

"I can show my family that I gave it my all. I tried. I fought..."

A JOURNEY OF STRENGTH & FAITH

BREYANA SEGURA

She confidently sat in her oversize chair, broadcasting her perfectly round, bald head awaiting the next question.

"I do not want people to be afraid or weirded out by my baldness," she said. "I want to make this a norm, so I am not going to wear my wrap."

Just over a year ago, on-the-go, mother of three, Rhonda Gonzales was just living the life. She had a full-time job managing a residential area, tending to her husband, raising her children, and enjoying her grandchildren – then it came, the news that changed her life.

Cancer.

Invasive mammary carcinoma triple negative breast cancer.

Triple negative breast cancer is more aggressive and difficult to treat, as the three common receptors are not present in the cancer tumor. Estrogen, Progesterone, and the HER-2/neu gene fuel breast cancer, since these are not present, common treatments like hormone therapy are ineffective.

Rhonda has been proactive in her mammograms since 2014 after her classmate, Belma Torres was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"She was my friend, we went to school together, she was young and that was enough to get me to start checking."

It wasn't until Rhonda did a self-breast exam that she discovered a hard, marble-size knot under her left breast.

"If there is one thing I want to tell women, if it does not feel normal or hurts, go to the doctor," she advises.

Knowing in her gut the knot she had discovered was not 'right', she immediately scheduled an appointment at a local clinic. Within a week, Rhonda found herself face-to-face with a reality that crushed every part of her being.

On April 20, 2017, the courageous woman was joined by her husband, Jessie; best friend, Barbie; and daughter, Marissa. Doctors told her she not only had cancer on her breast but there were two spots on her lungs.

At the time the spots on her lungs were too small for biopsies, therefore, the doctor diagnosed her with Stage 2 cancer and immediately began an aggressive regimen of chemotherapy in the hopes of curing the 47 year-old mother, wife, grandmother, and daughter.

"It was during football season of Matthew's senior year," she said fighting through tears. "I made sure I did everything I could to be at every game."

That June when she went for her first treatment, the shock became reality, the dream became real, and until September she prayed for a miracle.

Chemotherapy did not work.

The cancer grew.

After starting her second round of treatment, Gonzales was hit with news the tumor exhibited no signs of reacting.

She struggled with the decision to get a lymphadectomy or mastectomy due to fear of additional spreading

She sat up in her chair and bluntly said.

"It is my decision, it is my body, and women need to know that. Don't rely on your family or friends to make it for you, just ask them for their support."

Eight months after being diagnosed, Rhonda underwent a double mastectomy with reconstructive surgery on December 14, 2017. Her breasts were recreated with tissue from her stomach, 'from my own flesh'.

The eight-hour surgery did not compare to the recovery she endured for the next few months. "My family is amazing," she smiled. "I had four drainage tubes. You know they don't have to do the things they do for me, but they do."

Surgery gave Rhonda the hope she desperately needed, but the results from a February doctors' visit left her heartbroken and helpless.