, Journey Thru Cancer workshops and support groups.

Some survivors say researching and gaining knowledge about their disease gives them more control over their lives and decisions they make.

I am looking forward to meeting the survivors featured in our series this year at a gala to be held in Victorville this summer.

It will be a chance to put names to faces, reconnect with people I have already met, and celebrate everyone who has battled or is battling cancer.

The Survival & Hope series will enter its second year in a few weeks. I want to encourage cancer survivors, patients, and those who are newly diagnosed to tell their stories.

I have talked to many people who thought they had no story to tell. But every survivor has a unique story. People have talked about their reactions to hearing their

diagnoses, what kind of support they had, their experiences with treatment and how they coped.

Every story is a chance to help yourself heal, and it is a chance to help someone else, too. No one is too insignificant to tell their story. Every life matters.

The most recent statistics from the American Cancer Society indicate 1 in 3 Americans will develop cancer during their lifetimes.

It is estimated that in California alone, 186,920 new cases will be diagnosed in 2019. Those are staggering statistics.

Please tell your story:



I would be honored to help any cancer survivor tell their own survival story.

Just contact Liz McGiffin, Community Development Manager for the American Cancer Society at 760-887-3427 or by email at liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org.

I will then contact you and set an appointment for a telephone interview. It's easy and sharing your story is so very important.

– Alberta Hale Crigler

In the next two weeks, I will be writing about support groups available in the High Desert and resources available to cancer patients and their caregivers.



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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