



TEARS TO TRIUMPH

*Stories of Breast Cancer Conquerors
Stories of fortitude, hope and determination*

અશ્રુ થી વિજય સુધી

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Breast Surgeon

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| MY MISSION | 1 |
| THE PINK PARADE | 5 |
| PREFACE | 9 |
| PRELUDE | 10 |
| EARLY IS THE KEY, SMALL IS THE GOAL | 12 |
| CAUSE... THE CULPRIT | 14 |
| SYMPTOMS...WHAT TO LOOK FOR? | 16 |
| EARLY DETECTION - BREAST SELF EXAMINATION | 20 |
| THE DIAGNOSIS | 22 |
| TREATMENT IN A NUTSHELL | 28 |
| EXPERIENCES OF COURAGE & RESILIENCE... | 33 |
| अश्रुथी विजय सुधी | 85 |
| अनुभूति, धैर्य अने शौर्यनी... | 121 |
| अनुभूति, धैर्य और शौर्य की... | 207 |
| EPILOGUE | 226 |



DR SHEFALI DESAI

BREAST SURGEON

MY MISSION

**"How long you live is not in your hands...
But how you live is certainly in your hands!"**

Being a surgeon for more than 32 years and specialising in Breast Surgery for the past 20 years, has taught me a lot of things. Starting a speciality clinic, in those days (October 2002) was not so common, but Breast problems were becoming so rampant, that I decided to dedicate my services to women, who suffered from Breast problems. As time went by, the incidence of Breast cancer increased and I was sometimes shocked to see young girls suffering, just because they would not have expected that. These women came to me totally clueless and in a state of helplessness as well as sadness.

I realised, that the society needed to be made aware of the fact that a woman of any age, in her teens to nineties could harbour the disease! And that Breast cancer is curable, if it is detected in an early stage!

Having successfully treated these women having Breast cancer, motivated me to create more and more awareness, and I thought what better way could be there than to hear them talk and read their journeys in their own words! The book is a result of these very thoughts.

When I was in school, I always had a dream of becoming a doctor and then a surgeon, as it was a very challenging profession. I have always loved challenges in life. Working and studying hard was something which my parents had inculcated in me since childhood. I was fortunate enough

to be allowed to follow my dreams, especially in those days when girls taking up surgery as a profession was unheard of! Overcoming all the obstacles, I got admission to specialize in General Surgery, in the much prestigious, Sheth V S Hospital and Smt. NHL Municipal Medical College.

Being a female surgeon was tough in the male dominated society, but I sailed through and survived! I became a surgeon to the females and chose to train for Breast Surgery. I was fortunate to get trained at Memorial Sloan Kettering Hospital, New York, USA; Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, USA and Instituto Europeo di Oncologia (IEO), Milan, Italy from the best breast surgeons of the world. I wanted to give the best and the latest treatment to the women in India. I started a few pioneering procedures like Mammary Ductoscopy (Endoscopy of Breast ducts), Implants for reconstruction and Vacuum Assisted Breast (VAB) procedures in Gujarat!

I never wanted our women to be devoid of the newer modalities of treatment as well as not taking treatment due to financial paucity. I was fortunate to be supported and helped by my family and friends, who were and are ready at all times, to contribute to help the needy.

My father, Lalit Bhagwati, played a major role in encouraging me, getting tiffin for me even in the middle of the night, after a long day of emergency duty and long hours of surgery. He was always proud of me and my achievements, but unfortunately he could not be by my side and see me as a full fledged surgeon. Those were the saddest moments of my life. His words, love and blessings are still with me and that is what made me sail through my journey.

My mother, Malati Bhagwati, was and is my pillar of strength and support at every step I took. Whether it was my studies or my family, raising my children or my work, she was there as a rock by me, supporting my work while continuing her own work despite her own loss and problems! I could pursue my dreams and ambitions and still raise my children well only because she would be there to take care of them, sometimes even better than me!

“The word IMPOSSIBLE should not be there in your dictionary”, is what she told me!

I was fortunate to have a wonderful life partner, Dr. Janak Desai, a Urologist, who could understand and support my ambitions, despite his hectic schedule. He is my friend, philosopher and guide! He believed in me and supported me to pursue my dream of becoming a surgeon. Without him, I would not have been able to have the right balance between work, family and home!

I am fortunate to have two wonderful children, a son and a daughter. My daughter, Anshumi, always pushed me to follow my dreams and she is now following my footsteps of becoming a surgeon, a Breast Surgeon. Archan (a Urologist), her husband, has been extremely promising and encouraging. My son, Tanay, decided to make his career into Finance, and he is a

philanthropist and a wonderful human being. He and his wife, Vaissnavi (an Architect) are always there by me to encourage and inspire me to do the right things!

I am grateful to my parents-in-law, Kusum and Dinkarrai Desai, who were always there by me, and whose heavenly blessings are there with me to be where I am today.

My loving four legged boys, Oscar and Anand, brought me immense comfort and joy during our long editing sessions.

My deepest gratitude to my hospital staff especially Dr Hemangi, Dr Harnisha, Dr Vidhi and Dr Nisha for all their efforts to encourage our Breast cancer warriors to pen their stories and motivate them to put them into words. My nurses and administrative staff need a special applause for making these women comfortable during their treatment and help them go through the tough times with their care and smile!

Trupti Majmudar Parekh, my learned friend, has been kind enough to compile and compose the stories as well as guide me to write this book. The Gujarati version (translation) is completely attributed to her. Without her, this book would not have been possible.

Dr Megha Sheth, my dear friend , has always been by me to encourage, motivate and help me to complete my mission!

Mr Shailesh Desai, our dear friend, with his team of Hi Scan (Kamleshbhai & Bhaveshbhai) have selflessly contributed to print this book. Sohani, Prachi and Anshumi have designed this book, apt to the subject. Mr Shilpeen Majmudar has helped for the proof reading. My special gratitude to Diipak Vaghela for giving the finishing touch to the book.

My Breast Cancer fighters, my warriors, my conquerors.... I cannot thank you enough for gathering the strength and courage to tell your stories to the world, which will not only spread the word of awareness but give courage to the women, who may have Breast cancer, to fight the disease bravely and tell the world...

“There is nothing impossible in this world to beat or conquer!”



SAMVED BREAST CARE CLINIC TEAM

THE PINK PARADE

Breast Care Clinic, Samved Hospital, organises a Walkathon annually in December, for the past 10 years to create more and more awareness for Breast Cancer so that every woman gets herself checked up at the right time. At this event, the Breast Cancer Fighters and Conquerors are felicitated and honoured, so as to encourage and applaud these women who have gone through the journey bravely. Some of them also narrate their journey of how they went through the entire period of treatment, coming up on the stage, conveying to the people, that even after suffering from cancer, they are fit, strong and confident enough to come up on the stage. They motivate others for check ups and convince them not to be afraid, should they suffer from Breast cancer. Crowds of people gather to cheer these brave women. People of all age groups from 9-90 years participate in this event in a huge number. We also have a ramp walk-The Victory Walk, as we call it, by the Breast Cancer Conquerors. The event, usually hosted by RJ Nimisha , also has fun filled activities like games and Zumba dancing by my dear friend Ruju Desai. Samved Breast Clinic is blessed to have these wonderful people, friends and family, contributing selflessly, and helping our mission to spread Breast cancer awareness.

The event took place virtually even during Covid times, where people all over the world participated. They walked, cycled and ran to encourage the warriors and support the cause. The event takes place virtually and physically for the past two years, there by having a huge participation by people all across the globe.



THE PINK PARADE BY SAMVED BREAST CLINIC

Samved holds breast cancer campaign



Samved Breast Clinic organised the 10th PINK PARADE on Sunday to spread awareness about breast cancer. The event was held to mark the clinic's endeavour in spreading the message for past 10 years. The campaigners advised women not to ignore lumps in their breast, especially if they are painless. If the lumps are ignored, they can grow in size and if cancerous, the disease can spread to other organs. If diagnosed at an early stage, the cancer can definitely be cured.

Breast cancer is on the rise not only globally, but in Ahmedabad too. Day by day, younger women are being diagnosed with the disease. More than 350 people between the age group of 9-90 participated in the event.

While the event aims to spread awareness of breast cancer, it also felicitates those fighting the disease and emerging victorious. These wonderful women also performed yoga on the stage, thereby conveying that despite undergoing cancer treatment they are fit and normal. Hence, there is no need to be scared even if one is diagnosed with breast cancer.

At the event, Dr Shefali Desai, Director and Breast Surgeon at the clinic, announced that she was writing a book on breast cancer awareness that also details stories of the fighters and their journeys.

Ahmedabad Mirror, 26th December 2022



Walkathon for breast cancer awareness:

The 10th edition of Pink Parade, an annual walkathon for breast cancer awareness, will take place on December 25. Dr Shefali Desai, the founder of Samved Breast Clinic, said they have received more than 350 registrations, and many participants are likely to join virtually from other centres in India and abroad. "The walk would be from the clinic to Stadium and back, where the cancer survivors will share their journey. There will be activities to spread awareness with fun," she said.

The Times of India, 25th December 2022



PREFACE

This is a compilation of the journeys of women who have gone through the battle with BREAST CANCER and emerged victorious! Their feelings are expressed in their own words and in the language of their own choice-English, Gujarati or Hindi. I chose not to translate these, which makes this book unique!

These women, who belong to different age groups, professions and socio-economic background have fought and won the battle with the disease bravely. They are here to share their experience, conveying that “Cancer” is just a word and not a disease to be perceived with dejection and gloom! The journey is surely not a cushy one, but also not one you cannot tread on.

These are stories of women, who initially came with a heavy heart while feeling that they are doomed, when they heard of their deadly medical condition. But, with the support of their near and dear ones, they decided to go through the protracted treatment given by us. They did that with immense courage, strength, resilience, positivity and a beautiful smile on their faces... despite the tough treatment offered by us Doctors!

We were taking away their parts, one of the most important parts of their body. We were giving them some of the strongest drugs, the ones which killed cancer cells but also destroyed some of their healthy cells!! But they survived. They thanked us, blessed us and saw us with reverence!

Their tears encouraged us to motivate them and their smiles encouraged us to have faith in the Almighty!

PRELUDE

CANCER is a dreadful word, the most feared disease. But one must think differently. If you are diagnosed to have cancer, you are left with no other options but to fight it, fight it bravely and emerge victorious!

I often tell my “warriors”, (as I like to call them), “We doctors are here to treat you and hopefully cure you; your family and friends are here to support you emotionally and financially, but YOU have to go through it... so it is YOU who has to decide whether to tread the path with a smile or tears! We are all here to support you, but YOU have to face the trouble and pain and yet emerge as healthy and victorious warriors!”

So which way will you choose to deal with cancer?

With positivity or negativity?

With calmness or sorrow?

With a smile or tears?

With fortitude or cowardice?”

Some women would say, “Madam... it is easier said than done, you can empathize only if you go through this!” My answer always is, “Yes, I agree, but I do live through the agony and pain with you. I experience the same mental trauma as you. Maybe I don’t experience the physical aspect of the pain, but when I operate on you and remove a very precious and important part of yours, which is a symbol of womanhood, motherhood and beauty, I feel the pangs too!!” The irony is I get the task of telling you, ‘Everything is good and you are fine!’

Some of them would come and say, “You are God, God on earth, we have not seen God ever and for us it is You! We have overcome this illness only because of you and your team, who gave us the strength!”

