

what I learned from BREAST CANCER

You're never alone when facing a breast cancer diagnosis. Knowing what others have gone through can help you navigate your own journey. Meet five survivors touched by this disease at different ages and stages.

“You have to take care of yourself before you can care for others.”

KATHLEEN
DEPALO



KATHLEEN DEPALO

63, Staten Island, NY

» *Diagnosed two years ago with stage 1*

■ **When I was first diagnosed, the biggest challenge was...** Figuring out how to get the best care while caring for my ill husband. When my doctor at Mount Sinai Dubin Breast Center told me I was a candidate for brachytherapy, I was thrilled. Instead of going to the hospital five days a week for six weeks, my doctor inserted radioactive material during one of my surgeries. Forty-five minutes later I was done with radiation treatment.



■ **I want every woman to know...** Regular mammograms save lives. My sister and

I always went for ours together, but I had so much going on the year I was diagnosed that I said I'd reschedule. She insisted I go; thanks to her, my cancer was caught early.



JO AUGINAUSH

45, St. Paul Island, AK

» *Diagnosed five years ago with stage 3*

■ **When I was first diagnosed, the biggest challenge was...** Deciding where to get treated. I was living in a small town in Idaho and didn't feel comfortable being treated there. A former coworker told me about Cancer Treatment Centers of America, and I decided to go to their Zion, IL, location to get a second opinion. For a while I had to get on a plane every three weeks to get treated.

“Your family history of cancer on your dad's side matters too.”

JO AUGINAUSH

■ **I want every woman to know...** You should know your entire family health history; it impacts when and how often you get screened for diseases like breast cancer. Two of my aunts, five great-aunts, and my great-grandmother (on my dad's side) all had breast cancer.



ASIA CARTER

34, Frisco, TX

» Diagnosed two years ago with stage 3

■ **When I was first diagnosed, the biggest challenge was...** Accepting help. While I was getting treated, I lost my job and ran through my savings. I found out about

the AiRS Foundation, which gives financial aid to women who can't afford reconstruction; they paid for my surgeries.

■ **What helped me through treatment...** Being honest with others and myself. Initially I downplayed the situation because I wanted to seem strong. Once I embraced the fact that it was going to be a tough year or two, I stopped beating myself up when I couldn't be the mom I used to be. Some days I had to stay in bed all day and ask other parents to pick up my kids from school, and that was OK.

■ **The biggest change I've made...** Building a smaller but stronger network of friends. At first I was depressed about good friends who seemed to disappear, and my grandmother said, "You're so focused on everyone who isn't there for you that you're not able to appreciate those who are." Once I shifted my mind-set, I strengthened my relationships with those who did want to go on this journey with me.



ANNA WASSMAN

26, Chicago

» Diagnosed one year ago with stage 2

■ **When I was first diagnosed, the biggest challenge was...** Juggling treatment, graduating college, and starting a new job. I'm a big believer in telling people what's going on, so I reached out to human resources and the managers at my job and ended up deferring my start date.

■ **The best advice I got...** My mom always told me to do self-exams, and I ended up finding the lump. My oncologist also suggested freezing my eggs. I didn't realize chemotherapy might impact my fertility.

■ **I want every woman to know...** A cancer diagnosis can feel isolating, but you're not alone. I went out of my way to be friends with women in breast cancer groups—Gilda's Club Chicago, Imerman Angels, The Breasties, and Susan G. Komen. I also connected with a group of young women being treated at the same hospital as I was.

“Speaking up about having breast cancer has been empowering.”

ANNA WASSMAN



KAREN SCHOTTENSTEIN

63, Denver

» Diagnosed 13 years ago with stage 3

■ **When I was first diagnosed, the biggest challenge was...** Telling my children. My daughter was 20 and at college; we decided it would be less dramatic to tell her over the phone. My son was 17 and my youngest daughter was 8, so we got appropriate books for her about a parent going through cancer treatment.

■ **What helped me through treatment the most...** Sticking to my work schedule as much as possible. I took off after surgery, but I kept working during chemotherapy.

■ **I want every woman to know...** It helps to connect with people who have something you consider important in common, whether that is having the same type of breast cancer or being around your age. I'm a volunteer for Living Beyond Breast Cancer, which matches women going through the disease. ■



“Keeping my regular schedule helped my kids see life was continuing.”

KAREN SCHOTTENSTEIN