

My name is Clarence Renard Willingham. On March 14th, 2012, at the age of 57, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had heard that men could get breast cancer, but I also knew that it was pretty rare for a man.

I have always been a very healthy person and when I found a lump in my breast area, I thought it was just a cyst and expected it to go away. It wasn't long before it became an open wound and began to bleed. Around this same time, one of my favorite actors, Richard Roundtree, spoke about his breast cancer and it got me thinking; my step-sister had died of breast cancer and it could happen to me. I was "out of my mind" scared! I felt that God was prompting me to go get it checked. One morning, when I woke up and changed my Band-Aid, it began to bleed a lot and wouldn't stop bleeding. I told my wife that I had to go see a doctor. In the back of my mind, I think I knew it was serious and probably cancer, but I didn't want to let myself believe it. When the oncologist, Dr. Mark Womac said those words, "Stage 4, breast cancer," I just cried. My wife was hysterical, she kept asking, "Why? Why?" but then she said, "We're gonna fight!", and the fight began.

The open wound was an issue, it had to heal before I could begin the cancer treatments and I was referred to a wound center. For 4 weeks, under the doctor's instructions, my wife treated, dressed and cared for my wound. They had predicted that it would take 6 weeks to heal, but my wife took such good care of me, it only took 4 weeks. After the wound had healed, I could start my treatments.

My surgeon, Dr. Charles Portera, Jr., said, "I'm going to take care of you". Just the confident way he said it gave me a hope and a peace. I felt it was God's way of letting me know I was going to be okay, even though by this time we had found out that my cancer was an aggressive form of breast cancer and was at Stage III. The doctors gave me so much hope and my faith in God became so much stronger, I saw signs everywhere, even in traffic! One day this dirty truck had "Jesus Loves You" written in the dirt and I just knew that message was for me.

My treatment was a male mastectomy, chemo, and radiation; 3 shots of a treatment cocktail called "Red Devil" and anti-nausea pills to help me keep my appetite. I followed all the doctor's instructions. I ate when I should even when I didn't want to and because of this I didn't suffer any real weight loss. I did stay very tired and spent a lot of time in bed.

Through all of this, my support system at home was just wonderful. My wife took great care of me, lifted my spirits and loved me unconditionally. My son was wonderful, he brought his Bible and read me scriptures, reminding me that God loved me and I was His child and He would see me through this. It was my son that really helped me find a stronger faith in God. I have 6 grandchildren and some of them went to every single chemo with me. I tear up just thinking about the support they gave me.

The staff at Memorial were angels who kept me going. The doctors and nurses became like family to me, everyone was kind, wanting to help, and they DID help!

Now I am doing wonderfully. I go to the YMCA for exercise, the trainers there are helping me get my flexibility and mobility back. I love being able to do physical things again. I love to grill out and it's great to taste the food again! My wife and I can do some traveling which we love and life feels normal again.

I thank God for the Mary Ellen Locher Center and even Mary Ellen Locher, herself, I have to give them credit for my still being here.

The support from Susan G. Komen, the education they bring to the community about breast cancer and the services that they support in our communities, are so helpful to me and to other like me. I really appreciate the chance they have given me to share my story in the hopes that it will help someone else. I want to tell my story, I think God wants me to. If you, or someone you care for has breast cancer, there is hope, you can be saved, both physically and spiritually.

At the end of the day, after everything I have been through, I want to share hope. There is hope for people with breast cancer! Hope was given to me, I NEED to give it to others.