I feel humbled to hear this, as it gives a lot of mental strength to me and my team, to get positively recharged and induce this positivity back into the patients again. The cycle goes on and keeps us all going!

I say, “I wish what you said was true, but do not put me on this pedestal! Almighty has something written for you and me! Had I been God, I would make sure you don’t suffer. That is when you and I both realise that we are just lesser mortals! He is the Creator, the decision maker of our fate!”

“**Why me?**” is a question every woman asks! “I have done no evil, I have always been very helpful not only to my family but everyone around, and I also do my prayers regularly. Then why me?!”

This is not a punishment! It is a way of Almighty to teach you to be strong for any battle of life! Believe me...every woman after this battle, emerges so strong that she can face any misfortune that comes upon her! I firmly believe that any kind of trauma either kills you or makes you stronger!

So here are the tales of the journeys of some brave women, who sailed through the tempest called Breast Cancer and emerged as icons of strength!

These are the tales of their strength, the tales of their battle, the tales of the path they followed, the tales of their triumph!

Today, they can proudly tell the world that if a woman decides, she can do anything and everything under the sky and make the impossible ... possible!

And while we share the stories of victory with resilience, endurance, faith and patience, we also remember those who succumbed to the unfortunate fate.



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**EARLY IS THE KEY,
SMALL IS THE GOAL**

Breast cancer is a condition (I do not call it a disease on purpose) where a small little lump acts as a bomb, as it may not only take over the whole breast but if given time and opportunity, it can cross all boundaries to invade other parts of the body. It depends, whether one wants to seek help when the cancer is commencing or wait until a doctor cannot provide any treatment and is left to the mercy of Almighty!

It is up to the woman to decide to get herself checked when there is nothing and discover even the minutest abnormality or wait till it takes over her entirely when no doctor can defy the final fate.

Any occasion I find to talk about awareness to the women, I try to feed in to their minds about the importance of early diagnosis and check-up at frequent intervals. But I still fail, many a times, to understand why the fear of diagnosing the disease surpasses the fear of actually having the disease and getting treated for it! This feeling is no different when it comes to the patient's caste, creed, literacy or economic status. It is a universal fear, a fear which needs to be overcome at the earliest. Detection at an early stage ensures a placid life!

Sometimes we are fortunate to have some mature and rational women, who do get themselves tested regularly and are fortunate to have the condition restricted to a small area of the breast or have the disease diagnosed when it is still a small lump. This helps us save not only lives but breasts too!

I admire and wonder how Professor Veronesi (Milan, Italy) designed and invented this wonderful thing called BREAST CONSERVATION SURGERY! It is a surgery where only the lump is removed with surrounding disease-free margins rather than the dreadful breast removal surgery. I guess he was the person who could truly appreciate the femininity of a woman, the sensuality of a woman and could understand the feeling of womanhood as well as motherhood! I had the opportunity to meet him and work with him. I could not be more grateful to Almighty for this!



—
**CAUSE...
THE CULPRIT**

The common question and enigma is, “What is the cause of cancer?” Well, there is no specific known reason. Any woman can have Breast Cancer. I would go to the extent of saying, “If one is a woman, she has every chance of having Breast cancer!” That is the harsh reality. Women who have taken hormones (oestrogens) are at a higher risk of getting breast cancer. Early onset of periods, late cessation of periods, having no child or bearing a child at a late age, not having breast fed children are factors, which could be responsible for occurrence of Breast cancer. We are yet to find out what exactly is responsible for causing Breast cancer. A history of women having breast cancer in the family is present only in 5-10% of women and that figure is probably lesser in India. Hence every woman asks the question, “Madam, no one in my family has Breast cancer, how can I have it? I have breast fed my kids well and I have not taken any hormones too!!”

There must be some other factors responsible for this cancer that we do not know of. The fact is that there are more and more cases of Breast cancer occurring each day. The number is increasing by leaps and bounds and now even young women and girls in 20s and 30s have Breast Cancer. It is surprising why younger women have started having the disease.



**SYMPTOMS...
WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

Often, women I examine, already have developed a huge lump. When I ask them, “Why did you wait for so long when you knew there was a lump?”, they would usually answer saying, “It was a painless lump, hence I thought there is no reason to worry. I thought it will go away.” The ignorance or carelessness, whatever it is, makes these women pay a heavy price!

If you ever find any **lump** in the breast or armpit, even if it is small, even if it is painless, do not wait!! Go to your doctor, consult a Breast Specialist. Every lump is not cancerous, but one needs to check if it is or not. **Pain** is not an indicator of cancer as cancer is painless to begin with. Painless lumps are not to be ignored, infact any lump in the breast should not be left undiagnosed! Pain is more of an indicator of hormonal changes or inflammation or infection usually.

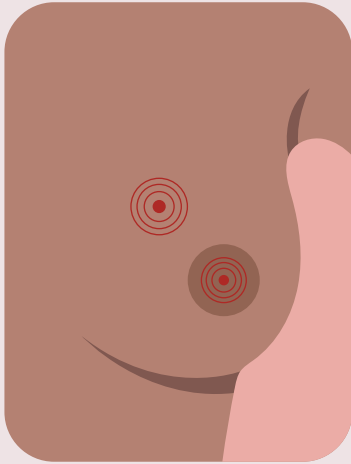
Discharge from the nipple, especially if bloody, may be worrisome. Discharge from multiple ducts, clear or milky or yellowish or greenish/brownish could be due to hormonal changes in the breast.

Changes in size, shape or colour of the breasts should be looked for.

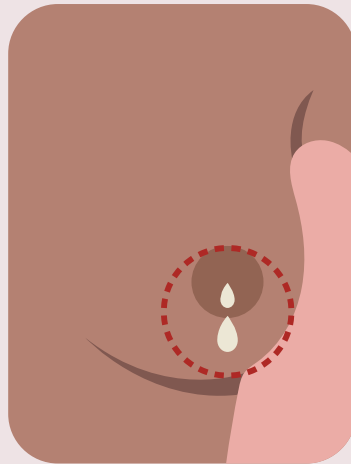
In late stages there could be redness, ulcerations, retraction of the nipple and a typical orange peel appearance of the breast.

Women need to take care of their health instead of giving it a last priority. We, women, have a lot of responsibilities, and need to be strong and fit not only mentally but physically! To take care of others, one needs to take care of one's own self first!

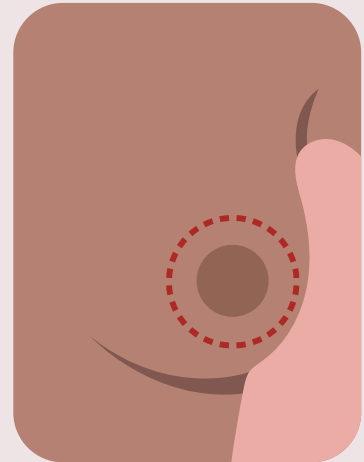
Signs & Symptoms of Breast Cancer



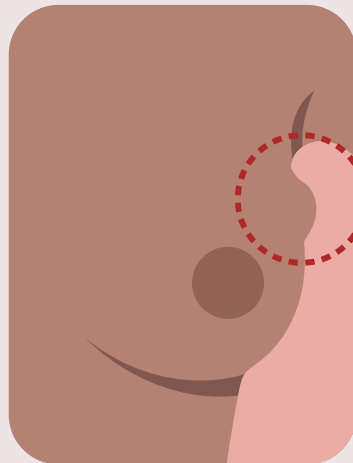
Breast or
nipple pain



Nipple
Discharge



Retracted or
inverted nipple

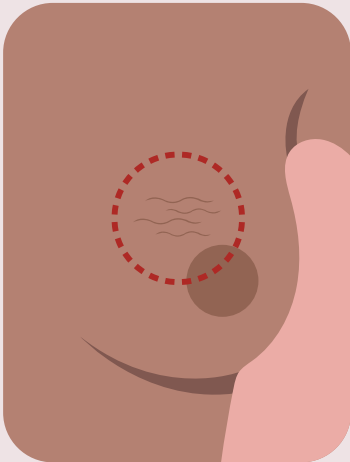


Lumps in
breast

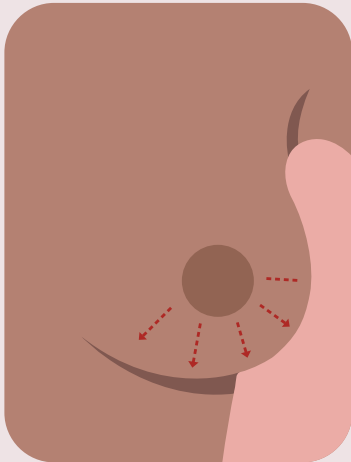


Lumps around
collar bone or
underarm

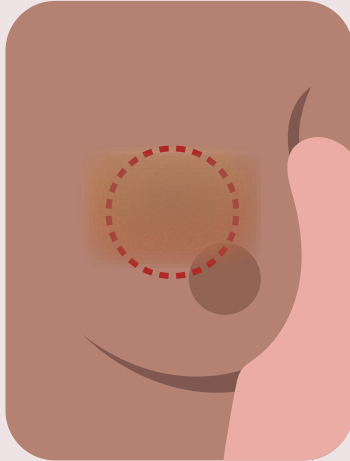
Signs & Symptoms of Breast Cancer



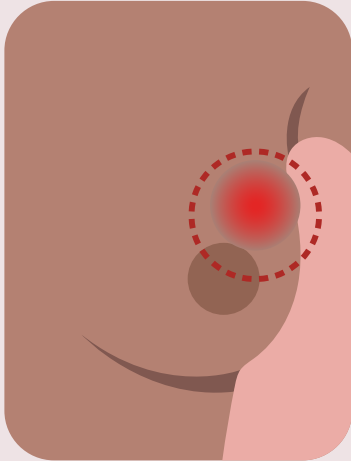
Changes in skin texture



Swelling



Ulcer



Redness/rash



**EARLY DETECTION
BREAST SELF EXAMINATION
[BSE]**

“Can we prevent cancer?”

“No”

“Is there any food that I eat or do not eat that causes it?”

“No”

“Do I wear any specific clothing to prevent it?”

“No”

Nothing can prevent breast cancer from occurring. The only key is to detect it early, when it is still small in size. How does one detect it early? The answer lies in **Breast Self Examination (BSE)**.

Early detection is the only hope.

Early detection is the key.

Early detection leads to cure.

If detected early, Breast cancer is curable!

Breast self-examination should be a part of monthly regime and going to the doctor for check-up a yearly routine.

Breast self examination, every month, should begin at the age of **20 years**.

An annual check-up by a doctor and a yearly sonography **30 years** onwards, an annual check-up, Sonography and a Mammography after the age of **40 years** is the protocol to be followed by every woman with no compromise.

Gifting oneself this health check-up package every year on one's birthday is the only way to achieve this! One should give this gift to one's near and dear ones too.

BSE is a free check-up, requiring just your hands!

One does not even need to step out of the house. All you have to do is go to your bathroom! I strongly believe that there is no excuse to not do a breast self-examination every month.



THE DIAGNOSIS

The final diagnosis is done by **Mammography** i.e. the X ray of the breasts, along with an **Ultrasonography**.

If you are below 40 years, Ultrasonography is advised and if above 40, both Mammography and Ultrasonography are advised to be done annually.

One should get these tests done even if there are no complaints. These tests pick up the smallest tumours, which are not felt by our hands.

