

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



## About Me:

**CITY:** Victorville

**JOB:** Housewife

**FAMILY:** Husband; two sons, two daughters; 10 grandchildren

**HOBBIES:** Likes to go shopping.

**PHILOSOPHY:** You choose to fight and you don't have to regret it. I don't want to hear negative things.

*"I looked around and thought, 'I am crying a lot and I am not even dying.'"*



The American Cancer Society provides a 24 hour service to answer questions about diagnosis, insurance, local support and resources

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If you or someone you know would like to be featured in this series, please contact Liz McGiffin at [liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org](mailto:liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org).

## Silvia Hurtado, 55 Type of Cancer: Triple-negative breast cancer

By Alberta Hale Crigler

In 2008, the first time Silvia Hurtado was diagnosed with breast cancer, she had one breast removed; her insurance would not cover removing her healthy breast. Her surgery was followed by nine months of chemotherapy.

"I cried when my hair fell out," she said. "I was so sad about my hair."

In 2013, Hurtado had a recurrence of cancer in her other breast. But her surgery and breast reconstruction were just the beginning of her battle with cancer.

Hurtado's second cancer was discovered after a women's clinic referred her to a hospital in the High Desert.

An initial mammogram was negative, but Hurtado insisted there was something wrong in her breast.

"I don't know anything about medical, but you know when something is wrong in your body," she said.

"I told them, 'This is my body and there is something in there.'"

"After a second mammogram and an ultrasound, they said, 'you are right.' They ordered a biopsy right away and it was cancer.

"The doctor said, 'You need surgery right away; we have to remove the whole breast. The type of cancer you have is very aggressive.'"

"He didn't say chemo or anything."

"I left and went to my car and was crying and crying. There was nobody with me when I got the results. 'I looked around and thought, 'I am crying a lot and I am not even dying.' It was a second chance for me.

"I did not want to go home and start crying; everyone would say, 'Poor thing.' I decided to fight."

Ultimately, Hurtado sought treatment at City of Hope.

Doctors said her breast cancer was triple negative; some common treatment options would not be effective in her case.

Her surgery involved removing her breast and reconstruction, plus removing her uterus and ovaries.

Complications set in on the third day after surgery.

"I felt burning in my arm pits and between my legs," she said. "I told the doctor about the weird feeling."

"He examined me and said, 'Uh oh, this is not good.'"

"I had internal gangrene. I almost died. I was in the hospital more than a month."

"I lost so much weight when I was in the hospital. I was so skinny I thought I was going to die."

"It took two years to heal. After that healed, the cancer came back in my skin. They had to remove a tumor on my face, which they said was a different cancer."

"There was a tumor inside my nose, which they said could go to my brain. They had to remove it. I didn't have radiation or chemo."

"I go for checkups every six months. I may have another surgery because they found a tumor on my back."

"I found what I thought was a hernia next to my belly button. I told the doctor it hurt my bladder. She said it is not a hernia, it is something else."

"I was supposed to have surgery in November, but they were afraid to do the surgery because of the gangrene."

Recently, I went for an MRI and got blood work. (Soon) they will decide to do surgery or not."

I have another tumor in one of my breasts. They say it is not dangerous. They check it every three months with ultrasound."

During her treatment, "there was nobody to tell you what was going to happen when you went for treatment," Hurtado said.

"I became a friend of Maria Garcia. She knew a lot of things from the hospital."



"There are a lot of ladies out there asking for help. I told her I knew two or three when I went to get chemotherapy."

Hurtado was one of three cancer survivors that joined Garcia to form Mujer a Mujer, a Spanish-speakers cancer survivor group in the High Desert.

"We ended up with more than 30 ladies in Maria's house," Hurtado said. "Everybody was so happy."

"When you first get diagnosed you don't know anything. When you talk to people, you feel much better."

"One time I met a Spanish-speaking lady at the doctor's office. She had breast cancer and she didn't want to have surgery. She just wanted to go home and die."

"I spoke to the lady and convinced her to have the surgery."

"She had surgery and started having chemotherapy. She didn't want chemo."

"I said, 'Come on, there is nothing wrong. Do you see me crying?'"

## Support in Spanish

For many years, Maria R. Garcia worked in radiology and as a hospital interpreter.

"I would be in the room with the Hispanic ladies and explain the procedures and what the doctor was doing," she said.

In 2011, Garcia started Mujer a Mujer, a Spanish-language breast cancer support group, in her home.

"It just grew really fast," she said. "St. Mary's offered the Senior Select Resource Center in Apple Valley for my group after the first year."

"Education is the important thing; some women don't educate themselves about their condition and what they can do."

"Basically, you have to make lifestyle changes. Yes, we are all going to die, but it doesn't mean you have to die today."

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