

SunSentinel
**Life's
Victories**

11
YEARS
STRONG

Celebrating Eleven Years of Breast Cancer Survivorship

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Miami Cancer Institute



Embrace Tomorrow

Miami Cancer Institute Supports Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Miami Cancer Institute is a next-generation cancer treatment destination known for its leading clinical care and research, compassionate patient experience and state-of-the-art technology—including the first proton therapy center in South Florida, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the only radiation oncology program in the world with each of the latest radiation therapies in one place. The Institute offers an impressive roster of established community oncologists and renowned cancer experts, clinical researchers and genomic scientists recruited from the nation's top cancer centers.

The Diagnosis

I was 35 when I felt a lump, and my physician was hesitant to prescribe a mammogram at my age because I had no family history of breast cancer. But I was persistent, and after several “no’s,” I got the prescription and got the mammogram. After an additional mammogram and a sonogram, my doctor ordered a biopsy. A few days later, on Halloween, I was diagnosed.

Sharing the News

I was shocked. My first thought when I was diagnosed was, “Oh, my goodness—I’m going to die and leave my two young daughters behind.” It was difficult to find the right words to explain to my daughters, who were 5 and 6 at the time. I looked for children’s books that explained cancer in a way they would understand, but most of them were outdated and somber. My journey motivated me to create a positive narrative about breast cancer, so I wrote my own book, *Hair to the Queen*. Writing the book alongside my family opened up the conversation of cancer and helped us cope together with my diagnosis.

Choosing Treatment

Immediately after my diagnosis, I was referred to a surgical oncologist. After having a double mastectomy, I underwent chemotherapy for six months. During my treatment, it was hard to stay focused and optimistic, but having a doctor who cares and goes above and beyond and guides you is really unbelievable and makes a difference.

Impact on My Community

Haitians are very private people and don’t like to discuss difficult topics. Cancer isn’t spoken about enough in the Haitian community, so it is my mission to start the conversation and destigmatize cancer. I want to let my community know that you can do something about your diagnosis. You can talk to your doctor. You can be open about your cancer, and if you talk about it now, you can get help in time.

What I Learned

Having cancer changed my outlook on life and my future. I learned that “tomorrow is not given,” so I need to be present and live in the moment, especially with my family. If I hadn’t persevered, I wouldn’t be here today. If you feel something, go and see your doctor and get checked. I now know that I am strong enough to overcome any obstacle life throws my way.

“It is my mission to start the conversation and destigmatize cancer.”

Tamara B. Rodriguez