“Mammography is so painful and disgusting!” many say, and propagate this message to every woman around her! But doesn't one undergo more painful things than that?! The discomfort of compressing the breast between the X ray plates is going to change your life!

Normal or Suspicious- is what the Radiologist would say. If one understands this, one would not dare to complain! I believe (and most women would agree) that it is not as bad as the pain of normal labour or a Caesarean Section! Then why complain?

Please get your annual Mammograms and Sonography done, is all that I want to convey. Please get an annual check-up done, is what we plead. Please do Self Breast Examination, is what we request!

“Can Mammography cause cancer?”

NO! It is a low dose radiation. Getting Mammography done once a year causes no harm but definitely does good because it would be either normal or would detect the disease in its early stage!

If required, MRI and Genetic tests may be advised.

BIOPSY is the final stamp and endorsement to determine whether one has cancer or not. We advise Core Needle Biopsy or Vacuum Assisted Breast Biopsy (VABB) when there is a lump that is suspicious of cancer. The medical and surgical technology has advanced tremendously. What was diagnosed by surgery a few years ago is now diagnosed just with a special needle. A few small pieces from the tumour are taken and sent to a Pathologist, making that area numb. Those small pieces give a lot of information about the presence of cancer, type of cancer, its genetic patterns and whether it is hormone dependent or not. If the result is positive for cancer, the world will not collapse!! Get a scan (PET CT Scan) done to see if it has spread anywhere else in the body. If not, it is an early stage cancer and, you are lucky! You can be cured of the disease with proper treatment.

If you find Bloody discharge form the nipple, an endoscopic/telescopic examination of breast ducts(Ductoscopy) is done to detect the minutest tumours, which are sometimes not detected even on Mammography or Sonography!

*Small non cancerous lumps can be removed by VABB, without a cut or incision, just with a puncture (Vacuum Assisted Excision of Breast lump-VAEB)!

MAMMOGRAPHY

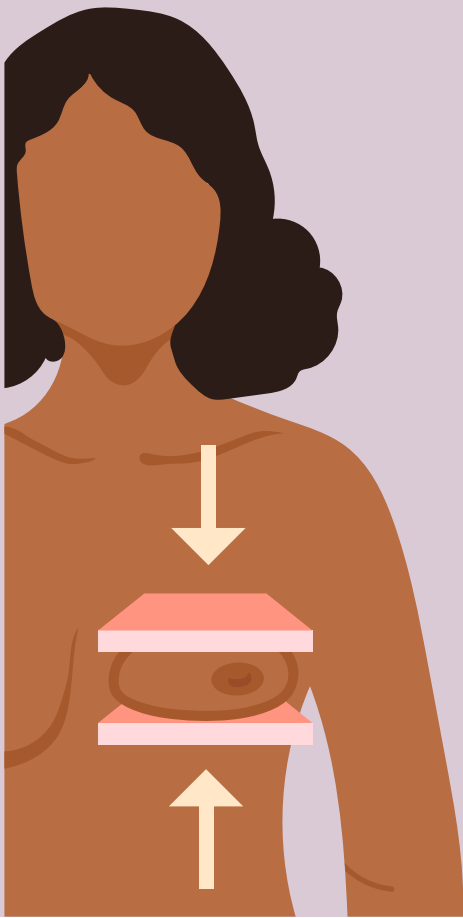


BREAST SONOGRAPHY

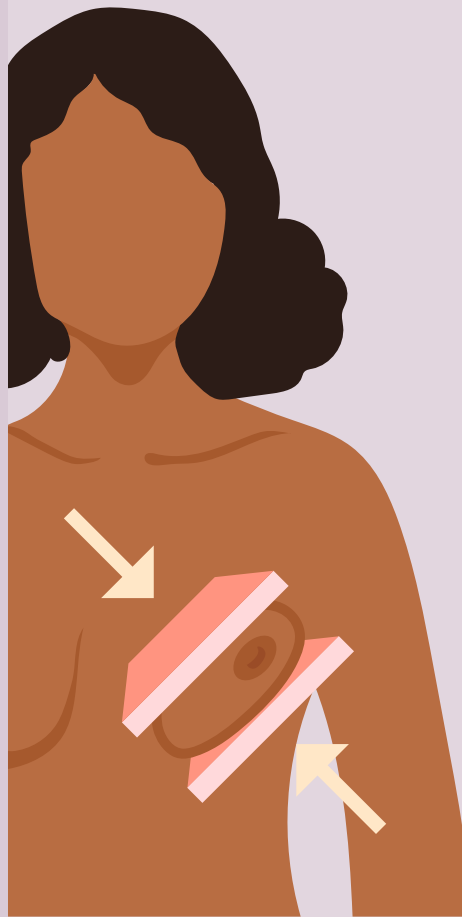


MAMMOGRAPHY

1. EACH BREAST IS COMPRESSED HORIZONTALLY BETWEEN TWO PLATES FOR IMAGING



2. EACH BREAST IS COMPRESSED DIAGONALLY BETWEEN TWO PLATES FOR IMAGING





CORE NEEDLE BIOPSY



VABB

DUCTOSCOPY/ENDOSCOPY





**TREATMENT
IN A NUTSHELL**

Surgery is the first choice whenever possible.

Breast removal (**Mastectomy**) was the age-old standard practice for treatment of breast cancer and is a procedure that is still practiced. However, to preserve the dignity and pride of the women, it is very important to preserve the breast whenever possible!

If detected early, with a small lump and given that cancer has not spread anywhere, we can just remove the lump (**Breast Conservation Surgery-BCS**), while keeping the rest of the breast intact. This gives a huge mental satisfaction to the women who are already suffering from cancer.

Many a times, the lump is sent for examination to the Pathologist during the operation to confirm the diagnosis or assure complete removal of the cancerous lump - **Frozen section biopsy**. A few Lymph nodes in the armpit are either sent for sampling by a special technique during the operation, to confirm whether the cancer has spread there, in early cancer cases. All lymph nodes are removed if cancer has spread there. In that case, there are chances of the upper limb swelling (Lymphoedema). To prevent that, rigorous upper limb physiotherapy is advised starting on the day of the surgery itself. Believe me... the women who follow this regime, will escape from having this problem!

After surgery, there could be tubes (drains) coming out at the site of operation, to drain the fluid accumulated due to removal of lymph nodes, for a few days. But with the modern surgical techniques, one is ambulatory and free to do all normal activities from the next day of surgery itself!

“Madam, do I have to take **Chemotherapy**?”

This is the most difficult question for a surgeon to answer!

Whether the women are educated or not ... they all have a unanimous opinion on this. They are petrified with the thought of taking chemotherapy.

Chemotherapy is the intravenous injections given to kill any microscopic cells that have escaped and settled anywhere in the body. Depending on the stage, type, grade of the cancer and the Receptors (Oestrogen, Progesterone, Her2Neu) status, the type and number of injections are decided. Each therapy is tailored for each woman. There is NO one treatment for all!

Some have to take Targeted therapy, some Immunotherapy... it is all a medical jargon, but the medical science has advanced so much and research goes on and on to find the best treatment with least side effects, to give a good quality of life even if the disease has spread to other organs.

Yes, Chemotherapy does come with a package of side effects and some women refuse to take it, but we coax them and at most times, we emerge successful.

Sometimes, it is difficult to give so many intravenous injections and hence a small device is placed near the chest wall by a small surgery. The device directly infuses the drugs into the system and can function for a couple of years, should need arise, after which it is removed. This device is called Chemoport.

Chemotherapy is a true test of endurance, strength, will power and the desire to overcome the odds which have been thrust upon women suffering from cancer.

Believe me.... EVERY WOMAN PASSES THE TEST!
AND THAT IS THE STRENGTH OF A WOMAN!

“What about my hair? The essence of my beauty?” I tell my lovely women, “Bald makes you look beautiful, and the hair which invariably comes back for sure, makes you look younger, more than ever before! There will be a queue of men to propose to you!” The blush on their faces and the smile, which comes on the sly, since the husband is sitting next to her, is a sight to be captured and cherished!

Radiation is the third arm of the treatment after surgery and chemotherapy. Apparently, it is the least traumatic. Even though the apprehension and fear are prominent due to hear-say from other women, who offer unsolicited opinions without ever having gone through the treatment!

Reconstruction....

Restoration of the empty area...

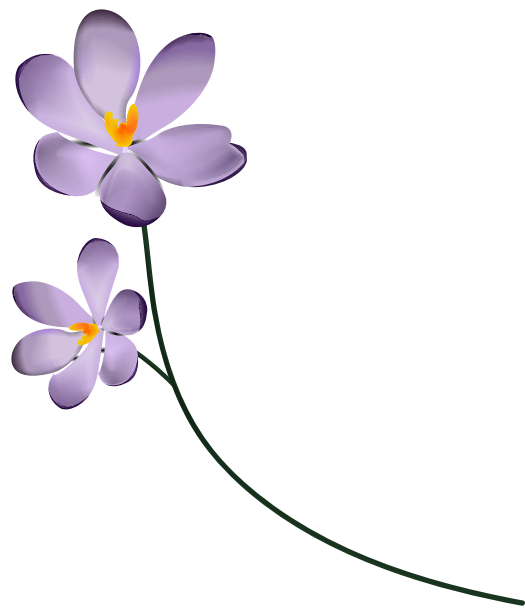
Even if one has the breast removed, the hope of regaining it remains. Our Cosmetic and Reconstructive surgeons make sure that the pride of these women is preserved.

“No, I just want to treat my cancer first!”, is what many say. “I don’t care what others feel or say!” Some also feel, “What will others say if they see me flat chested? How will I look? It is so embarrassing!” I want to assure those women that there are wonderful external prostheses which are placed in the brassiere. I challenge anyone to figure out if the lady has had her breast removed! It is a secret only between her, her partner and the surgeon!!

However if one desires, the empty area can be restored and reconstructed permanently too. This procedure can be done either at the time of removal of the breast or at a later stage. With younger women having breast cancer, better techniques of reconstruction have been designed.

Reconstruction can be done by either placing implants (which could be saline or silicon, the latter being more commonly used) or restoring the mound by one's own muscle and fat from the back or abdomen. This is a sure shot or permanent way of restoring the breast mound back. Getting her breast mound back, similar to the opposite side, gives the woman a huge mental and physical satisfaction, saving her the anxiety of her appearance, which is the most disturbing thing.

The modern medical and surgical techniques do not save just lives, but breasts too!



EXPERIENCES OF
COURAGE & RESILIENCE...



SAVITA DESAI

WRITTEN BY JANKI MISTRY

"I SURVIVED BECAUSE THE FIRE INSIDE ME
BURNT BRIGHTER THAN THE FIRE AROUND ME!"

Joshua Garden (Cancer Survivor)

My Grandmother - An indomitable spirit!

Until she was 90, she had never taken a single pill or had ever visited a doctor. The only time she had been to a hospital was to have her cataract removed. She travelled the length and breadth of Gujarat by train, almost always by second class, for the spiritual causes that she was committed to. At 87 she jumped out of a running train because she had realized, after it took off, that she had boarded the wrong one. A knee injury at 87 had been the most serious ailment until my grandmother discovered at 90 that she had cancer in both her breasts.

