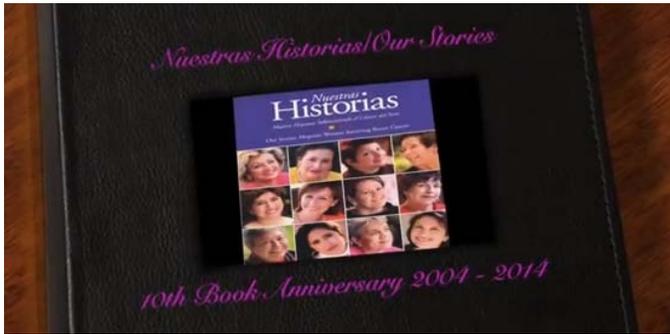


Nuestras Historias: 10 Years Later!



*Here is what some Latina cancer survivors have been up to in the last 10 years since sharing their stories in **Nuestras Historias: Mujeres Hispanas Sobreviviendo el Cáncer del Seno (Our Stories: Hispanic Women Surviving Breast Cancer)**!*

Joan Treviño Lawhon

1. How would you describe your current breast health?

I am totally cured. No additional bouts of breast cancer. I see my doctor for my annual breast exam and undergo mammograms religiously.

2. How did the experience of being featured in the book impact your life and your family's life?

It was an honor for my story to have been chosen for *Nuestras Historias*. I share the existence of this book, especially when I address groups on the benefits of early detection. I have a strong supportive family and they are and have always been proud of me.

3. Is there anything that you know now that you wish you had known when you were diagnosed with cancer? Why?

When I was initially diagnosed, like most people that hear a cancer diagnosis, your initial reaction is of a concerned shock. A lot of "what ifs." Fortunately for me, that did not last very long. The previous year I had lost the love of my life to pancreatic cancer and besides being his 24/7 caregiver, I also, through the process, became very assertive in dealing with doctors, nurses and his treatment. I used this learned assertiveness for my personal benefit.

4. What advice do you have for other women recently diagnosed with breast cancer?

First and foremost, have faith. I personally think that to experience complete faith it takes a lot of courage because it is difficult to give up the control that we think we have to have. Become as informed as you can about your particular situation. Every cancer diagnosis is different and, as such, treatment will be different. Many advances have been made in the field of breast cancer and what might have applied to someone in your situation 10 or 15 years ago may not have the same solution. **DO NOT GIVE UP HOPE.** Reach out and surround yourself with people that are positive and that will provide the support you need. Your attitude can make a difference in how your treatment can benefit you. If your body has to undergo changes due to needed surgery, accept it and move on. The real you is your heart and your soul and surgery does not affect them. Continue to love yourself to show others that “YOU” are still lovable.

5. What accomplishments/milestones have you experienced in the past 10 years that you’re proud/grateful for?

Throughout my early 20s and into my mid-30s, I suffered from agoraphobia. I was not able to travel, often not able to eat in restaurants, attend social events and so on. My cancer was a wakeup call. In a sense because it made me realize that I was missing out on many things. My cancer diagnosis awakened me to my mortality and literally changed my life. Six weeks after my 9-hour mastectomy and reconstruction surgery I was on a plane to Hawaii on my way to fulfill a dream I had had since I was a child to visit the Islands. I have had the opportunity to travel extensively and in November of 2012 I fulfilled another of my bucket list items—I was able to visit and walk where Jesus walked.

6. What does survivorship mean to you?

It is extremely rewarding to be able to reach out and share my survival story with other women. I have reached out to women attending church services, to young women in college sororities and even to women that are serving prison terms and living in a halfway house (the sound of the metal doors closing behind me was a little shocking). But, since the “new” me has developed, I reach out to the grocery store clerks, the department store clerks, women with whom I am standing in line, etc., etc., and I find the way to bring up the subject of the importance of breast exams and early detection. To date no one has rejected my conversation and more likely

than not will share a story from their family. Especially among the Hispanic culture I sense that they have feelings of embarrassment over cancer, and I strongly feel that this is a topic that needs to be discussed within the family from a very early age.

Cancer was a gift. It reinforced my faith. It has allowed me, in many ways, to reach out to other women and men and share my story of survivorship. I have had the opportunity to speak to many, many women and even though I may never know for sure, I pray that at least one of them took my advice and experienced early detection survivorship.

Surviving has also allowed me to form a bond with the most amazing women who have also survived. We are joined by an invisible yet most resilient multicolor thread and a very special kind of love for each other.

7. What challenges, if any, do you still face as a survivor?

I cannot think of any challenges that I face as a survivor. Even though I will admit that every new ache or change in my body makes me think that the big "C" is lurking around, I review with my doctor and once cleared, I do not entertain that thought for a long period of time because I know that my faith is stronger and I am ready for whatever direction my life takes me.

8. What are your hopes for the near future?

A world without breast cancer is my hope for the near, near future. If I am no longer here to join the celebration parade I hope and pray that Our Heavenly Father will allow my grateful tears and shouts of joy to join in the celebration.