



**May Lorah – 2015 Susan G. Komen Inland Empire Race for the Cure®  
Honorary Breast Cancer Survivor-Temecula**

The word cancer means something different to everyone. For me it was breast cancer, and immediately I thought, “Wow, is this how I’m going to die?” Both my parents passed away from cancer: my mom had stomach cancer and my dad had bladder cancer.

My journey began with a series of annoying hot flashes. I was getting about 15 a day, crazy eh? And it was starting to become unbearable. In September 2013, my gynecologist said there was a solution to these “personal summers:” Minivelle patches. I got a mammogram as well, and my provider said there was some dense tissue, but otherwise it looked good. I started using the patches and voila, 2 weeks later no hot flashes!!

I felt normal, even fabulous now that I wasn’t screaming at my husband and kids anymore, who were so used to fanning me with paper plates whenever a hot flash emerged. Life was good again.

Then, in April 2014 I noticed a small lump in my left breast. Since my last mammogram results were good, I thought it must be a fibroid cyst, as I use to get them when I was on birth control pills. No biggie. A few months later, I had an appointment for a cardiac stress test with nuclear dye, due to my atrial fibrillation (which is controlled by medication). A week later I get a call from my cardiologist with the results, he said, “Your heart looks really good but I’m concerned about something I saw in the left breast. I would like you to get it checked out immediately.” I thought it must be that Fibroid cyst so I called my GP. The phone call was all it took to get an ultrasound ordered and general surgeon referral immediately. I had the ultrasound biopsy done on July 2<sup>nd</sup>, and got the results 5 days later over the phone. I’ll never forget that moment when he said it was cancer. I hung up that phone and just started crying like a baby, my middle daughter looked at me and started crying with me. After a few minutes I looked at her and said now that we got this out of our system the fight begins. I called my husband, next my oldest daughter who was at college. We cried a bit and prayed a lot, and she reminded me that I should give my worries to Jesus. I called my sister, and then was my youngest daughter, who took it like a champ.

After my visit with the general surgeon he told me that I was triple positive. I had absolutely no idea what that meant. He explained to me that [there are 3 kinds of receptors they look for in breast cancer, 1 was estrogen, 2 was progesterone and 3 the Her 2 protein] I had them all and in that moment I realized I just wanted to talk to someone who knew what I was going through. I started with just telling one friend at a time and everyone was introducing me to a friend who was a cancer survivor. I could not believe how many women in this town had undergone this same challenge with different outcomes, and was even more surprised by how much they shared with me and encouraged me. I became friends with many women because of our shared struggle. I even got incredible advice from men who had wives affected with breast cancer. I was like a sponge that kept absorbing all the words of comfort and wisdom. I also turned to the internet. Yeah, I know they say too much information was scary, but not for me. Knowledge meant power, even if that knowledge wasn’t necessarily what I wanted to hear. I just wanted to be prepared for anything.

In August I had a Lymph node biopsy. They took out the sentinel lymph node and 2 other ones. 2 were negative and the sentinel had isolated cells, which means that eventually it would have passed on the cancer cells to the other lymph nodes.

Now that I had all the cards on the table, it was time to choose my treatment game plan. Doctors gave me options, and I prayed about it and discussed it with my husband and family. Chemo 6 sessions every 3 weeks, bilateral mastectomy for sure, and maybe radiation depending how everything went. One step at a time. My first chemo began on September 2, and I remember every chemo day vividly. My husband went with me on the first session, and my sister went with me on the second. After that I thought I would rather do this by myself. I didn't want to entertain anyone I just wanted to relax and distract myself with TV and phone games. So many friends wanted to help and visit once I was settled back at home, but I just wanted to be left alone, not because I was feeling sorry for myself but I just didn't feel good. I'm one of those personality that if I had someone with me I would have to entertain the whole time, so being alone was much more peaceful for me.

In October 2014 my friends started a team for the Susan G. Komen Inland Empire Race for the Cure® in my name. Since I just had Chemo that week I wasn't able to make it, so they decided that the name of the team should be "May, we be strong". I felt so honored that they would take the time out of their busy schedules. They made shirts, tutus, and signs. That was the day I realized how important Susan G. Komen® Inland Empire was, not just for helping in raising funds to fight cancer, find a cure and raising awareness. For me it was about the love and the commitment that your family and friends have for you and the time they are willing to spend to show you. Komen Inland Empire gave my loved ones the opportunity and the outlet to show me what I meant to them. That meant the world to me.

As time went by and after every chemo session, all I wanted to do was sleep. Everything tasted awful; even water was hard to drink. I became dehydrated and had to go in for IV fluids 2 times a week. And let me tell you, driving from Temecula to Rancho Bernardo 2-3 times a week was pretty tiring, but at least the drive was beautiful. I would feel horrible for 2 weeks and when I started being able to eat again it was time for another session, YUK!

December 16<sup>th</sup> was my last major Chemo day, and I couldn't believe how fast time had gone by. I got through Christmas and was still alive, thank the Lord. I was so grateful to have made it through and be alive for another day. I got through the worst part of chemo, and only had the 9 more sessions of the "easy-chemo," Herceptin.

This February I decided to have a bilateral mastectomy, I didn't have to but I wanted to be safe now than sorry later, (also, I wanted my boobs to look good, can you blame me?). Mastectomy was so easy for me, especially since I had a fantastic doctor. Three days later I was out having sushi, with my drains in of course but still. The result were great, the margins were negative. After having long talks with the radiation oncologist, surgeons, family, friends, and fellow survivors, I opted not to have radiation. I am now in the middle of my reconstruction and I feel great. My last Herceptin is August 4<sup>th</sup> and the port comes out after that.

My biggest pieces of advice I can give are these: Knowledge is power, so learn as much as you can about *your* cancer. Be positive. Don't start second-guessing your decisions about treatment. Whatever decision you make, however, should be an informed one. Ask your provider questions, and ask them again and again until it is clear. Don't be afraid to reach out for help.

Cancer: It is what it is. This may sound real strange for some, but despite everything I feel so blessed to have gone through this, because I get to share with others, and love and encourage others the way I was loved and encouraged. We are more than cancer patients. We are women. We are survivors!! How great is that?