Remembering those days, when the disease was detected, everyone in the family thought that maybe this was how it would end for Dadi who had lived a full and extremely interesting life as the wife of a senior diplomat with the Indian government. She on the other hand was utterly calm and collected and never for a moment believed that she would die of a disease as banal as breast cancer. Dadi had accidentally discovered a lump in one of her breasts and had called my mother (her daughter-in-law) to reconfirm her suspicion about something not being right. However, she had no other symptoms. So, my mother asked her to see Shefali Aunty on her next visit to Amdavad which she did almost immediately.

Up until that point, Shefali Aunty was our go-to doctor for every ailment - be it stomach pain or conjunctivitis, since she was such a close part of our lives - my very own Kaki. For our family, she was a doctor who could cure everything! The whole family was completely nonchalant and oblivious to her specialisation and expertise as a breast cancer surgeon. That happens in families where half the members are doctors and the other half believe for some reason that they have as much authority over the profession even though all they ever studied was literature!

We live in Surat. So, Dadi went to Amdavad to see Shefali Aunty. She made her go through all the routine tests and what came out was technically called bilateral carcinoma of the breast which meant that her cancer had spread aggressively in both her breasts and Radical mastectomy was recommended on both sides.

The swiftness and razor-sharp efficacy with which Pinkaaunty (as we lovingly address her) took Dadi under her charge when the cancer was detected brought our family out of our ignorant daze and suddenly, we all saw her in a new light - the young bright confident breast cancer specialist and surgeon that she was!

She quickly informed the family of the seriousness of Dadi's condition and recommended surgery without further delay. Dadi informed us in Surat that she was going ahead with the surgery and that neither of my parents needed to come to Ahmedabad since she was in Shefali Aunty's able hands. She was completely unperturbed and said that Janak and Shefali had reassured her that she would be completely fine after the operation and that she would come to Surat after everything was done. This was her! Fortunately, her postoperative recovery was

extremely smooth and she started her work and travelling within a few days of surgery, as she was not required to take chemotherapy or radiotherapy, but just a hormonal tablet for 7 years.

The ever confident and indomitable Savita Desai. 'Savita' means the sun in Sanskrit and all who know her would agree that she is the perfect embodiment of her namesake – dazzling yet dangerous if one crosses a line. She was like that in 2014 when the cancer was detected, and she is the same today at 99 still going strong. She watches every cricket match in which India is playing and every tennis grand slam. She still cheers and hollers when her favourite player scores a point. She reads the "Gita" daily and sometimes asks me how many shoes I own! Her zest for life, though somewhat waning, her body still refuses to give up. She takes on each day having cheese toast and hot chocolate in the afternoon and pizza and coke for dinner most nights, always leaving space for butterscotch ice cream!

She came out of the cancer as if it was just some bad dream. Most of the credit for that goes to one person - Dr. Shefali Desai. The confidence with which she took Dadi into the operation theatre and her certitude about everything being absolutely fine after the surgery put everyone in the family at ease. She performed the surgery as a thorough professional and consoled us as a loving family member. This combination of a honed and skillful surgeon and a compassionate and caring human being is what makes her a very special doctor and our most beloved aunt and family member. We, of the younger generation, take inspiration from her every day! Despite all that she has achieved, she remains the ever-humble, simple, down-to-earth, and fun-loving person who has a penchant for good food and who never ages a day!

Today my grandmother is 99. We are all hoping to celebrate her 100th birthday this December. As I sat down to write this piece, I started by asking her about how she had felt when she first found out about her cancer. She looked at me and asked, "When did I have cancer?" I reminded her that it was the year 2014 when she was a young dame of 90. She gave me a wry smile and said, "It was such a long time ago, I don't remember anything!"





SHAKUNTALA MAHESHWARI

“YESTERDAY I DARED TO STRUGGLE,
TODAY I DARE TO WIN!”

Bernadette Devlin

I was watching TV in my room with my two grandsons. Both were also wrestling with each other. I tried to separate them and in the process their hand touched my breast, when I felt some pain. When I checked that spot with my hands I could feel a lump. I kept on checking daily for the next 5 days. It was still there! It was then that I talked to Dr. Shefali Desai, who is our family friend as well as our guide for all medical matters.

I went to Samved hospital to get a checkup done from Dr. Shefali. On her advice, I got a mammography done on 2nd November 2000. I was 53 years old then. A suspicious lump was detected in the right breast. She immediately did a needle biopsy, which was reported as positive for cancer. On learning about cancer I got very scared, but Dr. Shefali and my family members consoled me and gave me enough strength. Required tests were done. On 6th November 2000, I was operated by Dr. Shefali and her team at Samved Hospital and the small lump was removed and the breast was conserved, even in those times! The team at Samved Breast Clinic took very good care of me and were more than ready to help at all times. The way the doctor and her staff talked to me, I felt my illness was half gone because of that.

After recovering from my surgery, I went to consult an oncologist and started Chemotherapy. All my hair was gone during this treatment and I also felt a lot of weakness. Because of vomiting sensation I was not feeling inclined to have food and also had blisters inside my mouth. This was a very difficult time, which I knew I had to go through with the support and advice of my doctors and family. I was also advised to take Radiation therapy. My radiation cycle was postponed a bit due to earthquake in January 2001. However I managed to complete my treatment.

I started feeling better after eight months of operation. After completion of one year, various tests like mammography, sonography, bone scan, blood tests etc. were done, which were normal. My doctors, my family and my friends were a constant source of support and care in this difficult time because of which, I could face my cancer with great determination and I could fight it out.

After two years I got myself occupied and busy by becoming a member of Tupperware Corporation. Because of this, I could meet a lot of new people, made many friends and got busy working. During this time I also got a lot of support from all my friends and acquaintances and I could develop a good business.

It is more than 23 years now since I got operated for cancer and I am 76 years old today, but I still get my yearly checkups done without fail. By God's grace and dedication of Doctors, I am fully cured of cancer. I try to keep myself busy as much as possible. I am currently living a good and healthy life with my son and daughter-in-law.

All I can say with my experience, is that one should keep the morals high to fight cancer and emerge as a conqueror! The bad times never last long, they pass with good times to follow and the future always is worth living!



GIRIJA SHANKAR

“A STRONG WOMAN KNOWS SHE HAS STRENGTH ENOUGH
“FOR THE JOURNEY, BUT A WOMAN OF STRENGTH KNOWS
“IT IS ON THE JOURNEY THAT SHE WILL BECOME STRONG!”

Luke Easter

I was diagnosed with Breast cancer in 2008. When the doctor told me that my result is positive, my husband was very upset but I was very strong at that time. The doctor also appreciated me saying, "We want strong and positive patients like you!" I was working with a bank. I was advised to get the surgery done as soon as possible so as to minimize the chances of the disease spreading further. My husband and I decided over the weekend, to get operated at the earliest. I attended my office on Monday, finished my urgent work and informed my Director about it. He gave full support and extended all possible help from the office.

I was admitted and underwent several tests after which surgery was done, on Wednesday, May 28, 2008. Before going for the surgery, I specifically told the doctor, not to disclose my case to any of my relatives or friends. To have cancer in those days and get the breast removed was a big taboo. Hence we informed the relatives after one week of the surgery.

The surgery went well but after the surgery I suffered a lot mainly because of my existing chronic disease. I was under heavy steroid treatment before surgery. That was also a challenge for the doctor for post surgery treatment. Radiation treatment was not recommended for me. I was advised to take 8 chemotherapy doses. After every session, I suffered nausea, muscle cramps, sleeplessness etc. My husband took care of all things at home like cooking a variety of food himself as my taste had altered and I did not like eating. We had no help as we were living by ourselves. I have no words to express for my husband as without him and his care, I would not have been able to sail through this, as the chemotherapy period of 6 months was very tough for me. My sisters were kind enough to come on weekends to help.

After removal of the breast, I started using an external Breast prosthesis. Cosmetic surgery was not too advanced and popular at that time and we also wanted to wait for a sufficient time, should there be any recurrence. I was not very comfortable mentally and physically with being devoid of one breast. It was also a bit inconvenient. Looking at myself in the mirror was also kind of unacceptable. I became very apprehensive and found it difficult to mingle with friends and family.

I decided to go for reconstruction 7 years after my surgery. Cosmetic surgery was getting more acceptable, popular and successful. In 2015, I got the breast reconstructed by the team of Dr Shefali Desai with the Cosmetic and Reconstructive surgeon, from my own abdominal fat and muscle. I was extremely happy and overwhelmed to have my lost breast back! Today I feel so much more confident and my day to day life is normal. I don't feel the apprehension to interact with others. Medical science has advanced so much that even after removal, the breast can be restored.

Even after this, a regular check up is a must annually. I also get my annual check up done till todate.

Today, I feel completely normal...have forgotten what I had gone through!



TARLA PANCHAL

"IT IS OK TO BE SCARED, BEING SCARED MEANS
"YOU ARE ABOUT TO DO SOMETHING REALLY BRAVE!"

Mandy Hale

It was December 2015, and life was going on as usual. One day I found a lump in my right breast and I was extremely disturbed because just 2 years back, my friend died of breast cancer. I still did not have enough courage to consult a doctor. I was scared. My brother was diagnosed with oral cancer and hearing that my BP started dropping. I was extremely tense.

After gathering some courage, I consulted my physician and then also a Gynaecologist, since my elder daughter insisted. I was asked to undergo Mammography, Sonography and some other tests. The final results concluded that my lump could probably be cancerous, which I faintly heard when my family was discussing with the doctor. I was shattered, went to the temple and asked God, "Why me?"

My husband and daughter got the reference of Dr Shefali Desai from some people, who we knew and also some friends. They consulted her without my knowledge, requesting her to keep it a secret from me. But my doctor was very clear, she said, "I am not going to lie to my patient!" She insisted that she will tell me the truth with a lot of positivity. A doctor knows how to handle the patient mentally besides doing the right treatment! She motivated me and prepared me for the surgery in every aspect-mentally and physically. She not only gave me the strength and courage, but assured me that I will be fine and be cured of the disease as it was diagnosed at a very early stage. I still remember her words, "Tarlaben, you will not die of Breast Cancer!" She gave me a second life as I had almost given up and I felt as if I have lost the battle of my life!

On the operation table, she said, before anaesthesia was given, "Don't worry, just trust me, have faith in God and leave everything to me". It was not sure if the tumor was cancerous and hence the lump removed was sent for biopsy to the pathologist during surgery (frozen section biopsy). The decision to preserve or remove the breast was given and my family left the decision to the doctor, as she would be the best judge. We trusted her fully and knew that she would do the best possible for me. She decided to preserve the breast, which was a big psychological relief to me, as it would be to any woman.

The hospital staff at Samved Hospital was very caring and supportive, which makes the patient forget the pain and agony.

Although the path of cancer treatment is long, all that one needs is patience and faith.

I was advised chemotherapy, which was very scary because the people around us scare us saying all negative things. My doctor told me, "Do not listen to anyone. Just ask me if you have any problems or questions." Hence with good supporting doctors and family and with a positive mind, this also passed by. Of course I had a lot of weakness, gastritis, loss of hair. After the 2nd dose I had a bunch of hair coming off every time I combed my hair and I was bald after the 3rd dose. One has to accept this. It was quite a dreadful experience as I did not like seeing my face in the mirror! It was quite painful and I felt a bit depressed too. But the positive side was everyone around me started respecting me and took extra care to make me feel comfortable.

After the completion of chemotherapy, I thought it is over! But the third part of the treatment was yet

to be done-Radiation therapy.

