



# Support the Cause

Breast cancer affects everyone

By Juliet Farmer

October is a special month at my house. Not only do my husband and I celebrate our wedding anniversary (five amazing, fun and sometimes crazy years and counting), but it's the month that I finished my cancer treatments three years ago. October is also Breast Cancer Awareness Month, something that, I have to admit, until a few years ago meant very little to me.

Before I was diagnosed with breast cancer at the ripe young age of 30, I was blissfully ignorant about cancer. After multiple surgeries, six months of chemotherapy and a month and a half of radiation, I can safely say that cancer does not practice ageism.

At the time I was diagnosed, other than my career, my life was great. (I was stuck in a dead-end job being micromanaged to death, and I was miserable.) As it turned out, I was working for a company (and, more importantly, a supervisor) with so little compassion that on the day of my last chemo treatment, she demanded I come to the office for a meeting—and yes, she knew I had just had chemo.

Working in such an environment created a united front for me. I can honestly say I would not have been able to endure the situation were it not for my husband and our supportive entourage of friends and family. In the end, I quit the miserable job.

Like Lance Armstrong often says, cancer is one of the best things that ever happened to me. Not only did it

help set my career straight (I started freelancing), but it also toughened me up. Though I've always had an aversion to confrontation, I learned to stand up for myself (a trait that was put to the test several times at that job).

I also learned that even the nicest people can inflict pain through careless words. Earlier this year, I was at a party with several women my age, and talk of babies led to a discussion of reproduction. The consensus among the women was that if you don't have all your reproductive organs (be it breasts, ovaries or uterus) you're more "he" than she.

This was a group that knew I had both breasts removed, as well as my ovaries, in an attempt to thwart a cancer recurrence. I was completely out of my comfort zone and did not speak up for myself, a fact that still upsets me. But what upsets me more is that this discussion took place at all.

Even if you've never been personally touched by breast cancer, there are ways you can support the cause this month.

On Friday, October 7, Lee Jeans will sponsor Lee National Denim Day, the world's largest single-day fundraiser for breast cancer. Every year, Lee Jeans invites companies nationwide to participate by allowing employees to wear denim in exchange for a \$5 donation to the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation.

Mary Pare, Breast Cancer Navigator at the Sutter Cancer Center in Sacramento, says Sutter will participate in Denim Days. She explains, "I view breast cancer awareness month as a wakeup call to all of us . . . a reminder to do monthly

breast exams and (if age appropriate) get an annual mammogram. It's also a time to celebrate survivorship and recommit ourselves to the fight against breast cancer by raising awareness and raising money for research to find better treatments and, ultimately, a cure."

Since 1996, companies nationwide have raised more than \$50 million for Lee National Denim Day. The Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation receives 100 percent of all donations to fund research, education, screening and treatment programs. For more information on the program, visit [denimday.com](http://denimday.com).

In the United States, there are nearly 250,000 women under the age of 40 currently living with breast cancer, and breast cancer is the leading cause of death in women ages 15 to 40.

Breast cancer tends to be more aggressive in younger women than in their post-menopausal counterparts (something I learned firsthand), which may be compounded by the fact that fewer young women get screened for breast cancer, as well as the potential that doctors will dismiss some women's concerns because they are "too young to have breast cancer."

The Annie Fox Act (H.R. 987) is a critical piece of legislation to support research into why so many young women have breast cancer. Named after a breast cancer activist who died at the age of 35 from the disease, HR 987 would authorize \$9 million each year for the next six years for clinical research on causes, prevention, detection, treatment and the long-term effects of breast cancer in younger women, including the long-term effects of treatment.

To support the legislation, go to [breastcancerfund.org](http://breastcancerfund.org).

Being aware of breast cancer is about more than just knowing it exists—it's about being sensitive to people who are going through something that I hope you never have to experience. My hope is that every day, but especially during Breast Cancer Awareness Month, you're aware not only of the disease, but also of the person behind it.

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