

# The True Impact of Breast Cancer: Stories Outweigh Statistics

These are the stories of women affected by breast cancer that have impacted my life

By [Jenny Wisniewski](#) | December 15, 2023 | [Cancer](#)

We have all heard the numbers: roughly one in eight U.S. women will develop breast cancer throughout their lifetime. Indeed, it is an alarming [statistic](#), but I have something to tell you that is even more impactful.



Participants embrace after racing in a fundraiser for breast cancer research

You see, numbers don't tell the whole story. In fact, in large part, they miss the point. Statistics only give us a conclusion. To understand breast cancer's

**We need to know a bit about her before and after breast cancer arrived like a thief in the night to make its mark, subtle or profound, on her life story.**

impact, we need to back up and consider each woman behind the statistics.

We need to know a bit about her before and after breast cancer arrived like a thief in the night to make its mark, subtle or profound, on her life story. Thus, I want to share some of these stories about the women diagnosed with breast cancer whom I have known, some for most of my life and others for a short while.

I don't confess to knowing each story in its entirety. But I can confidently say that what I know has impacted me and

many others. I want to start with several friends who ultimately lost their lives to breast cancer.

## **Recommended**

### **Finding Purpose By Paying Breast Cancer Patients' Expenses**

Roberta Lombardi found herself through her Infinite Strength Foundation

## **Women I Have Lost**

There was the sharp-witted and pragmatic co-worker who, one day, announced her remission when she had stopped joking about her wig. When I commented that I was glad she was through the worst of it, I noticed a strained, sideways glance.

These were the days when I was too naive to believe that young women with young children could lose their lives to breast cancer. She died fifteen months later.

**Gathering with candles at dusk, hundreds of us walked silently to her home, where we sang and prayed our goodbyes.**

several months after her death.

There was another mom I knew casually. Statuesque, warm and gregarious, she had many friends. I joined them one evening when she was close to the end. Gathering with candles at dusk, hundreds of us walked silently to her home, where we sang and prayed our goodbyes.

Most painfully, I lost my [college roommate](#). Following graduation, we spent eight weeks shoulder to shoulder as we backpacked through Europe. In recent years, we had grown apart, which I regret. I learned about her fate

## Most Popular

1. TurboTax?? Fuhgeddaboutit!! | **Taxes**
2. Oh Christmas Tree, I'll Miss Thee | **Personal Perspectives**
3. Don't Wait to Focus on Balance | **Health**
4. 6 Ways to Save Your Heirs from a Painful Probate | **Estate Planning**

I learned, too, that in the short time preceding her death, she had lost both her father and her only sibling, a cognitively disabled brother for whom she had cared and advocated and who himself died awaiting a kidney transplant.

Breast cancer shows no mercy. But I know survivors, too. There are several moms at my children's grade school. Some of their stories I know better than others. I participated in meal trains sometimes and prayed.

## Knowing Survivors

**In recent years, we had grown apart, which I regret. I learned about her fate several months after her death.**

There are two friends, both of whom my husband and I have known for decades. Both were diagnosed with other forms of cancer in their twenties, underwent treatment, and then moved on. But cancer doesn't give up that easily, and in their midlives, breast cancer came to both, and now both continue to live as survivors.

There are two sisters, each diagnosed with breast cancer within a year of each other. I count both as friends. Each caught cancer early but chose different paths towards recovery, one radiation and the other a total mastectomy.

Most recently, the woman who chose the latter treatment refused to allow cancer to be the last to leave its mark on her body: she had her reconstructed breasts covered with [tattoos](#) that she and her daughter designed. Remarkably, I know another set of sisters who fought breast cancer simultaneously. Only one survived.

And then there was my nana. She was the first to bring the word "mastectomy" into my young consciousness. I remember leaning into her as a child and feeling the padding on her left side, replacing the breast that no longer existed.

Recently, I learned of yet another friend who was recently diagnosed. Beautiful inside and out, she has encountered tragedy in her life and borne it bravely. She is now breast cancer's latest warrior. It is because of her that I sat down today to reflect.

These are the many women diagnosed with breast cancer who have touched my life. Their lives, stories, triumphs,

**The truth is, in some way, we are all**

# touched by breast cancer.

choices and profound losses speak much louder than statistics.

And I am just one person. I am certain that you have your own stories to tell. The truth is, in some way, we are all

touched by breast cancer.

I visited the doctor this morning for a scheduled annual appointment less than 24 hours after I learned of my friend's diagnosis. Early in the appointment, my doctor inquired about my alcohol consumption. She flatly stated the newest research linking [breast cancer](#) and alcohol use.

The timing put an exclamation point on her advice to cut back. As I process the news of another friend fighting another cancer battle and an unknown outcome, I have decided that this is a moment for self-care, awareness, gratitude for my health and, yes, taking a pass on that glass of wine.

Today, I pray for peace and recovery for my recently diagnosed friend and other women diagnosed with breast cancer who are so much more than a statistic.



**Jenny Wisniewski** is a freelance writer based in Milwaukee. She writes about elder care, the environment and travel. More of her work can be found at [jennywisniewski.com](http://jennywisniewski.com) and on [LinkedIn](#). [Read More](#)

## Editors Recommendations

Why It's Important for Women to Know If They Have Dense Breast Tissue

Later in Life Breast Reconstruction: Yes or No?

Creating Cancer Survivorship Plans



## Support Nonprofit Journalism

*Next Avenue is free to consume, but not free to produce. Please become a member today and contribute what you can. Your gift will go directly to sustaining our nonprofit journalism so that we can remain free and accessible to everyone.*

DONATE TODAY

[Learn About Next Avenue](#)

STORIES FROM AROUND THE WEB



Meeting the needs and unleashing the potential of older Americans through media

[About Us](#)

[Newsletters](#)

[Sponsorship](#)

[Submissions](#)

[Contact Us](#)

A nonprofit journalism website produced by:



©2024 Next Avenue