In those days it was a 45 days treatment. It is not as dreadful as chemotherapy, just a few seconds or minutes of rays on the breast to destroy the rest of the cells as my breast was preserved.

At the end of 6 months of treatment my doctors told me that I was fine and I should go and enjoy. I immediately took a trip to Kerala with my family and enjoyed to the utmost. I was totally charged up and rejuvenated. Gradually the hair started coming back and I had a new modern look.

Samved hospital also organizes a Breast Cancer Awareness Walkathon every year, where I participate with my daughters every year as awareness and early diagnosis is the only important thing to have a good normal life even after having cancer. I am felicitated every year, as a good gesture at the event. Though that is not an award I was wanting, but after going through this journey, I feel whoever has gone through this journey definitely deserves this! I thank Dr. Desai and Samved hospital for doing this and making us feel respected and important!

The treatment does not end here as the cancer can come back! My doctor had told me very clearly to do a checkup every 6 months and like every time, I follow her advice completely. At the end of almost 8 years, I am fighting fit!

I get my daughters also checked up regularly as Breast cancer could run into the family.

I am extremely grateful to my family, doctors and friends for helping me get through this!

**“WHEN WE GIVE CHEERFULLY AND ACCEPT GRATEFULLY,
EVERYONE IS BLESSED!”**

Maya Angelou



ANONYMOUS

"YOU CAN BE A VICTIM OF CANCER
OR A SURVIVOR OF CANCER,
IT IS JUST A MINDSET!"

In every individual's life there is always an unforgettable memory, positive or negative, It varies upon the situation, but it is something that will always be remembered by the individual. Something like that happened to me, and that was "Breast Cancer"! Basically whenever people hear the word CANCER the only thing that strikes to their mind is the incessant growth of the tumour, which would take your life.. In breast cancer patient's treatments such as chemotherapy, locoregional therapy, radiation etc. cures the cancer but there are some physical and psychological side effects, which are surely bothersome and come as a package deal.

I chose to undergo breast removal and I was quite apprehensive about the same. But my doctor, Dr. Shefali Desai, reassured me and gave me confidence. Surgery and the post operative period was very smooth.

I had to undergo only 4 chemotherapy doses as my disease was early but spread to the lymph nodes. I had hair fall, nausea, change in nail color, change in taste and a lot of mood swings. I was really not able to understand what was happening to me, I was slowly going towards depression. My doctor had asked me not to go out of my house and not to stay in crowded places, as my blood counts would go low after chemotherapy which will affect my immunity. It was my family and relatives who helped me to come out of depression and change my mindset. This is how I came out of it.

Today, I am back with all types of outdoor and indoor work, taking oral medication (Hormonal treatment), for which I must be thankful to my Dr. Shefali Desai ma'am and the entire team members of Samved Breast Clinic. Her encouragement, motivation, patience, softness and trustfulness in her words during that period and today helped me come out from these difficult times. I am really thankful to her for the treatment and dedication shown to me.

The message that I want to convey to all the readers is, always remember that cancer awareness is the first step towards cancer treatment. It is a great benefit to know about the disease well in advance so that one is aware of the symptoms and signs one may come across and bring the same to the notice of your doctor at an early stage. This will help detecting cancer at an early stage more effectively.

Most importantly, do not ignore any health issues and hide it from your kith and kin. Everyone together should spread the word of awareness, get regular check ups done by a Breast specialist and get mammogram or sonography done as per one's doctor's advice.

Last but not the least, one should not lose hope, courage and self confidence if you have breast cancer, because you will win the battle soon!



JIGNASHA SHUKLA

“TOUGH TIMES NEVER LAST
“BUT TOUGH PEOPLE DO!”

Robert Schuller

On September 16, 2023, I found out I had cancer.

It was a normal morning. I woke up, had my usual toast and tea for breakfast, chatted with my husband. After a few hours at the office, I went in to see Dr. Shefali at Samved Hospital for a routine check up, fully expecting to walk out from there within 15 minutes.

But this time it was different. The mammogram detected some lump in my right breast. This was not exactly news, since I did have a history of benign lumps. But this time it was suspicious for cancer!

I know I should have been scared. Maybe I was? But the feelings were never quite as bad or as overwhelming as many people talked about. I often think that the way I handled those early feelings about my diagnosis was what gave me the strength to get through the treatment. Dr. Shefali immediately took charge, laid out a plan. She did not waste a minute before scheduling a biopsy for the same day. Once we had the biopsy results, which was reported as positive for cancer, she wasted no time in scheduling surgery to remove the lump. All of this happened within the last 10 days of September.

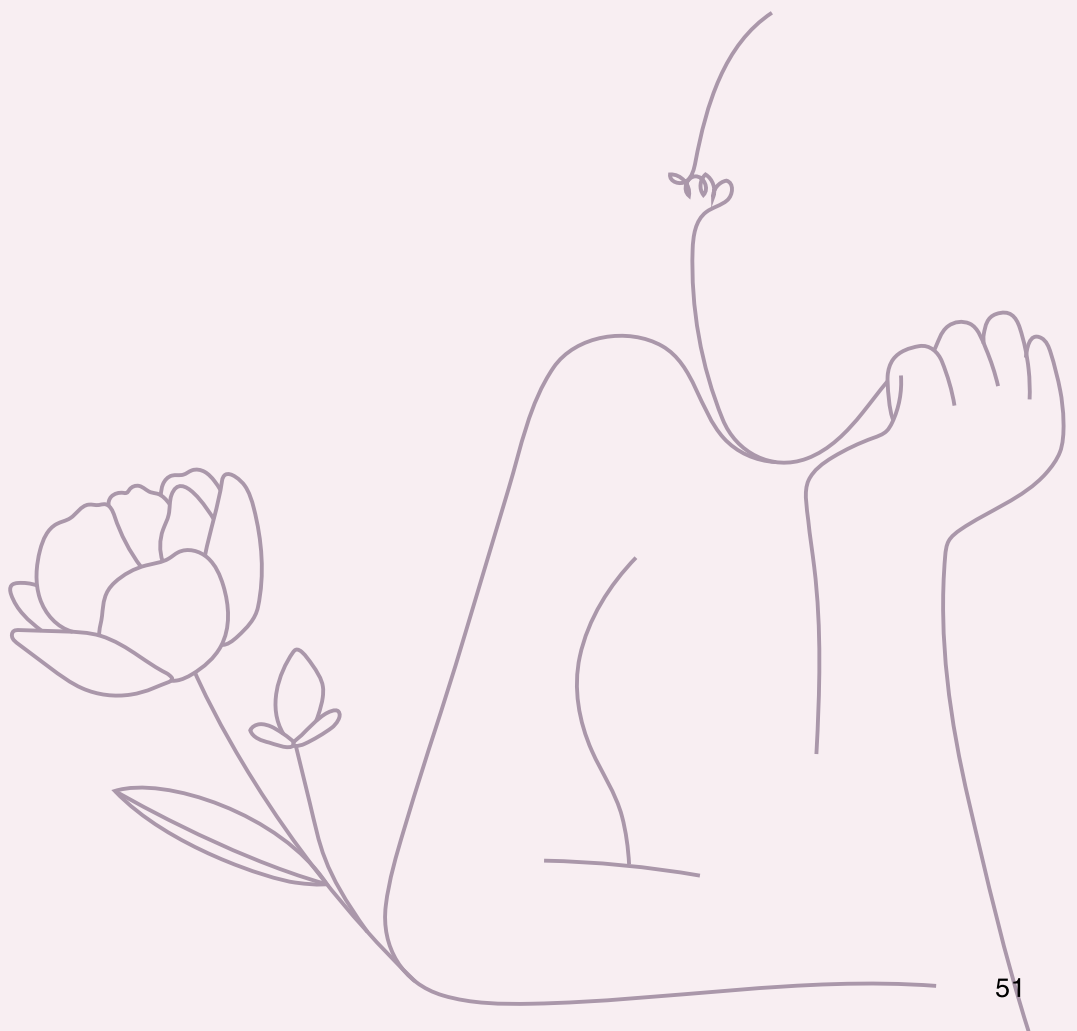
On the day of surgery, once again, I expected overwhelming emotions. But the past experiences I have had at Samved Hospital, allowed me to have total faith in the team operating on me. Whatever had to be done, needed to be done, and whatever was needed will be done. There was never a doubt in my mind that I was in the best hands possible. Studies have shown that having a positive attitude prior to a surgical procedure can lead to better outcomes. I do not want to downplay the emotional upheaval that can come with a life-changing diagnosis like cancer, but I do encourage everyone reading, to acknowledge that your mental health will be just as important as your physical well being going ahead. In India, we face terrible stereotypes about mental health. Often, we face ridicule when talking about anxiety or stress. Those of us in situations where anxiety or stress is unavoidable know that these intangible threats to our health are real. I urge all patients, no matter the diagnosis, to start a regime that helps you calm your mind and fears as soon as you can. You can destress yourself, through conversations with your doctors. When you can control your mind and your fears, there is hope, and you can get through the ordeal. It helped me, and here I am, almost a year to my diagnosis, returning from a trip to Canada with my family.

Losing my hair has been the biggest challenge for me throughout this experience. The cancer is gone, but I am reminded of the months I battled with it, when I look in the mirror and see my short, very different hair. As a woman born in India in the '60s, I associated my identity closely to my hair. It was the source of my femininity. I had beautiful and healthy hair and I spent a considerable amount of time, money and energy ensuring it stayed that way. The drastic hair fall and having to cut it a few weeks before receiving chemo treatment was emotionally draining. I had never had short hair before. I had never not dyed my hair before. I bought a good quality wig, only for it to be too hot and uncomfortable to wear daily. Scarves and caps made me more comfortable. I was disturbed but my Doctor reassured me that, like everyone else, my hair will grow back and I will be back to my normal appearance within a short time!

I was blessed to have people around me to help me in the house, people to support me at work, people I can rely on to run errands for me and to look after things on my bad days when all I could do was sleep. The chemo, while not painful, made me extremely weak and I slept for days immediately after a session. But cultivating a positive spirit helped and so did the encouragement and love I received from my community.

I also wanted to mention that chemo and radiation were not as bad or as terrifying as the media and societal exaggeration make them out to be. I never stopped going to work. I took time off on the really tiring days, usually a day or two after a chemo session, but I never felt the need to take time off during radiation. I would go to my radiation treatment on my way to work....it was that simple! Overall, there might be some nausea, or some pain during your cancer treatment plan, which is a possibility in other diseases also. I was in pain after my C-section too! I could not take any food or liquids during my Swine Flu infection for two whole weeks. They are all different sides of the same coin.

My final note would be to get regular check ups to enable early detection and building a positive mind set. Detecting the cancer early can make a huge difference, and staying positive through the experience will help you and your loved ones get through this together.





JOYCE DAVID

"I KNOW GOD WILL NOT GIVE ME ANYTHING I CANNOT HANDLE,
I JUST WISH HE DID NOT TRUST ME SO MUCH!"

Mother Teresa

I am a retired State Bank Of India employee, having served the bank for 40 years and residing in Ahmedabad with my husband Neil. With my office colleagues, I had been getting an annual check up done since 2011.

Two years later (2013), I had gone for a yearly medical check-up. During my previous check-up, I was given a clean chit with almost no health concerns. I was quite affirmative even this time, as I hardly had any signs of discomfort concerning my health, apart from a 2 month old ache in my right arm, which I thought was a casual muscular pain.

