

## **Being A Cancer Survivor**

*By Bonita Halley-Schamp*

When I looked up the word *survivor*, it was defined as “one who lives through affliction.” When I looked up the word *affliction*, it was defined as (1) a state of great suffering and distress due to adversity; and (2) a condition of suffering or distress due to ill health.

My name is Bonita and I am proud to say that I am a cancer survivor.

It was December 12<sup>th</sup> 2003 when I was diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma. I was in a state of shock. It could not be happening to me! I was the healthy, vibrant, active 47-year old woman who enjoyed life to the fullest. I thought I was healthy because I exercised, ate a lot of steamed veggies and brown rice, drank fresh-squeezed juice, never smoked cigarettes and hardly ever got sick! How could a healthy woman like me end up a sick person, afflicted with BREAST CANCER? I was having the time of my life. I was in love and in the middle of buying a house with my fiancé Gregory. I was a successful realtor and the market was hot. This was not a good time for me to get cancer! But then when is it ever a good time to get cancer?

When I look back at that time, it is like a bad dream. I was suddenly no longer a healthy, vibrant 47-year old woman; I was a zombie! I went through all the motions, did what the doctors told me to do-- even though I never liked to go to a doctor. (I even had both my children at home naturally.)

February 5, 2004, 5 days after Greg and I moved into our house, I found myself on an operating table for a lumpectomy. While waiting for my lumpectomy, I prayed that the surgeons would not find any cancer cells in my sentinel lymph node -- but they did. This required that I have a full lymph node dissection, the removal of 16 lymph nodes. I prayed I would not have to go through chemotherapy -- but I did. I prayed I would not have to have radiation on top of chemotherapy -- but I did.

I remember the radiologist telling me that the radiation would be a piece of cake compared to the chemotherapy. Well, he was wrong! I wondered how such a thing like radiation could possibly be good for you. I never even liked to get x-rays from the dentist! The doctors all assured me that it was not only good for me but it was necessary when a lumpectomy is chosen instead of a mastectomy. The radiation was needed to kill any cells that the chemotherapy may not. And now after surgery, I was a zombie, just going through the required motions 5 days a week for 6 weeks.

I remember that I not only became bald, but I was also in great pain. My muscles ached, my bones ached and my nerves ached. I had to take pain pills 3 to 5 times a day, and a sleeping pill to get me through the night. Even though I was this listless zombie, I still had to put on my *Bonita mask* and continue to work full time in real estate and be a desirable fiancé to Gregory. I wondered at times if I would ever be able to be the Bonita I once was.

I remember showing properties in the heat of the summer wearing wigs and trying to pretend I was not a cancer zombie. I soon found out that the Florida heat and its well-known humidity levels, wigs were not comfortable. I was constantly worried people would know I was wearing a wig or it would come off if I did anything active like boating, swimming or biking.

While going through those tough times, I got an idea! I envisioned a design and pattern for a unique two-in-one headscarf, similar to those I had worn for years from my “hippy” days. My best friend, Lori, took my design and sewed several of them to match some of my outfits and bathing suits. Not only were they cool and comfortable, every time I wore one, I seemed to draw attention, and I got at least one compliment or an inquiry where they could get one. I knew in my mind that if I ever got through this tough time, I was going to do something with my design. But in my zombie-like state, it was all I could do to go through the motions and hope and dream of better days ahead.

I am happy to say after all the adversity I went through, I am a true survivor.

After going through my last chemotherapy and radiation treatment, I realized I needed to make some changes. I went to the health food store and bought some great books. I learned that I needed to change my body chemistry to be more alkaline instead of acidic. I started juicing and changing my diet. I started drinking shakes in the morning made from unsweetened juice with a dab of flax seed oil, fast food enzyme powder, greens powder, B-12 powder and frozen unsweetened frozen fruit. I stayed away from dairy, sugar and red meats. I started exercising again. The best thing that came from these changes is that I was able to get off the pain medications and sleeping pills. I slowly started feeling like Bonita again!

Cancer is a life-changing experience. Now that it is over, I can look back and see that I have emerged as a woman more full of life than before. I am looking forward to marrying Gregory, who is a cancer survivor himself. I have filed my patent and I am going forward with my dream to manufacture my unique fashion headscarf, *the ABonita Scarf*.

I want every woman going through hair loss to enjoy them as I did, as well as the active woman, as I am now. My pain has been replaced with joy and contentment. I pray that all breast cancer patients in the world will get through their tough time and emerge a SURVIVOR!

*Bonita Halley-Schamp is a resident of Merritt Island, Florida and is proud of both the physical and emotional benefits of her ABonita headscarves. For more information, you can go to Bonita's website and view her current selections of the ABonita Scarf at [www.abonitascarf.com](http://www.abonitascarf.com). Or if you have any questions or comments, you can email her at [Bonita@abonitascarf.com](mailto:Bonita@abonitascarf.com).*