

Danna's Story

Danna, 39 years old, a wife and mother of two was diagnosed with breast cancer just two short years ago. There was no family history of breast cancer, she was feeling great and had recently given birth to her 2nd child when, while breast feeding, discovered a lump in her right breast. She vividly remembers this day and refers to it "As the day I accepted I had lost my *perceived* sense of control". Being diagnosed with cancer turned her world upside down and her feeling of control over her life, had been replaced with fear. She says she's a "data girl" so she started researching breast cancer treatments. Among other things she started studying more about her faith and spiritual side - her way of finding hope in a world that had turned upside down.

She met her husband in high school, in fact he was her high school sweetheart but they did not get married until 19 years after their first date at the age of 34. After college and before deciding to get married and reconnecting with her high school sweetheart, Danna spent most of her time learning and moving up the ladders of professional achievement. She does not regret these years at all but is grateful to have had the opportunity to focus on a career before starting a family as it taught her independence and life skills.

She adjusted to the travel that her job required and learned how to juggle career and family. To be able to do that successfully, she was fortunate to have a wonderful husband that helped out with the boys by being an active and involved parent, which allowed Danna to enjoy the corporate life she had become so accustomed to. When speaking about her husband she says, "He is also my touchstone to staying grounded".

Not too long after being married and finding out she had breast cancer, Danna had two surgeries, eight rounds of chemo and thirty six rounds of radiation. She's an incredible woman for just having to endure all this in her life while still raising a family. Then once she healed from the surgery she decided to continue working as it gave her some sense of empowerment. Not having control over a disease left her powerless, but being able to choose to go to work helped her mind focus on other things; things she did have some control over. I would imagine

it probably helped her keep her sanity as well by not just living the ups and downs of cancer treatments.

Although, Danna knew going back to work was good for herself and her family, she was criticized by others for not staying home with her children. Despite her critics, she knew she was a better mother for working and having the kids in daycare where they were able to interact with other children, not to mention a place they enjoyed being. Going to work helped her mentally get through each day and kept the fear of being sick after chemo treatments at bay. In fact she never did experience sickness. She says, "My survival and endurance during treatment were better than average because I had the right attitude."

As one can only imagine, life for Danna is very different after being diagnosed with cancer. She has a different outlook on life both personally and professionally. She now sees her career as something women do but should not be the only thing that defines us as a person; that people are far more important than material things and that living in the moment is key in life. She doesn't see good times as only being in the years to come or something that we look forward to, but that good times are happening today all around us.

In spite of the challenges she was faced with, she is so grateful to know that there is life after cancer for her and her family and feels so blessed to be alive today. She is certain that it is during these challenging and difficult times we face, that character and courage matter most and help define our legacy. How incredible it is for her to be able to enjoy a glass of wine while watching her boys play on her living room floor and look forward to the New Year ahead. To be able to not only enjoy the moment, but to have the chance to watch her boys grow and be a part of their life.