

Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



About Me:

CITY: Hesperia

WORK: Caregiver for elderly people

FAMILY: Jose "Freddy" Enriquez, 48, husband; Bert, 18 and Samuel, 16, sons; Nancy, 15, daughter; Melanie and Melody, 10-year-old twins

HOBBIES: Reading

PHILOSOPHY: Value the little things

"Sometimes it was too hard for me, my children and everybody."



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Claudia Enriquez, 47 Type of cancer: Colon

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Note: The interview for this story was conducted in Spanish and English with some help with translations from Claudia Enriquez's family. Some of the quotes attributed to Enriquez are translations.

In 2016, Claudia Enriquez was 44 years old and she was having intestinal issues that she first thought could be related to her diabetes.

She was not feeling well; she was often constipated and was losing weight.

When she could no longer eat solid foods, she went to her doctor. He told her the problem was not connected to her diabetes.

Medical jargon can be difficult for any patient to fully comprehend. And when the doctor and/or patient are not native English speakers, communication can be more complicated.

"My oncologist is from India. Sometimes someone would translate and sometimes I understood. The nurse was Mexican-American and could translate.

An X-ray was performed, and the doctor told her "there was something in there," Enriquez said.

She was sent for a colonoscopy, but doctors were unable to pass the scope: A mass prevented them from completing the examination.

A biopsy was performed, and it confirmed what her doctor had suspected: cancer.

"It didn't sink in at first," Enriquez said. "I didn't have any reaction immediately.

"But before my surgery, I was, 'Oh my God, I have cancer.'"

Enriquez said she is fortunate that her healthcare provider does everything from diagnostics to treatment and aftercare in plan.

That meant events happened very quickly, and she was able to immediately have surgery and treatment without long wait times.

Her surgery was performed three weeks after she was diagnosed. The tumor in her colon was the size of a fist.

The tumor plus about 12 inches of Enriquez's colon, her appendix and local lymph nodes were removed.

Just four weeks later, she began receiving chemotherapy treatments.

Her treatments consisted of 12 rounds of chemotherapy during a six-month period.

After each chemo treatment at the hospital, Enriquez's infusion continued for three days at home via a pump.

Forty-eight hours later, she had to return to the hospital to disconnect the pump until her next treatment.

"My last three chemo were terrible," she said. "My body had no energy, and I was throwing up and had diarrhea. I couldn't even tie my shoes because when I bent over, I got dizzy.

"My last chemotherapy was March 2017, and now I have checkups every four months. It takes five years to say it is cured.

"My doctor said with the chemo, my future is good, even though it could go to my pancreas, liver, kidneys - everything near there."

Enriquez said since her diagnosis and treatment, she finds "more value in things.

"Church has always been important, and having friends praying for me was good support."

Enriquez joined a Spanish-language women's cancer support group in Apple Valley.

"When a person has had cancer, they understand me better. Talking about it helps us, we understand, and it is more support."

But Enriquez said her family's support was her mainstay.

"When I had cancer, I was thinking: When I die, who is going to take care of them?"

"My husband was working 18 hours per day. He used his sick days to take care of me.

"He used everything, including family leave. We were lucky to have good health insurance that covered me, too.



"My children matured more quickly because they had more responsibilities. They had to cook, wash clothes, do dishes, clean the house and other chores," she said.

"My two boys received the most impact. Bert was 16. Samuel was 15, Nancy was 13, and the twins were 7.

"Sometimes it was too hard for me, my children and everybody.

"It's hard when you have children. Nobody takes care of her children like a mother does. And, it is not the same to the children.

"They understood everything. They knew the situation. The older ones took care of the twins. During the time I was sick, they took care of everything.

"But, when I was better, they were, 'OK, now mom can do everything.'"

"It is good because everything is normal again; now they don't have all the responsibility."

Enriquez tells others facing a cancer diagnosis: "Don't give up. It's hard but not impossible.

"Sick people with cancer in the support group, I tell them: 'Tú puedes' (you can)."

Caregiver perspective:

Caring for Claudia Enriquez during her treatment for colon cancer was a family affair.

"We were lucky," her husband, Freddy, said.

"We were really in a good position with my job and our health insurance.

"(After chemo at the hospital) she had chemo pumped from a bag through a port for three days at home.

"Sometimes she would get chemo and be able to get up and take the kids to school."

But there were other times that Claudia was very sick. Freddy has nothing but admiration for his wife's strength.

"Personally, I think I would have tapped out about halfway through," he said. "I don't think I could have done what she did. What she went through was a lot."

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