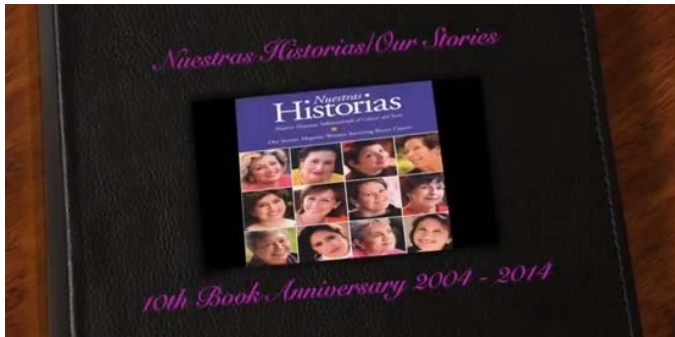


Nuestras Historias: 10 Years Later!



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)!

Sylvia Fernández

1. How would you describe your current breast health?

Thankfully I am enjoying good health and have just celebrated my 22nd anniversary cancer-free, by the grace of God. I also celebrated my 75th birthday and can still do most everything I did in my 50s and 60s, before and after cancer.

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

Being featured in the book gave me an opportunity to share my experience with so many women, and to be inspired by the stories of my fellow survivors. I continue my quest for physical, emotional, and spiritual health by implementing positive habits I learned during my cancer journey. It is often said that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Cancer was a valuable teacher for me, although we are never ready for a cancer diagnosis and the subsequent treatment. However, to me it was a gift that continues to give me opportunities to reach out to newly diagnosed patients and give them hope.

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

I guess what I know now is that managing stress is crucial to our overall wellness. Life happens, and we face many challenges along the way. The tools I learned during my cancer experience related to serving others by

sharing my faith, strength and hope, continue to this day. I also focus on the importance of giving myself permission to do fun things, pamper myself, and enjoy the moment without any guilt. Learning the importance of self-care through eating healthy, exercising regularly, and maintaining a balance in life through prayer and meditation has been invaluable in tackling hip and knee replacements for osteoarthritis, as well as the loss of my oldest son to cancer six years ago. I have been blessed with amazing friends and family and strive to surround myself with positive people, as well as relinquish control of things I am powerless to change.

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

My advice for women continues to be that they learn to take care of themselves and allow people who care about them give them a hand during the tough times. I also encourage them to get up every day, get dressed, put on a little makeup, and “fake it till they make it.” Although they may not feel great, maintaining a semblance of normalcy as much as possible has a positive effect on the healing process. I also stress the importance of feeling their feelings, expressing them as needed, cling to their faith, and never ever, underestimate the power of prayer.

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

Because the disease of alcoholism has affected loved ones in my family, I expanded some of my service efforts from cancer survivors to helping families who are suffering from the effects of this deadly disease. This has been a huge gift to me over the past 11 years. The Serenity prayer is my daily guide as I ask God to grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Ultimately, I understand that the only things I have power over are my thoughts and how I choose to react.

6. What does survivorship mean to you?

Survivorship to me means I have been given a second chance. Through the gift of life for the past 22 years, have been able to travel extensively to parts of the world I had only dreamed of. I have shed some of the fears and

worries as I daily strive to surrender to the Will of God, be myself, do the best I can, and Trust that God has a plan for me and for my loved ones. I have developed a fierce “attitude of gratitude” that gives me peace.

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

Right now I don't have challenges related to my cancer. I am always quite relieved every time I get my mammogram results, and I continue to be diligent about my checkups. I breezed through my two joint replacement surgeries within the past 3 years, thanks to my yoga practice, water aerobics, and extensive exercise program—all habits that also helped me through cancer.

8. What are your hopes for the near future?

My hopes for the near future are that I can continue to allow God to use me in any way I can serve Him by reaching out to those who are suffering from physical, mental, or emotional challenges. I hope to continue enjoying good health and to travel the “aging” journey gracefully. I want to continue spending quality time with my family and nurturing my relationships with them and with dear friends who have been there for me from day one. Obviously, I hope that we will find a cure for breast cancer. I have lost many dear friends to breast cancer, and I know the importance of research and the continued support of so many wonderful organizations, such as those who made the book possible. I am also looking forward to reuniting with some of the brave women featured in the book and continuing to learn from them.