I was advised a sonography test as they found my mammography report to have a doubtful lesion, suspicious of cancer. The doctor assumed that I would be scared to accept the reality, hence they wanted to inform my husband. But I was ready to accept the reality of having breast cancer.

I was informed that there is a small tumour in my breast, which seems to be cancerous and I will have to consider further investigations, operation, and post surgical treatment that included chemotherapy and radiation therapy. This news shook me. But, my faith in God grew stronger and I asked Him to have mercy upon me and my family. From that very moment, I was strong enough to deal with the situation, else my husband and daughters would be shattered. Being a wife and a mother, I simply could not think of stepping out of my responsibilities, no matter what! Even today, my daughters lovingly tell me, "Mummy, it is your positive attitude that has kept us strong till date!"

I was glad to have my friend and other colleagues help us find the right doctor (Dr. Shefali Desai at Samved Hospital) who could properly guide us.

Based on further investigation reports and as informed by the doctor, the cancer was detected at an early stage. I cannot thank her enough. God really does send angels in the form of humans. Also, now I understand the importance of yearly medical check-ups.

I was successfully operated in October 2013 by Dr. Shefali Desai and her team. 20 days later I was asked to meet the Oncophysician for my chemotherapy sessions. I had no idea what this therapy would make me go through. All I had to do was follow the given instructions and anticipate some not so pleasant side effects. Yes, the first two chemotherapies ended up being the most difficult phase of my entire treatment. I hardly knew what my body would accept or throw out. It was indeed very difficult. I could feel that my body was becoming weak. But I figured out the right things and diet to overcome this.

It was a period of 5 long months as I approached the 6th and the final chemotherapy session. This was followed by 28 radiation sessions. This was the end of my cancer treatment. I was back in office, to which I was so much looking forward to!

I am now again running errands and witnessing the most blessed life. As I write this today (August 2020), I have been living a totally healthy retired life.

My biggest encouragement to fight back the disease was my faith in God! My strength and determination to fight was supported by my husband and daughters being by my side in every phase. My parents had served in a hospital all throughout their lives. I was brought up in an environment where they discussed the surgeries being done and the medical treatment being given to the patients. Hence I was prepared to face anything that came my way.

Blaming God for what I had to go through was not even a question for me! I firmly believe that why should we expect only good things from Him? We should be ready to accept sufferings as well, because it is His way of making us stronger than what we are!





DR. PARUL SHAH

“CHALLENGES ARE WHAT MAKES LIFE INTERESTING,
OVERCOMING THEM IS WHAT MAKES LIFE MEANINGFUL!”

I am a Gynecologist, and also a breast cancer survivor. Back in March 2004, I started feeling low, depressed and my body was filled with negativity, giving a signal that something is wrong in my body. Being a doctor and brought up in a medical background, I started getting all the reports done. My father, sisters and brother are all doctors, my father being the Dean and Superintendent of Sheth V S Hospital, Ahmedabad.

On 21st May 2004, I was able to palpate a hard lump in my right breast of about 1 centimeter in size. I called my father and we immediately rushed to my surgeon friend, Dr. Shefali Desai at Samved Hospital. After local examination she was sure about the diagnosis but she wanted to confirm by mammography, sonography and biopsy. The report confirmed the lump being malignant. I was only 39 years old then! Hence I had to go with the odds and choose surgery as that was probably my best chance of cure and survival. My parents, my family and me, all were in tears. My husband and my elder son were at Vishakhapatnam for his national skating tournament. My brother and sisters were in the USA.

They all flew into Ahmedabad. This is when I got to learn the value of a family! Having them around, diluted my pain and agony. My close friends were also around me. I would like to mention my friend Niyati specially as she would be there at my beck and call selflessly at all times, and Minaxi for mental support when I felt low. They did not let me be alone and quoted incidents of other patients who got cured and were doing fine. This gave me tremendous courage to face the reality. Before surgery, with the support of the family and friends, who were all chanting mantras, a spiritual atmosphere was there all around me.

My surgeon cum friend and my true well wisher, Dr. Shefali Desai, was kind enough to come forward and take all the responsibilities for my surgery which was planned on 25th May 2004. She came and took me to the Operation Theatre. My right breast had a lump, hence mastectomy with removal of axillary nodes was done. After surgery, as I was out of anesthesia, I remember my friend telling me "You are now stage 0, Parul!" and I smiled at once. My father told me, "I have seen my daughter smiling after two months!" I was totally calm and at peace after that.

Next day morning I realised that I was flat chested, a bit confused and apprehensive. It was less than 24 hours of surgery, but the nurses and the paramedical staff gave me great courage and spirit to get out from the bed and do my daily chores. Everyone was so kind and polite, and their gentleness freshened me up. I will never forget those days, though my post operative course was uneventful and day by day I was gaining more and more confidence to become normal. There were two drains coming out from the operative area, which were later removed. I was lucky to have an extremely supportive family and group of friends, who helped me to recover with little steps on this long and slow journey.

Days were passing and I learned many things during this hard time trying to remain strong and positive and valued relationships and friendship more than ever before.

Few weeks passed and it was time for the dreadful chemotherapy. I was anxious and nervous about the hairfall and unsure if I would be able to tolerate it. My husband gave me an idea to get all my hair removed and make a wig from my own hair. The wig that the beauty parlour made was exactly what I wanted and made me look as if I had my original hair, which gave me a lot of confidence and made it less traumatic for me.

There were a lot of questions in mind.

What will be the side effects? How will my body react? Will I be able to tolerate it? Will I be able to complete all the cycles? Will I be cured? How will I remain away from my children? What are the chances of recurrence? There was a constant war going on in my mind. With all those fears and uncertainty, I kept moving forward one cycle after the other.

It was indeed a long and a tough battle. My body was able to get through all 6 cycles. Each cycle made me feel weaker and weaker. But my children and family became my biggest strength during this time. I just had one goal in my mind, "I want to fight the disease, be cancer free and want to live for my children and family." Throughout my journey the support of my friends and family members who would stop by to talk to me, bring me books to read, feed me with some wonderful homemade dishes, give movie suggestions and showing that they are there for me, made me realize that life's true investments are one's relationships and friendships. Days became weeks.... weeks became months... months became years and I have been cancer free for almost 20 years now. My hair has grown as long as it was before my diagnosis, but now grey! :) I started operating my patients almost within a few months of my treatment!

Today, I am as normal as one can be! I am playing all possible roles in life... a role of a mother, daughter, sister, friend and most importantly of a successful Gynaecologist. I am heading the department of Gynaecology at SVP Hospital, have been helping and treating patients and teaching young Gynaecologists in making, for their bright future. I can proudly say that I never shunned away from my duty during COVID times, despite me being a cancer patient. Me and my team treated even COVID positive women, conducted their deliveries and also did the first successful Caeserian section in the state of Gujarat in a COVID positive woman!!

I decided to help my doctor friend Shefali, spread awareness for breast cancer in every way, through TV talks, being a part of THE PINK PARADE every year and also counselling as well as motivating women suffering from Breast Cancer.

Message:

This was a glimpse of my journey of overcoming breast cancer through treatment with Dr. Shefali Desai and her team and support from my family and friends. I am sharing this, with the hope that if you or someone close to you has been diagnosed with cancer, you do not lose faith and fight your battle seeking appropriate medical help, with a positive attitude knowing that a normal life, once you win this battle, is very much a possibility!



ANONYMOUS

“CANCER IS JUST A CHAPTER IN YOUR LIFE,
NOT THE WHOLE STORY!”

JOE WASSER

Here is the story of my encounter with a formidable disease of breast cancer, how I fought with it and survived it.

I am 65 years old and it was quite a surprise and astonishment when I spotted a few drops of blood in my brassiere. I first thought it is due to friction and abrasion of my nipple with my undergarment. Hence I ignored it for some time. But it recurred after four days and I told my husband, who himself is a doctor. He decided to consult Dr. Shefali Desai, a renowned Breast Surgeon at Samved Hospital, Amdavad. She advised me to get a Mammogram and Ultrasonography done as well as the Nipple discharge was taken on a slide to be sent for cytological examination. I was a bit scared, but I decided to be positive and focus on what was good for me in that situation. The good thing was that I had taken action as soon as possible and consulted an expert and experienced Breast Surgeon. So I knew I was in safe and best hands.

Fortunately the lesion was small-about 1 cm (and behind the areola). I was advised to undergo Ductoscopy (Endoscopy of Breast ducts) guided excision (Microdochoectomy) and biopsy. I was praying and hoping it to be benign (non cancerous), but when it was reported to be Intraductal Papillary Carcinoma, the world seemed to be spinning around me and I was terribly afraid. But I was thankful to God for sending me to Dr. Shefali Desai, who is a very kind and compassionate human being, apart from being a very well experienced surgeon. She explained to me very patiently and elaborately about the cancer I had. She gave me solace saying it was a very early diagnosis, an early stage, which had not spread beyond the breast. This gave me huge comfort and I was a little more calm. Of course, I was very anxious and worried about what is going to happen to me. I was advised complete removal of the breast, because of the type of cancer I had, along with sampling of the lymph nodes in the axilla to rule out the spread of the tumour there.

She explained to me about every step to be taken and the plan of action very patiently, understanding my emotional status. I could not imagine myself devoid of one of my breasts. My life seemed to be meaningless and I could not help crying. But I gathered the courage, told myself that if I wanted to survive, I had to choose what is good for me. I need to think and focus on what is right for me. I prepared my mind for the surgery after some further investigations (MRI & PET Scan) to make sure that it has not spread anywhere else. The lymph nodes were clear and the final biopsy showed a localized disease with a Hormone positive status. I was relieved to hear that I will not require Chemotherapy or Radiation therapy as the disease was diagnosed at an extremely early stage. I was advised Hormonal treatment and a follow up every six months.

Today I can happily say that at the end of 9 months of surgery I was settled into my routine life and today I am doing absolutely fine at the end of 3.5 years. I am thankful to Almighty and Dr. Shefali Desai for everything which was done to save my life, along with a great support from my husband, which made me go through the journey very smoothly.



DR. SUCHITA CHAUBAL

“LIFE IS NOT MEANT TO BE EASY, IT IS MEANT TO BE LIVED,
BUT WITH EVERY UP AND DOWN,
YOU LEARN LESSONS THAT MAKE YOU STRONG!”

April 2020, the world was struggling to fight the pandemic of Corona Virus. All were at a standstill, sitting home in lockdowns, suddenly connected in the feeling that humans are helpless in front of a virus causing havoc globally. Today, as I sit down to write my journey through cancer, somehow COVID 19 is so fearful that the word cancer does not have its earlier effect anymore!

I remember hearing the words 'cancer' and 'chemotherapy' from my extended family. Luckily both my parents never had it. So we were not worried.

God blessed me with two children and a good family life. As an Ayurvedic doctor, I practiced only for ten years after marriage as my husband got frequently transferred. Finally, he was posted as a chief engineer at Gandhinagar and we moved to Amdavad. I studied Hospital management and started teaching management to higher secondary students at my mother's tuition classes as per her wish! When my son was in his second year of Computer Engineering and daughter was in the 10th grade, I heard the word cancer again!

