



“You’re my only daughter, and it makes me so scared for you”

Joann (left) and Jessica Deliz, Detroit

When Joann, a mom of four grown children, found a lump, she put off telling her family, including her daughter, Jessica.

JOANN: I found the lump and I didn’t want to say anything to anyone about it because your brother Jeff was having shoulder surgery, and I wanted to be there for him. The next week, I did say something to Dad. I got into bed and said, “I think I need to have a lump checked.” I had him feel it and he got this really scared look on his face. When I got the diagnosis, I didn’t cry, but it felt like an out-of-body experience. It was this weird feeling, like a quiet rushing over me. I hate the word *cancer*. I told my doctors, “Let’s refer to it as my ‘diagnosis.’” I think the word sounds nasty and negative.

JESSICA: Who do you feel it was the hardest to tell?

JOANN: It was hardest to tell you, because you’re my only daughter, and it makes me so scared for you. I have two aunts on Grandma’s side who had breast cancer.

JESSICA: I can completely picture the day you told us.

JOANN: Remember we had that torrential storm?

JESSICA: Yes. It’s kind of weird. There was a storm, and a storm in our house. You were afraid you were going to start crying and you were going to get me upset. Dad said it as plain as day: Mom has breast cancer.

JOANN: Your dad was very stoic. Starting the Belief Foundation—that has been his way of dealing with it. He started it with good friends of ours. I wanted local help for the women I saw every day when I was having chemo. There was one woman who didn’t have the money for the anti-nausea medication. It was \$400 for the shot. Her insurance wouldn’t cover it. And my heart just broke, because I knew she was going to be so ill when she got home.

JESSICA: You had people in your life helping you. Were you surprised by some of the attention you got?

JOANN: When you go through something like this, you truly find out who your friends are. They’re going to be there when you’re bald and feeling ugly to tell you how beautiful you look and help you try on different hats. But I will tell you this, I will never send flowers again to somebody who is sick. The money could be used to purchase a meal for that person when they can’t cook. Now, whenever somebody is sick, I always find out where they like to eat and get a gift certificate.

JESSICA: I’ll never forget when your hair first started coming out and you had me cut it so that it was even.

“The diagnosis felt like an out-of-body experience, a quiet rushing over me.”

You looked in the mirror and said, “For the first time, I actually look like a cancer patient,” and you broke down really bad. Why do you think it hit you so hard?

JOANN: Because I think deep down all women have a little bit of vanity. I’m not big into makeup, but your hair, it’s like an identity thing, I think. It was kind of shocking, wasn’t it? Wasn’t it fun, though, when you could color it and did all the different colors?

JESSICA: It was!

“Breast cancer made us reconnect”

Timothy A. Lukas and Claudia E. Ortega-Lukas, Reno, NV



Tim and Claudia are the parents of two sons. Claudia was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 45.

TIM: How do you think this experience has changed our relationship?

CLAUDIA: I think it has made us a lot stronger, because it’s made me understand how you function, how you interpret the world around you. I think there was a point where I was feeling sort of disconnected and I wasn’t sure why. When we talked about my diagnosis, you didn’t say much, but the way you reacted, you have been by my side the whole time. You have.

TIM: I’ve always been there and I always will be. Right before you got sick, we had so many things going on. Maybe if there’s anything that’s a blessing from having to go through such an ordeal, it’s the ability to slow your life down a little bit—to have a greater appreciation of what matters the most. I like volunteering, I like doing things, but we have only so many nights in the week, with the boys growing up and becoming men...

CLAUDIA: Breast cancer did slow us down a little, and I think it made us reconnect at a different level. You know, I don’t think that otherwise it would have been possible.

TIM: I love you.

CLAUDIA: I love you too. ●