In their own words
Survivors help themselves by supporting others through diagnosis, treatment and recovery

By Lyn Dobrin

For over 40 years, the Adelphi NY Statewide Breast Cancer Hotline & Support Program has been a vital resource for Long Islanders — and all New Yorkers — coping with breast cancer. The more than 100 highly trained volunteers offer comfort, guidance and referrals, all free. Social work staff provide professional services.

Before the pandemic, throughout the pandemic, and now in our post-pandemic world, Adelphi’s dedicated volunteers and staff remain committed to meeting the challenges and needs of patients and survivors. In addition to the hotline, locally the program offers support groups, individual and family counseling, plus educational forums and workshops. Hotline staffers are readily available to respond to everyone who has concerns about breast cancer. “You are not alone” is their motto.

Many local survivors are longtime hotline volunteers. They contribute their personal insights in their ongoing effort to help others; sharing their message that it is possible to get through this — and even thrive — as you find your own way on this unanticipated journey. These survivors have turned their encounter with the disease into an opportunity to better themselves and those around them.

Kimberly Callahan
Bellmore

I was diagnosed with Stage 2 invasive ductal carcinoma/Her-2 positive at the age of 30. I underwent six months of intensive chemotherapy, a bilateral mastectomy and radiation therapy; I also received fertility treatments for fear of future infertility due to chemotherapy treatments. Just four years into remission I gave birth to a healthy baby girl who is now five years old. I currently live in Bellmore with my husband Anthony and daughter Savannah. I’m a mom who is homeschooling and enjoying every moment with my miracle child. I never thought nine years ago I would be so happy and healthy! I am truly blessed and my hope is I can give inspiration and hope to those also struggling with this awful disease.

What got me through the diagnosis of breast cancer was having true faith in God, inner strength, the love of family and friends. Also seeing other young women who had gone through what I had and came out the other side living their lives happily. That is why I found it so important to share my story and become a volunteer now to let young women know there is life after breast cancer; there is hope.

Judith Platt
Long Beach

I am a survivor, a wife, a mother of two sons with four grandsons and two wonderful daughters-in-Love. When diagnosed all I could think of was my new-born grandson and would I be there when he was born mitzvahed. Obviously I was; he’s 27.

What helped me when I was diagnosed? Love!

My family and friends were my support group. I researched and found out that women who join support groups live longer. I joined the Adelphi Hotline and Support Program. That was 27 years ago. Thank you, Adelphi.

I am still a hotline volunteer and it is wonderful to make a difference in somebody’s life.

Jeff Flynn
East Meadow

As anyone I have spoken to that receives the horrible news they have cancer, I too was devastated. It was an extremely confusing time as I didn’t know if I’d survive at 59 years old. At the time there were almost no male breast cancer support groups, so for a while I felt very alone and scared.

What really helped me through the worst of times were first and foremost all of my immediate and extended family. The love and support was amazing. Phone calls, visits, cards letters, and cooking chemotherapy-friendly recipes to help me through my regimen. My lifelong friends were also very supportive with much of the same support and kindness. Then my breast surgeon gave me contact information to another male breast cancer survivor. We had regular conversations, and even got together socially once chemotherapy was over. I felt after time I might survive as other males did.

At the time of diagnosis I was senior director for a technology company. I had been there for 18 years when I had to share the news. Having established many business and personal relationships over the years, my many peers, coworkers, and employees locally, and at our corporate offices in Massachusetts were unbelievably supportive. Phone calls, emails, text messages, and gifts on almost a daily basis. There were so many fruit baskets and baskets of goodies delivered to my home that I got to know the FedEx driver personally.

My initial diagnosis was Stage 3C metastatic breast cancer. Three years later it morphed into Stage 4 metastatic breast cancer. I made the decision to retire at 62.5 years old, about four years earlier than I planned on retiring. I thought it better to go out with a good reputation than attempt to muddle through and perform at a mediocre level. The drug regimen that I had to take for the rest of my life caused some fatigue and suppression of my immune system. Once again, everyone mentioned previously couldn’t have been more supportive.

So here I am, after a left breast mastectomy, bilateral lymph nodes removed, with 36 of them cancerous. I am still standing nine years later. I am very thankful for the life I’ve had in retirement. My daughter has had two children so we are having a ball with our grandchildren. I stay active walking my Labrador five miles or more daily, go to the gym as often as I can, and have fulfilled my bucket list dream of purchasing a sports car.

Finally, with all the help and support I’ve received over the years, I wanted to pay it forward. I have done quite a bit of work in getting the word out for males to check themselves and to understand they too can get breast cancer. I’ve been volunteering at Adelphi for years to help support any males that call into their Breast Cancer Support Hotline. As I spent many months downtown Manhattan after the 911 attacks, I have done many interviews for TV, newspapers, radio, and the internet all to get the “word out” to males, especially those that were downtown during and after the attacks, as males seem many times more vulnerable to get the disease. If I’ve helped even one male survive, it makes all my efforts worth it.

Knowledge is power
Know the facts

Breast cancer is the most common cancer diagnosed in women (excluding skin cancer) and second only to lung cancer as a cause of cancer death in women. About 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime. For the first time ever, female breast cancer has surpassed lung cancer as the most commonly diagnosed cancer worldwide.

- In 2021, an estimated 284,200 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with breast cancer; 281,530 women and 2,650 men. An estimated 44,130 people will die from breast cancer in 2021; 43,600 women and 530 men.
- In New York, in 2021, an estimated 17,540 people will be diagnosed with breast cancer and about 2,510 will succumb to the disease.
- Breast cancer death rates have dropped by 41 percent since 1989, as a result of earlier detection through increased awareness and mammography screening, as well as advances in treatments. Despite this drop, Black women are 40 percent more likely to die of breast cancer than white women overall and are twice as likely to die if they are younger than age 50.1
- The five-year survival rate for breast cancer that has not spread to the lymph nodes or other location is 99 percent.
- There are more than 3.8 million breast cancer survivors in the U.S.
- The average risk of a woman in the U.S. getting breast cancer during her life is about 12 percent.
- About 15 percent of women with breast cancer have a family member with this disease.
- Evidence is growing that regular physical activity reduces breast cancer risk, especially in women after menopause. Exactly how physical activity might reduce breast cancer risk isn’t clear, but it may be due to its effects on body weight, inflammation, hormones, and energy balance.

Courtesy American Cancer Society