

CHARRON WALKER

VICTORIOUS WOMAN - NOVEMBER 2009



“My mother died from breast cancer at the age of 34, so I knew my sister or I would inherit the “Big C”, but I never thought it would be me.”

But it was. In October 2000, Charron Walker found the lump while doing a breast self-exam; she was later diagnosed with Stage One breast cancer. Charron was thirty-two years old, had just earned a Master’s Degree in Human Resource Development and was happy at her job doing training at the St. Vincent’s Medical Center in Florida. She thought she had her whole life ahead of her. Then, without warning, everything changed. “I’ve been given a death sentence,” Charron remembers thinking.

Suddenly, instead of figuring out what fun and engaging activities to add to her next training session, she was making life and death decisions with six doctors who poked and prodded her body. Emotionally, she went up and down from panic to the elated feeling that she would beat the disease and then back to fear and despair.

Over the next several years, Charron had a lumpectomy, chemotherapy, radiation and hormone therapy. She didn’t have an easy time of it. There were plenty of physical problems related to her treatment. Not only did she lose her hair but every medication had bad side effects and she was constantly weak.

As the months wore on, Charron found her greater battles were mental and emotional. Since breast cancer usually affects women who are somewhat older than Charron, she found a lack of resources for women her age. Her boyfriend at the time was also her caregiver and her greatest support. But, as a single woman with cancer, she didn’t know how to handle dating or maintaining relationships. Also, she wondered if she could have children, or if she would have an early menopause. Of course, Charron also realized that those things might never even be an issue. Her young age and family history lent itself to a higher mortality rate and more aggressive cancer.

All the thoughts running through Charron’s mind resulted in sleepless nights and, when she did finally sleep, she was plagued with nightmares. Her doctor put her on medication for depression, but it wasn’t much help. Thinking back on some of those nights, Charron says she remembers while “lying on my bed, I prayed for God to take me because I didn’t have the strength to go on.”

In the middle of all of the turmoil, Charron’s department was downsized. She lost her job and had to find another one. Job search is bad enough for anyone; for Charron, doing it during cancer treatment added a whole new dimension to her challenge.

Fortunately, Charron *did* find another job. Through it, she transferred from Florida back to her home state of New York, on Long Island.

Though she joined a cancer support group and the women in her group wanted to be sympathetic and encouraging, she was the youngest one and felt out of place. Her

concerns about making friends, dating and children – most of them were past that stage of their life. To fill the gap and to have someone who would listen to her specific needs, Charron began seeing a therapist. In 2006, at the therapist's suggestion, Charron started a support group specifically for younger women. She called it the Young Survivors Network or YSN.

For the first couple years, Charron worked full time during the day and ran the Young Survivors Network at night. Since she was providing a service that was often overlooked in most cancer treatment centers, the network grew quickly. However, if she was going to grow the organization to accommodate the increasing need, Charron would have to find financial support for her work. She discovered that she could get grants to help, but she had no experience writing grant proposals. So she read books from the library and studied how to write the words. It was tedious and she had her share of rejections, but slowly she began to get funding. At the same time, she went to local businesses and asked them to provide services to YSN members at a discount. She also began hosting fund-raising events.

In the past year, Charron has dedicated herself to YSN full time with an intention to help as many women as possible. As YSN grows and Charron finds her way in uncharted territory, she admits she's "making mistakes but learning from them and talking to people who are subject matter experts" and they are graciously helping her. She's rediscovered her relationship with God. Charron says she understands that, "My relationship with God, each job I held, each class I took, each challenge I encountered, my father being a Pastor, each valuable lesson learned and each individual that was in my life was there for a reason and were pieces of a bigger picture."

Through YSN, young women with cancer can find support groups, services and workshops on breast health and early detection as well as programs to help them build positive and supportive relationships. YSN also provides a "Helping Hand Program" for those undergoing chemo or radiations treatments – everything from house cleaning and transportation to massage therapy.

Cancer has given Charron a different perspective on life. Now in her forties, Charron chooses to surround herself with people who are positive and have a purposeful direction to their lives. She's decided that "life is too short to be wasted on unforgiveness, confusion and negativity. I don't worry about the small stuff, I choose my battles. I put my trust in God and I strive to live life to the fullest."

Congratulations, Charron!

*You shaped your personal challenges into victories for yourself,
and then turned them into help and resources for others.*

*We hope there will soon be a cure for breast cancer, but until then,
we applaud your good work for young cancer survivors.*

**Read more about Charron Walker and the Young Survivors Network at
<http://www.youngsurvivorsnetwork.org>**