In December 2006, I was 43 years old. One fine day, when I was rolling chapatis in my kitchen, I experienced throbbing pain in my right breast. It passed and I continued rolling out chapatis but it came again and again. I somehow finished my work in the kitchen and went for a bath. The first thing I did was my own breast examination. To my shock, I found a small button sized lump in right breast just below the nipple. I was numb and started thinking of the worst. My family history pointed to breast cancer. In the evening, I told my husband. We went to a speciality hospital near us and consulted a surgeon in the oncology department. I was apprehensive and wished I could consult a lady doctor!! He told us to go for sonography and mammography the next day. The lump was suspicious for cancer, a biopsy was done and it was reported as cancerous. I was operated exactly a week after I had pain.

My chemotherapy started 21 days after the operation. My mother was over the initial shock and gave all the help needed like even bringing evening meals and managing the classes alone. I had bouts of vomiting, which lasted 3 to 4 days after chemotherapy. I had to postpone the 4th and 5th rounds due to less count of WBCs. Now I was bald and weak. My nails looked blackish. I completed 6 cycles of chemotherapy and was eager to go out and start work. I had spells of giddiness when I went out. My daughter's board exams were over and we all put up a brave front. After 6 months, I started going to the classes against my husband's wish.

I began my Radiotherapy sessions. I was strong and talked with fellow patients there. In one more month all the treatment was over. I had bought a wig and life was coming to normal slowly. I remained positive all throughout, all due to my two best friends, Pranayam and Yoga!

After a few follow ups we did the Ashtavinayak trip to thank God for my new life. My hands still had blackish discolouration, stiffness and some pain near the vein used for giving chemo. My hair was now growing and looked curly, one point that fascinated me. All my fat was gone and I was slimmer.

Years passed and only the fear of mammography remained with me. So I used to go only for

sonography in follow ups . After sometime I stopped the follow ups also. I was trained as a robotic teacher and was working with a company teaching stem education and robotics. I could not thank God enough for giving me the opportunity of learning programming and coding. I loved every bit of it!

One day while taking bath and doing the routine check up of self breast examination, I felt a small lump, this time in my left breast. I didn't want to believe it, but being a doctor I knew I had to act fast. I told my husband that I wanted a lady doctor. So next morning after some research, I landed up alone in Dr Shefali Desai's cabin. She examined me and advised mammography. I told her my previous experience.....here was a doctor who was ready to listen to her patients. Her sympathetic and encouraging attitude gave me the support I needed! She told that things were much advanced and I would not face any pain during mammographic examination. On her word, I did the mammography and she was right! I thanked the operator multiple times for the smooth mammography. I was very happy to know that the biopsy results were benign! My doctor told me I had to get the lump removed and she would send the tissue for biopsy on the operation table to be sure.(Frozen Section Biopsy). This was in June 2017. My son flew down from Hong Kong to be with me. We planned the operation for the coming week. My surgery was done and the result of the frozen section biopsy came out to be malignant during the operation, but the lump was completely removed. After discharge, when we met Dr Shefali madam for follow up, she wanted me to start my chemotherapy soon. I was reluctant and reminded her of the size of the lump, which was very small. On her advice we consulted the Oncologist who told about the new advances and fitting a port in the chest. Everyone wanted me to take chemo but my heart refused. I agreed to take Radiotherapy

We went to a centre where they had the most advanced machine for radiotherapy. I had a lot of pain, for which I consulted my Radiation Oncologist and also the previous surgeon, who had operated me, and they advised me a second surgery as it seemed that there is some blood collection(hematoma). But, I had full faith in Dr. Shefali madam, who had assured me, that applying icepacks along with some medicines would cure it. She asked me to be patient and wait for nature to take its course. So I followed her advice and went to her each week for a check up and I was completely fine in a few weeks.

I am living a full and healthy life now and I am forever thankful to Dr. Shefali Desai, not only for her expertise but for listening and even counselling my family members in the difficult times with correct advice. Thank you!



"THERE'S ALMOST ALWAYS SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT!"

Aaliyah Parker



RIZWANA MEER

“SHE STOOD IN THE STORM AND
WHEN THE WIND DID NOT BLOW HER WAY,
SHE ADJUSTED HER SAILS!”

Life's boat was sailing smoothly, of course with usual undercurrents and storms (obviously it is not always a Rajshree movie!).

Had a wonderful home, two lovely sons and a wonderful husband. But just before my 40th birthday, cupid struck. Not in the form of love, I was way past that, but in the form of big C. I felt a lump in my breast while doing self examination.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I knew nothing about it like most of us, until it knocked on my door.

Family panicked and we thought this was the end. But luckily, the doctor was like family and had sessions with us to ensure and reaffirm to us that, Cancer is curable and is not always terminal!

So the next few months were hectic. Mastectomy, Chemotherapy, Radiation and doctors' visits. After breast surgery, I thought, this is not as bad as it is made out to be. But once the Chemotherapy started, I realized, "Oh God this is going to be difficult." Couple of days after every chemo were terrible, but the good part is that my story is nearly 20 years old. Nowadays, even Chemotherapy is easier. With all the newer modalities in cancer treatment, it is not as bad as it used to be in the good old days.

I considered the side effects of hair loss and weight gain very minor, compared to the love, care and affection that I received from my near and dear ones.

God has made our species so strong that we are proud to handle all the stress without complexity. So Cheers to us and Adieu to Cancer!

JAYA PATEL

“I AM TOO POSITIVE TO BE DOUBTFUL,
TOO OPTIMISTIC TO BE FEARFUL,
AND TOO DETERMINED TO BE DEFEATED!”

I do not know how to express the feelings I had when I first came to know about something which one would not have expected to happen in one's life!

It was August 2017 when me and my husband went for a routine check up to our physician. It was then that my physician diagnosed a lump in my left breast. It needed to be investigated and sadly it turned out to be cancer! It was quite shocking as well as strange for both of us. "Why me??"

With a heavy heart we started taking opinion from different doctors and tried to find out who is the best doctor. The entire process was very confusing and stressful. Finally we searched on web and found the name of a doctor who was quite experienced and having her own way of treatment. We met Dr. Shefali Desai, who we found very calm and gentle! It was so important for us that she listened to my problem in details with patience, explained to me and my husband about the disease and the treatment that I was supposed to go through. She gave us a lot of strength. She told us very confidently that we should not get scared of the word "Cancer". She told me, "You are going to be fine and going to lead a normal life soon."

The surgery was done by her so well and she and her staff were so caring, that I felt I was totally in safe hands. After the surgery there were two tubes, which drained the accumulated fluid, but I could move around freely and do my routine work. I was also advised upper limb physiotherapy. Dr. Desai made me understand the importance of the exercises, to prevent the swelling of the arm due to removal of the lymph nodes in the armpit. Hence I did physiotherapy, which was advised to me, religiously. Hence, to date I have no swelling over the arm. I would strongly advise all women who undergo lymph node removal to follow this very strictly to have a normally functional arm without any swelling (lymphoedema).

Dr. Shefali Desai came to our life and became a family member. We follow her advice and go for regular check ups. "Thank you" may not be enough to express the greatness of madam! I pray to God to give her a healthy and long life so that she can help many others like me and bless people with her treatment.



RUSIN HOOSSEIN

**"THE POTENTIAL WITHIN YOU IS GREATER
THAN THE OBSTACLES AROUND YOU!"**

Matshona Dhilwayo

I was born and raised in Zimbabwe as a devout Muslim. I am a mother of 2 children and am working as an accountant for over 45 years. I have a mixed heritage hailing from Indian grandfathers from the Gujarat region and African grandmothers from Zimbabwe.

I am involved in humanitarian work nationally. I feel, there is no job too big or too small. I take each task with a smile and an incredibly positive attitude.

Sadly, on 26 January 2017, I was diagnosed with breast cancer and sought a second opinion in Zimbabwe. Not satisfied with the results, I went to Johns Hopkins Hospital in the United States of America. I was still not happy with my diagnosis and decided to go to India in July of that same year, as my instinct told me that I would be given the correct treatment in India. My instincts were correct. I visited Samved Breast Clinic, through my relative. Dr. Desai went through all the reports. I had metastatic disease and I was given treatment instantly and was better there after. While going through the treatment, I carried on with my job as an accountant manager and conducted many charity programs. The cancer did not stop me even though some days were worse than others. I still carried on with great determination and positivity!



KIRAN DESAI

“WHEN FEAR KNOCKS, LET FAITH ANSWER THE DOOR!”

Robin Roberts

I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2022 around Diwali. Obviously it was shocking at first for me, but I decided to accept it very positively and I made up my mind that I will fight this and bid it goodbye. Having lost my husband just a year ago, the news was extremely difficult especially for my two daughters to accept. Even for me, in this position I felt very lonely because no one could have taken care of me better than my husband. My younger one studies in Australia and she broke down, ready to leave everything she is working for, just for me. My elder daughter flew all the way from Africa to be with me throughout my treatment. This made me even stronger and I decided to fight this battle for my girls. My family's support, elder's blessings and my Thakorji (God) have been my constant guidance. It is with these blessings that my journey started and is ongoing with a great team of doctors, as I write this.

My surgeon Dr. Shefali Desai and my Oncophysician, have guided me correctly, helped me take my decisions promptly at the right time and made me believe in the power of womanhood, especially after my surgery. I had a huge lump in my breast and my doctors decided to make the lump smaller (downstaging the disease, as they call it) by giving Chemotherapy and Targeted therapy. Once my PET scan report was clear, Dr Desai operated upon me. Her entire team took amazing care of me while I was there and made me confident during the entire process. I will start my radiation and the rest of the Targeted therapy soon and I am sure I will get through this journey with a smile on my face as always.

Friends, my dear women, cancer is something that comes knocking without warning. Our only option is to accept the next long journey. So my advice to you is do not be afraid, be positive, accept the situation and make your faith stronger. Tell yourself, "This is nothing, I WILL deal with this." You will definitely get out of it in a better and healthier way. My spirituality and belief in my Thakorji (God) has helped me through this and it will continue to do so.



NISHITA SHETH

“YOU ARE BRAVER THAN YOU BELIEVE,
STRONGER THAN YOU SEEM,
SMARTER THAN YOU THINK, AND
TWICE AS AWESOME AS YOU EVER IMAGINED!”

You could say I have had a good life. A great supportive family and friends who I love, children who I adore, including my son-in-law, who is so good that I could not have asked for anyone better for my daughter. But when everything was going just fine, there was unseen trouble just lurking around the corner.

I remember the day crystal clear. I had just gone to bed after a long day. I turned on one side when I first felt my chest heavy. Brushing it off as stress and overwork for my daughter's wedding, I forced myself to sleep. But the next day, the pain worsened. That is also when a good friend dropped by to help out with the wedding preparations. Since she was a friend, I asked her to check my breast and she too felt a lump.

It was 5th November 2018. "I'm sorry to tell you this, but you have breast cancer," my doctor informed me. How could it be though, I wondered! I had got a mammogram done six months ago.

I was scared, worried and cried. Amidst this happy, joyous environment, how was it possible that something so negative could creep in? At this time, I was not sure how my family would react. And I knew that however they did, it would greatly impact how I would later deal with the entire journey. So when my husband Kunal said, "It's okay. We will deal with this together," I felt the weight on my shoulders get lighter. He was someone who would not leave my side, no matter what happened. Suddenly I knew I had the power and courage to deal with it, and I knew that I had the motivation to stay strong, stay alive and enjoy rest of my life. And Kunal stayed true to his word. Despite the hair loss and the weight gain, he looked at me the same way he did before. But I won't lie. There were instances when I felt lonely. My helper, said, "Madam, if you lose hope, what will happen to your daughter Reeya?" And that is what hit me hard. I knew I was a pillar for my daughter's wedding. If I turned weak, would I be able to ever forgive myself for not giving her the wedding that she truly deserved? That I truly wanted her to have? After completing all the destination wedding festivities, we returned to India on November 21st.

