ANELLE'S STORY OF HOPE

SILVER LININGS, SEPT. 17, 2011

GRAND REGAL HOTEL, DAVAO CITY

My name is Anelle Forbes. My loving husband of 20 years is Buddy and we have two daughters, Arielle (19) and Aleena (14).

I am just like many of you, a full time working mother who strives hard to help my spouse provide for our family. We live a simple life and have always been satisfied with what the Lord has given us. I would be considered by others as someone who is OC or obsessive compulsive. I have always been very organized, especially in planning our life. I have set milestones and goals with specified timelines. Everything seemed to be going well in our life until that day in August 1, 2005, when I felt a lump in my breast. I believe that I discovered it through divine intervention.

I woke up on a lazy Sunday morning and because it’s the last day of the weekend, I decided to stay in bed a little longer. I reached for the remote control, I flicked through the channels and I chanced upon a morning show with our very own, Ate B, Ms. Bibeth Orteza. She was wearing a bandana on her head and was sharing her experiences about chemotherapy and mastectomy. I felt that she was talking to me. I slowly felt my breasts and I froze when I felt a small hard nodule, a little smaller than a marble. I got scared but I tried to dismiss it knowing that I usually get fibrocystic lumps before my period. I almost forgot about it but in the afternoon of that same day, I went to the salon and as I flipped through the pages of an old magazine, I landed on a whole section on breast cancer, featuring women who had just undergone mastectomy. That time, I felt that it couldn’t just ignore the signs. That couldn’t be just a coincidence.

Everything went on so fast, I immediately had the lump excised, biopsied and the results confirmed that I had Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, stage 2B.

I will not deny that undergoing 8 cycles of chemotherapy was one of the most difficult things I had to go through in my 43 years of existence. I’m sure most of you know what I mean. But those difficult 6 months of chemotherapy proved to be a turning point in my life, for I have learned the most valuable lessons that I now live by:

First, cancer taught me to better take care of myself. I used to overwork myself. I lacked sleep and had a very bad unbalanced diet. I was lucky thought to have a very good immune system --- I rarely got sick. I rarely had flu, cough or colds and I thought I was perfectly okay. I thought I was a superhero. I thought I was Wonder Woman until cancer caught me by surprise. Cancer made me realize that if you abuse your body, payback time will come one day. Cancer or no cancer, it is but right that we take care of ourselves. We owe it to our families to stay healthy. Living a healthier lifestyle has proven to be very beneficial to me. My skin looked better, my hair looked healthier when it grew back after chemo.

I eat a balanced diet with lots of fruits and vegetables. I still indulge in the foods I love but I never overdo it. My philosophy is “everything in moderation”. I try to get quality sleep, I exercise and I listen to my body. I rest when I feel tired. I learned to let go of things I cannot control and tried to eliminate unnecessary stress, knowing that the world will not stop if I don’t take control of everything.

Second, cancer made me realize that I had the strength and courage I never thought I had. I am sure that all of the survivors here in this room, share this same sentiment. Looking back, it amazes me how I was able to face the challenges that cancer brought. I am proud to stay that I defeated this enemy. I grabbed it by the horns and faced it head on. In fact, I now have a big battle scar on my left chest. I am proud of this scar because it remains to be a proof of the battle I won. I believe that God made us women to seem soft and almost fragile on the outside, but with unimaginable toughness within that we only realize with situations like cancer

Third, I understood that cancer will not incapacitate us or prevent us from doing the things we need to do or the things we love to do. During the time I was undergoing treatment, I continued to work. I would work from home 4 days after chemo and go back to the office on the 5th day, wearing a mask to prevent myself from catching any virus that will compromise my immune system. I was determined to still succeed in what I do. I know that lost a breast but not my brain and therefore, I can still perform my job excellently and I can and do anything that the other people in the office can do.

While I was being infused with chemo drugs, I would still do my teleconferences and will only stop when the antihistamines start to make me feel dizzy. I led a very successful product launch while I was in treatment. I never backed out from accepting bigger challenges in my career. I would always tell myself, after cancer, what else can scare and what else can’t I do?

This amazed people in my office. But I believe that this is not really extraordinary. I am just but one of the many survivors who decided to go on with their lives and not allow cancer to get the better of them. Many of my sisters in ICanServe can attest to this.

Fourth, cancer taught me to have an attitude of gratitude. I realized that the since I do not have control over my life, the only thing I can control, is my attitude and how I choose to react to my situation. I started to let go and let God. When I learned to let go, I learned to thank Him for whatever He gives me and wherever He decides to bring me. I’m just glad that He is in control for He knows more than I do and He will only give me the very best, all in His time.

Lastly and most importantly, cancer gave me the chance to develop a personal relationship with God. When I quieted my soul and surrendered everything to Him, I got to know the amazing God, Father, Healer and Best Friend that He is. I wouldn’t probably have known this if I never had cancer. I never thought that one day, I will say that having cancer was one of the best things that happened in my life, to change me for the better.

Fast forward, 6 years later, here I am standing in front of you…healthy, well and cancer-free by the grace of God. I wake up each morning with much gratitude in my heart for being alive and being well. I am grateful that I can still enjoy life with my loving husband Buddy and my adorable children, Arielle and Aleena. I am thankful that I can pursue passions, my career being one of them. I am grateful that I can still serve my company, Unilab, for my company took care of me and has been good to me and my family.

I still don’t know what is in store for me as I continue with my life journey, but I rest in the fact that God has got my back and He has everything under control. He will never give you or me anything that we cannot handle.

I thank ICanServe, especially my sisters Kara Alikpala and Lanie Eusebio, for giving me this opportunity to share my story with you. I am Anelle Forbes, and this is my story of hope…

Thank you very much.