

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



## About Me:

**RESIDENCE:** Hesperia

**OCCUPATION:** Registered dental assistant

**FAMILY:** Chris Redmond, 48, husband; Savannah, 18, daughter; Grayson, 15, daughter

**HOBBIES:** Spending time with family

**PHILOSOPHY:** We need to get the word out there about the importance of BRCA-positive surveillance and prevention.

*“My sister helped save my life; anything could have happened”*



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## Julie Redmond, 44 Type of Cancer: BRCA2-positive cancer risk

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Prior to 2016, Julie Redmond had a pretty normal life for a 40-something woman. She was married and had one teenage daughter and another about to enter her teens. Life was good.

But suddenly, Redmond's life changed.

“I lost my sister in 2016,” she said. “She was only 48. We had no breast cancer in our family.

“But she had a rare cancer: inflammatory breast cancer. She literally lasted four months after they found it.”

Doctors tested Redmond's sister for mutations of the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes, which produce tumor suppressor proteins. A positive test indicates the gene has mutated and is not able to help the body fight cancer cells.

“She encouraged me to get tested for the BRCA gene, too,” Redmond said.

“A week after she passed, doctors in Texas called and said she (was BRCA positive).”

Redmond, too, was tested, and she also was BRCA2 positive.

“My sister helped save my life; anything could have happened. She has given me a second chance to fight this. I feel bad that she had to find out that way.

“The weird thing is that with me finding out, I told my family. My sister-in-law had always wondered if her mother's ovarian cancer was genetic. She got tested and was positive for BRCA as well.”

On April 17, Redmond had prophylactic bilateral mastectomies.

“The report came back very recently, and there were no cancer cells to be found in my breast tissue,” Redmond said.

“They did take all of my breast tissue except for skin. They put in expanders, and I will be able to do reconstruction in a couple months.

“Thank God, I don't have cancer. Having the surgery has given me peace and relief. In the past few weeks I felt like a walking time bomb.”

Redmond said in the future, she will “do my ovaries and tubes” in a separate surgery also recommended for BRCA-positive women.

“I am in a few BRCA groups on Facebook,” Redmond said. “They suggest removing your ovaries by 35 or after your last child.

“They suggest doing that first. (Reproductive hormones) can make breast cancer grow. Then, before 40 and 45, do prophylactic breast surgery. With inflammatory breast cancer, sometimes they can see it on a mammogram, but often they can't.

“By the time they find it, it is usually stage 4. It is kind of too late. That is what pushed me to doing this. I don't want to mess around with that kind of cancer at all. I want to live to see my grandkids.

“When I first started reading, I thought BRCA1 and BRCA2 were mutations, but everybody has those genes. If a cancer starts to formulate in my body, the mutated BRCA-2 gene won't fight it. Usually people who don't have that mutation, if there is a cancer there, your body just fights it.

“My genetic counselor told me my children have a chance of inheriting it. It all depends on whether they get a mutated or non-mutated gene from me. There is a 50 percent chance I could pass it down.

Redmond said her daughters must wait until they are 18 to do BRCA testing.



“Savannah is turning 18, and she is on me: ‘Mom, I have to get that test going,’” Redmond said. “I don't think Grayson cares to think about it right now.”

Since he also has a BRCA gene mutation in his family, Redmond's husband, Chris, knew he, too, should be tested.

“(BRCA-positive) men also can get breast cancer, but there is less chance (than a woman),” Redmond said.

“But they can also get prostate cancer. Chris actually got tested the day I went in for surgery on April 17. Now, he is waiting for the results.”

Redmond said she does have moments when she worries.

“I think, oh my gosh, what if? I try to keep it positive and be proactive. That improves your chances. We see this as a good thing, that we know, and we can be proactive and have better chances.”

“I feel blessed to have that knowledge my sister didn't have. I think of it as a positive; it is not going to get me down.”

## Caregiver perspective:

Julie Redmond's daughter Savannah is studying to be a nurse. She had two issues to deal with when her mother tested positive for the BRCA2 gene.

“I was shocked and, of course, upset because we found out she had a higher risk for cancer.”

“But I was also glad to know. Prevention is easier than finding it and trying to cure it.”

After Julie's surgery, Savannah emptied her mother's drain lines every 12 hours and measured and marked down how much had drained.

“From my classes, I knew the BRCA-positive genes could be hereditary. It is way better to know at my age and be able to be aware of it.”

“I will do preventive surgeries if I have it.”

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