I was admitted on November 23rd and operated the next day. I remember being wheeled in the Operation Theatre not being sure whether I will come out alive! But today here I am, fit and fine, healthy and happy!

Cancer is not easy to deal with and my only wish is that no one ever has to go through it. It is painful and tiring. But if you remain positive, it will be a smooth journey. After the surgery was over, drains removed and the wound being healed well, my chemotherapy sessions started. To tell you the truth, there are times when I take a long time to finish my work. But I also decided to pursue my hobbies that I had brushed under the carpet for long. I started working full time in my life at the age of 48 years! I have also not missed out on a single session of work out. I make sure that I eat healthy food and give myself enough rest too. It may have taken a disease to teach me this, but I feel it brought out the best in me and I feel I am a better person now!

In hindsight, I don't even remember certain days. I am only reminded of them when someone in my presence talks about them. But the journey taught me a lot. I know I had ignored my family in the past, but in this time of need, whenever I asked them to be present, they were there, without any question or hesitation.

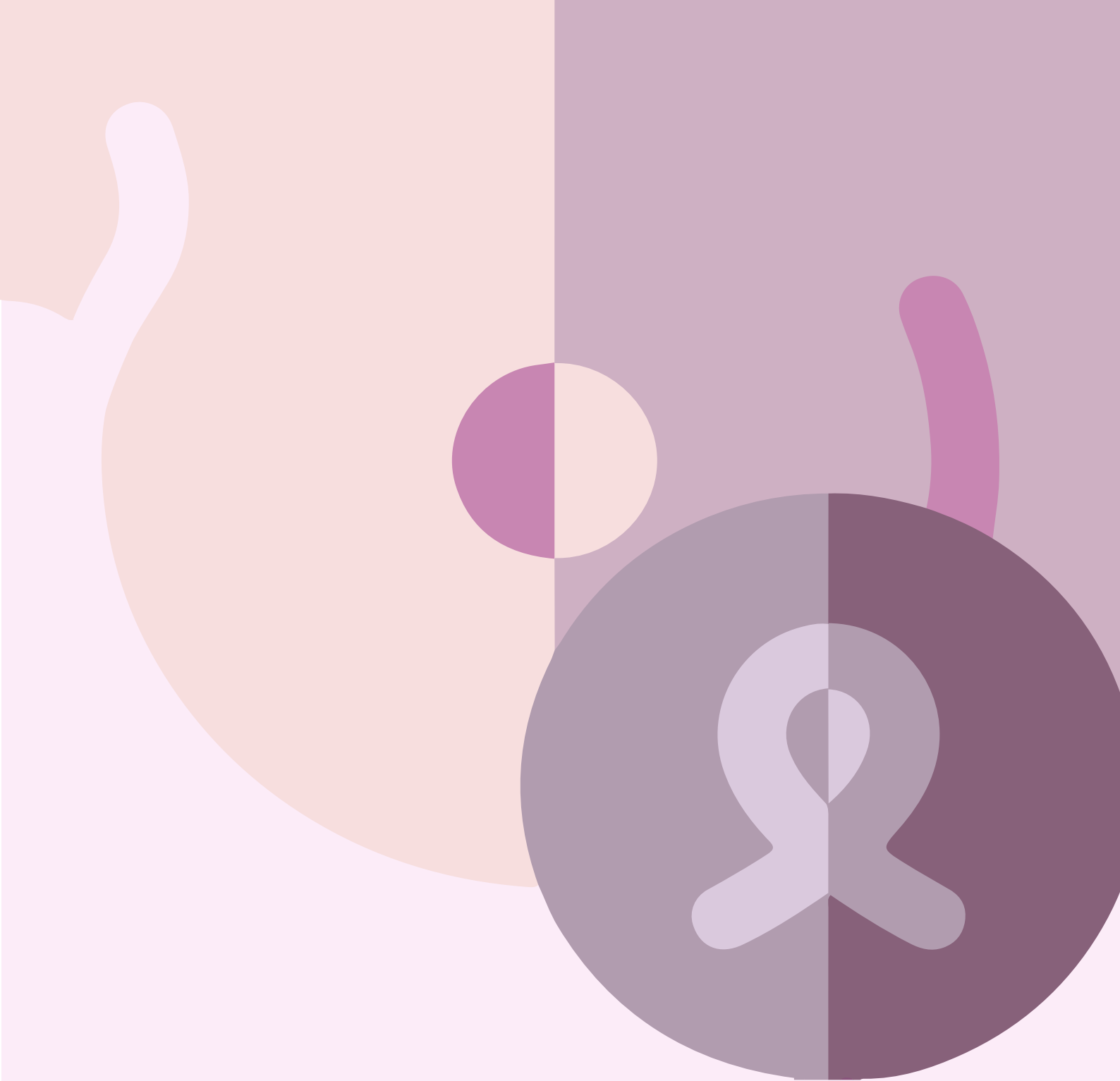
I want to take this opportunity to thank my surgeon and dear friend Dr. Shefali Desai, for not only helping me and constantly holding my hand throughout this journey, but also for the work she does for raising awareness on breast cancer. Her annual walkathon, THE PINK PARADE is commendable to say the least.

I would like to thank Dr. Desai, for calling me twice a day to check if I had taken my medications and to check how I was. Despite her seniority and expertise in this field, she was constantly present to help me through this phase, and simply her presence was soothing not only for me, but also for my family.

It would not be true if I would give all the credit to myself for sailing through this phase of my life. It was the unwavering familial support and constant positivity radiating from my friends. Sometimes I cannot believe I endured so much pain. Amidst the thunder of celebrations, I found my voice to deal with the devil!

Lastly, to everyone reading this and/or going through something similar, my request and message is that every woman should examine herself regularly, go to the specialist at least once a year and get tested routinely. Listen to your doctor.

Five steps to be taken seem like a hundred miles, but do it...
Walk those hundred miles.
Because in the end, it all would have been worth it!



“TODAY IS ENOUGH!”

Josh Taylor



POOJA BHATIA

“LIFE IS NOT ABOUT WAITING FOR THE STORM TO PASS,
“IT IS ABOUT LEARNING TO DANCE IN THE RAIN!”

Vivian Green

In December 2021, I could feel a lump in my left breast. However, as it was painless, I was ignoring it. With time, it kept on increasing in size. I assumed it was not a cancerous lump. But, in December 2022, I decided to get it removed, even if it was a benign lump. I underwent a few tests like mammography and sonography, which showed a suspicious lump. My doctor advised a biopsy, which showed it to be cancerous. Hence other tests and PETCT scan were done, which showed Stage 2 Breast cancer. It was a tough time for me and my family, but Dr Shefali Desai and her team were very kind and supportive. Since my lump was small and I went to my doctor at an early stage, the doctor could save my breast instead of removing the whole breast. I was so happy about that!

I underwent chemotherapy and radiation therapy after surgery and now I am on hormonal therapy. Chemotherapy was also available at Samved Breast Clinic and the Oncologist was very competent and humble. Later, I underwent Radiation therapy as recommended by Dr Shefali. The whole process takes time and requires patience. Today, I am cancer free and have got a new life.

Many women are dying of breast cancer due to lack of awareness and hence presenting to the doctor at an advanced stage. However, if detected at an early stage, it is curable. We must always be vigilant when it comes to our health and take immediate action.



NILAM GANDHI

“CANCER CHANGES US, BUT IT IS UP TO US TO DECIDE
WHAT THAT CHANGE WILL MEAN TO OUR LIVES AND
WHO WE WILL BECOME AS A RESULT!”

Britta Aragon

I still recall the day when I was diagnosed with breast cancer, 10th December 2019. The world turned upside down at that moment for me. I had a feeling that my life was on the verge of ending but by the grace of God, we were recommended to see Dr. Shefali Desai, by our family friend. After we consulted her on 14th December, we were spellbound by her optimistic approach and apart from that her encouragement and assurance, gave me the strength to face the tough times.

I had a huge lump, which I had ignored for sometime. I was advised a biopsy, after which I had to undergo a series of tests including a whole body scan(PET Scan) to know if it had spread anywhere else in the body. Fortunately it had not! But it could not be operated first as it was large. Hence I was advised to start chemotherapy first to downstage the disease and make the lump small enough to be operated to have a complete clearance and a better result. I was given chemotherapy every 14th day, a total of 8 doses, followed by operation, which took place on 5th May 2020.

With the emotional support of my doctor and my husband, the whole procedure went off very smoothly. Not only that but the facilities which Samved hospital provided were also exceptional, especially during the time of the pandemic. All the norms and protocols were followed during that phase, which made me feel very safe and secure.

After the surgical procedure was done, I had to undergo radiation therapy, a few days after my drains were removed. There were 15 sessions of Radiation. This was the last leg of my treatment. On 19th June, after going through my reports, my doctor informed me that cancer was eradicated fully from my body. That was the most heart warming moment as I overcame the deadliest disease with the support of doctors, family and friends and blessings of God.

In a nutshell, I would definitely like to say that the encounter with cancer for me was a rollercoaster ride which was resolved by the expert Dr. Shefali and her team. I would always be grateful for her optimism and helpful nature.



MYSHA PAIKRA

“OPTIMISM IS THE FAITH THAT LEADS TO ACHIEVEMENT,
“NOTHING CAN BE DONE WITHOUT HOPE AND CONFIDENCE!”

I am living with my spouse Niyaz and daughter Nyela in Valsad. I am a Deputy Manager at the State Bank of India. I was on maternity leave after my daughter's birth and was happily enjoying my motherhood with my daughter along with my parents in Madhya Pradesh, when I noticed a small knot in my left breast sometime in October 2016. I talked to my mother about it and we all thought it could be due to clogging of milk, since there was no pain. When I returned to Valsad, I talked to my husband about it as the lump was still there after 3 months. We consulted our Gynaecologist and was advised a series of investigations. To my utter surprise the lump was suspicious of being cancerous! I was just 28 years old!!!! The ground slipped under my feet! I told my husband and tears could not stop flowing from my eyes, since I had delivered just before 6 months! I thought my world and life has ended. What will my daughter do without me?! My husband also did not know what to say as he was also shocked. But he was mature enough to control his emotions and decided to be calm as the reports stated that it was an initial stage of the disease.

We were advised to see Dr Shefali Desai by our friends and well wishers. She studied my entire case and gave me strength and encouragement to undergo the treatment. She advised me to undergo breast preservation surgery as I was young and fortunate enough to have an early disease. Also, the disease was not unfavourable as it was a Hormone Positive cancer. This gave me solace as losing the breast would have been very traumatic for me. My mother and husband were by me too to support me go through this. The surgery went off very well and I also recovered very well. The most difficult part was chemotherapy. As I was young, my doctor advised me to take chemotherapy to prevent recurrence. It was a tough time, but I knew I had to do this for my family and I did not let it show on my face. I decided to be strong and I sailed through it.

If your mind and body are strong, you can face any hurdle that comes through your way!

I wish no one would get this dreaded disease, but what is important is that we should get ourselves checked up with the slightest doubt, do self examination as that is the best way to diagnose the condition. Get yourself checked up by a specialist every year and get your sonogram and mammogram done at an appropriate age.

Today after 6 years of surgery I am fighting fit!

