

Shining

Kay's Story

*"I sing a lot wherever I may be
to keep my mind free and happy"*



My name is Kay-Dionne. I was diagnosed with cancer at the age of thirty in 2003. I was terrified when I found out I had breast cancer. The first thing I thought was that I was going to die and I wouldn't see my children grow up.

People were shocked when I told them I had breast cancer. Some said I looked so well.

At this moment in time I'm studying at college for a childcare diploma. My aim is to run my own nursery.

I have three children: Rahkeem, aged ten; Raheesha, aged nine; and Rasheka, aged five. I was breast-feeding Rasheka, who was two months old at the time, when I felt a lump in my breast. It was as hard as a rock. My GP referred me to a consultant. That's how I found out it was cancer. It was a huge shock. I was on my own when I was diagnosed. I felt like the world was spinning. I was really worried about my little ones. I thought, I'm not going to see my little ones grow up.

Three months later I had a mastectomy and a reconstruction. After, I had six months of chemo and three weeks of radiotherapy. My kids had to go into care because my family couldn't have them. I was in a domestic violence refuge. My kids went into care for a year and a half. That was until I finished treatment. It was very depressing because I was going through the treatment and I missed the kids. It was so hard to cope with things some times. My breast care nurse referred me to a lady that was diagnosed with cancer and she was the one who helped me in the breast unit to talk about things. She was about five years ahead of me in terms of the illness and I could phone her any time and get upset or anything like that. It helps knowing another person who has gone through it. It's much easier to relate to someone who has been through that process. We still keep in touch.

I also got a lot of information by reading through leaflets that talked about what cancer is and the treatments. That really helped a lot, as did talking to other people, other ladies I met. With the help of my breast care nurse and a leaflet I got from the unit I sat my children down one evening and I said to them that I had cancer and that I was going through the process of treatment. I told them what to expect like my hair falling out. I told them so that if they saw me looking different

they would know what that change was. They did cope with it but my son didn't cope too well at the time. The first girl was really aggressive in school and my son's schoolwork fell down because he was thinking about it a lot. He cried a lot while he was in care. Sometimes they would phone me up so that I would speak to him before he went to sleep. At the time Rahkeem was about six or seven and Rash was in nursery; the youngest was too young to know.

The refuge was very supportive. I finished all my treatment in the refuge. I did get to see my kids regularly. I had a social worker and the foster carers were so good and said that I could come any time to see them. That was a great relief. The kids were separated but they were living with two sisters on the same road. The two eldest were together and the baby was with the other sister.

When my chemo doctor told me that I was going to lose my hair I went to the hairdressers and had it all shaved off. It made me feel better to know I'd done it all myself rather than see my hair fall out bit by bit. I'm on Tamoxifen for five years. The chemo and the radiotherapy all happened in the same year – 2004.

My reconstruction the following year was hurtful and the implant was moving around my body. I told my plastic surgeon. If I laid down the implant was coming up my chest and if I was walking I could feel it moving around.

Living with cancer is frightening but I have to be strong. No matter what anyone says I have to keep fighting instead of letting my fear run away with me. I have done my best to stay positive and keep my mind strong. I am determined to beat cancer because of my children. Whenever I looked at their faces and saw fear and pain I told myself to never give up. I want to die trying. I am a member of the Black Minority Ethnic Cancer, which offers support and promotes awareness. I feel all right now; I feel bright. I'm shining because having been through this process and having got back my kids I feel now I have to prove myself. Now I just have to move forward.

I still go back for my check-ups. I went for a mammogram last year and that was clear. I have also had tests for cancer in the womb but I don't get my results until the 28th of this month. After that I will know what's happening. That's because my smear tests kept coming back abnormal. That's why they had to take tissues from my womb. In a way it's depressing because I am trying to move on and this feels like it's holding me back. I keep trying to think positive and I just want to hear positive things.

When I was diagnosed with cancer I didn't think, this is it. Although at the beginning I did think about death. It kept coming to my mind and I thought, I'm going to die, I'm going to die, what am I going to do? Then I thought about the kids. I couldn't just think about myself. What is going to happen to them if something happens to me? I thought. That really helped because I knew I had to be strong for them. Going through my process of treatment I would never let them see me crying or looking depressed. I always made it look as if everything was OK. I didn't want them to go away depressed.

I have a support group now and we find time for each other and phone each other. We are planning our first event, which is a picnic in the park, everyone will be invited to come and bring along a game and play.

I'm with a new partner who is supportive. With the children and when I'm in hospital he is always there and supporting me. I also get support from the breast unit and Bridges. They are very helpful. I do a lot of voluntary work for breast cancer. This year I intend to do a run. That's in Sutton Park.

To anyone who is living with cancer I would offer these words of encouragement: be strong, think positive, and keep smiling. Whenever I feel down my children, partner, mum and friends give me words of encouragement. I sing a lot wherever I may be to keep my mind free and happy.

I think another person's story will uplift the person hearing it. It can help. Not everyone gets the support that they should get because family or friends don't really know what they are going through.

I was afraid to let my mum know that I had cancer and it was my brother who told her because I know how depressing that can be. My brother and mother are both back home in Jamaica, so it is difficult having that distance. I miss them a lot. We send photos and we speak a lot on the phone. I do have family here but they all live in London.

My name is Rahkeem and I am ten years old. When I found out my mom had cancer I was sad but now that she got the test I feel much happier.

My name is Raheesha and I am eight years old. When I found out my mom had cancer we went in child care. I felt worried because I thought something was going to happen. Now I feel much better because my mom made a big progress.

My name is Fred and I am Kay's partner. When I first met her I never thought of her as a cancer patient. She is always doing something and never feeling sorry for herself. I always try my best to support her because she is a very independent person and most of all she doesn't like pity. My words of encouragement are: be positive, think of the future and most of all be happy with who you are.