



# BREAST CANCER AWARENESS

## Positive Impact

Three-time breast cancer survivor says diagnosis & reconstruction 'best thing to ever happen'

By Janice Youngwith

Each year more than 250,000 American women face the reality of either invasive or noninvasive breast cancer.

For some like Maria Willer, a Winfield mother of four, that reality happens more than once.

"I've heard the diagnosis three times and there's a reason I'm still here," says Willer, a 32-year customer service coordinator at Carol Stream-based Spraying Systems.

Willer was a newly divorced mom with two young children when she first learned of her initial breast cancer diagnosis in 1989.

"It was a lump on my left breast and a simple itch which turned into something much more," she recalls. "I was only 32 and couldn't imagine what it might be."

Breast cancer was likely one of the farthest things from her mind.

A lumpectomy and six weeks of radiation therapy left her cancer free, until a 2001 mammogram helped doctors pinpoint a suspicious micro calcification in her right breast. Willer heard the diagnosis for a second time and again opted for a lumpectomy and radiation.

"When last year's digital mammogram showed other suspicious dots, I knew immediately what the diagnosis would be," Willer explains. "The breast cancer was back."



**Maria Willer (far right), Winfield, credits her family and friends with support during her three-time breast cancer battle.**

### 10 quick ways to make a difference

Are you interested in becoming active in the breast cancer community, but you don't have much time? Try our easy tips and help create change.

- 1) Become an advocate! Sign up for e-mail alerts at [www.networkofstrength.org/advocacy](http://www.networkofstrength.org/advocacy) and Network of Strength Advocacy will let you know when to take action.
- 2) Make an appointment for your annual mammogram and/or routine clinical exam.
- 3) Remind three friends to schedule their annual mammograms and/or routine clinical exams.
- 4) Call or e-mail a breast cancer patient and let her know you're thinking of her.

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Three-time breast cancer survivor says diagnosis & reconstruction 'best thing to ever happen'

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Her suspicions were confirmed when doctors biopsied the dots and diagnosed a more aggressive stage 2 breast cancer.

"In January, I had a double mastectomy and began planning for breast reconstruction," states Willer, who says that as unbelievable as it may sound, the entire breast cancer journey has been the best thing to ever happen to her.

"The goodness, kindness of others and outpouring of support has been a bright light to me," she says. "Family, friends and co-workers shed tears and shared laughter which is the best medicine. That and a strong faith in God and each other helped me during the most difficult times."

At the time of her mastectomy, Dr. Bahram Ghaderi, a board certified plastic and reconstructive surgeon in practice since 2001, began Willer's reconstructive process by placing temporary implants called tissue expanders. Willer later scheduled a series of weekly injections or fills of her tissue expanders to help stretch her remaining chest skin and reconstruct her breasts. The reconstruction process was completed in May with the placement of her permanent implants.

Dr. Ghaderi, who sees patients in offices at St. Charles Plastic Surgery, says building a close working relationship with patients is key as women face a most trying period in their lives. Breast reconstruction, he says, can have a very significant and positive impact on the healing process after mastectomy surgery - both physically and psychologically.

According to Dr. Ghaderi, the greatest reward is to see patients like Maria Willer recover and return to normal daily routines.

"By May, I was able to participate in my first ever Breast Cancer Network of Strength Mother's Day Walk To Empower," Willer says. "My family walked with me and we walked strong. They were there for me during the entire journey and I couldn't have made it without them."

5) Make a donation in support of a Ride to Empower participant at [www.networkofstrength.org/getinvolved](http://www.networkofstrength.org/getinvolved).

6) Register to vote so you can support the candidates who align best with your views on health care.

7) Check out our partner merchandise this October in support of Network of Strength.

8) Plant bulbs in honor or memory of someone who has made a difference in your breast cancer journey. In the spring, you'll brighten the neighborhood with fresh flowers.

9) Pass on a copy of Lifeline to someone who may not know about Network of Strength's programs and services.

10) Donate clean, gently used wigs and prostheses to Network of Strength's Wig & Prosthesis Bank by mailing them to:

Network of Strength 300 W. Adams,  
Suite 430 Chicago, IL 60606

- Source: *Breast Cancer Network of Strength*

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Lottery Ticket For The Cure sales fund mobile salon services

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Free breast health screenings available

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#### 6 tips for companions and caregivers

What can you do to help yourself and your loved one deal with cancer?

Here are some tips to help you optimally manage the cancer experience:

- Keep the lines of communication open. Actively listen and be mindful of what you say. In particular, do not tell a cancer survivor "I know how you feel," as you likely don't know how someone feels unless you have had that particular cancer.
- Friends can be more directive when offering help; for example, rephrasing "What can I do for you?" to "What are the things you hate doing most?" and offering to take on an unpopular task.
- Accompany your family member or friend to all medical appointments. You will become more knowledgeable and you can also serve as an important conduit for information. Take notes, record consultations, help your companion prepare questions and seek out treatment options for her diagnosis.
- Be proactive and educate yourself because education is key to dispelling myths surrounding cancer. You may want to initiate a phone and/or e-mail "tree" to streamline communications with family members, friends and colleagues.
- Seek avenues of support. The Breast Cancer Network of Strength Partner's/Men's Match Program provides support and education to men assisting a loved one through breast cancer.

Talk to someone who's been in your shoes. You can always call Breast Cancer Network of Strength's YourShoes™ 24/7 Breast Cancer Support Center and speak to a peer counselor for more ideas.

- *Source: Breast Cancer Network of Strength*

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