

Survival and Hope *Life After Cancer*



LAURA MADRID-SMITH, 53
DIAGNOSIS: BREAST CANCER

The Basics:

- **RESIDENCE:** Hesperia
- **OCCUPATION:** Office worker at Hesperia Unified School District since 1992
- **FAMILY:** William Smith, 57, husband; four children and “almost 11 grandchildren (one due any day)”
- **HOBBIES:** Her grandkids, music, crafts, church and convalescent ministries.
- **PHILOSOPHY:** Live every day with a thankful, grateful, positive heart. Believe that God can heal.

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Laura Madrid-Smith suspected she might have a health issue when “my Chihuahua, Nani, kept jumping on my chest, sniffing and then licking. “She was just persistent,” Madrid-Smith said. “I started to wonder a little bit, but I had no symptoms except sometimes it felt a little hot.

“I started feeling around and I found a pea-sized lump on my left breast.

“I had a history of fibroid cysts, and I thought it was just another one. I was scheduled for a mammogram, so I waited the two weeks for my appointment.

But during the June 13



mammogram, the technician “kept taking a lot of pictures, and that was strange,” Madrid-Smith said.

“They called me two days later and said I needed to be scheduled for an ultrasound.

During the scan, Madrid-Smith could see a dark, rippled image on the ultrasound monitor.

“When I saw the ripple, I asked to have my husband come in. I told him, ‘I think we need to put on our seat belts: I don’t think it is good news.’

“The doctor came in and said, ‘we need to do a biopsy.’ It was done on July 1.

“I got a call on July 3 saying I needed to come in. I told them we didn’t want to go down there. She asked, ‘Are you home alone?’

“It took the wind out of my sails. I could not even speak when they told me I had cancer.”

Madrid-Smith was scheduled for bilateral mastectomies on August 9.

“I told my husband, ‘you need to call the kids to come over because I don’t want you telling them over the phone, and I can’t even say the words,’” she said.

“My husband told them, ‘we got the call and mom has cancer.’ That was the hardest part: looking at my children.

But more tragedy was in store for Madrid-Smith’s family. Her

healthy, 37-year-old nephew had a sudden heart attack and died.

“We buried him on Aug. 8, and I had surgery on Aug. 9,” she said.

“The whole family had all flown out for the funeral, so they ended up being there for my mastectomy.

“I am the baby of the family. All of my siblings were retired, and they called me to check on me multiple times a day. Their kindness and compassion just filled my cup.

“My daughter Julia Sesma is an LVN and was incredible with charting and doing all my medications.

Madrid-Smith said she received “hard core chemo” until December 23, and then Herceptin every three weeks for a full year.

She said the chemo “came out of my pores as ugly, huge white

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pustules” which turned to scabs.

“One day, I was brushing teeth, and saw myself in the mirror with no hair or eyebrows, my face with bloody pustules, and no breasts, of course.

“I thought I would never look at myself in the mirror again. But I heard God saying, ‘Look into your eyes and look at who you truly are.’

“I started looking at myself every single day. God said, ‘Let’s walk this through. We are going to look at every issue.’

“It was like I opened Pandora’s box and looked at every issue I had held on to – back to when I was 3 years old.

“And then those issues were gone, lifted from me. It was this beautiful, chaotic awesome.

Madrid-Smith has had other cancer-related issues. “They told me it looked like it came back three more times,” she said.

She had additional treatments and was prescribed medications she subsequently discontinued.

She also has turned to diet changes, holistic options and prayer to help herself recover.

Additionally, “I have participated in Relay for Life and attended Journey Thru Cancer workshops,” she said.

Now Madrid-Smith says her “fear and worry are gone. I live day to day. Sure, you think about the future, but I live in the moment.

I live with peace, incredible joy, humor and laughter.”

The power of positive thinking:



Laura Madrid-Smith said she knew about the power of prayer, positive thinking, and not accepting long before she had cancer.

“My dad was Native American and he taught me mind over matter. Your body hears what you mouth is saying.

“Every day I would say, ‘I am healed, I do not have a tumor. Don’t worry.’ That is the biggest thing I have to say from going through this journey.

“I would never say ‘my cancer,’ because, in my mind, I did not take ownership of it. I would say THE cancer, the TYPE of cancer, but not MY cancer.”



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