



Strong & beautiful women coming together to share their story of courage: Ilka Zuijderland-Varnes, Patti Wade and Brenda Smith.

## Beyond the Pink: The Beauty of Survival

### 3 TIPS FOR TRANSFORMING BODIES AND SPIRITS AFTER BREAST CANCER

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> “It’s news that definitely takes your breath away,” says Patti Wade, 58, regarding her 2009 breast cancer diagnosis. In a moment, the stability of your world alters and everything that seemed urgent just a few moments before -- your to-do list, that spat with your spouse, what to serve for dinner -- suddenly fades into the background as a new priority takes over: “can I beat this?”

With a life-threatening illness looming over your head, it can be hard to think of anything but getting well, but with early detection on the rise and improved treatment and reconstruction options available, preparing for a vibrant life after breast cancer is also an important part of recovery. “When patients first come in, most are really scared and have a hard time seeing past the immediate diagnosis. Our job is to not only get them safely through the immediate medical crisis but also to help put them back on the road to thriving, so that they can fully experience all

of the life and beauty that lies ahead.” says Dzi Newman P.A.-C. of Newman Plastic Surgery, an Orlando practice offering post-cancer breast reconstruction. In supporting women along the arduous journey from here to there, plastic surgeon Dr. Charles Newman, Jr., offers these three essential tips for breast cancer recovery:

#### TRUST YOUR INTUITION

“The response to a breast cancer diagnosis is different for every woman,” says Dr. Newman. “Some women are crying at the first consultation and others are stoically matter-of fact. Our priority is to carefully present all of the options, help our patients weigh every pro and con, and then support them in whatever decisions they feel are right for their lives and their bodies at that time.”

For Ilka Zuijderland-Varnes, 47, that meant having a single mastectomy after her initial diagnosis, opting out of additional treatment (ie. chemotherapy, radiation, etc.) and forgoing reconstruction. “I wanted a period of time without my breast,” says Zuijderland-Varnes. “To experience life without it and grieve the loss. I just wanted to focus on the fact that I was healthy for awhile.” It was intuition that led to Zuijderland-Varnes’s original cancer discovery and it was intuition again that prompted her to remove her second breast two years later and undergo full reconstruction. “I had the same intuitive feeling again that I had with the first diagnosis,” Zuijderland-Varnes says. “Even though the tests were showing abnormal results, not cancerous, I just felt this was the best thing to do. My intuition was clear and I trusted that. Dr. Newman honored my intuition and supported my decisions, both to postpone reconstruction, and then, ultimately to have it. That is not common with other doctors.”

#### BUILD YOUR NETWORK

Another important aspect of the cancer recovery process is building a support network. “No one does this alone,” says Dzi

“These women are incredibly strong, but it is support from those who love them that bolster these ladies up and keep them going on the hardest days.”

For some women, their network consists of their spouse, children, relatives, friends, and/or co-workers. Some turn to breast cancer support groups. For Brenda Smith, 46, the core of her network was her 21-year old daughter. “As soon as I heard my diagnosis, I immediately thought of my daughter,” says Smith. “I’m a single mom.” Smith’s daughter accompanied her on almost all her appointments. “Her support was wonderful,” says Smith “but I also wanted her to see what I went through and understand why monthly breast exams are so important.”

Smith says that Dr. Newman, Dzi, and the clinic’s staff were also core parts of her support network. “Cancer is such a traumatic experience,” Smith says. “They made me feel comfortable and helped me see past my immediate diagnosis to the future. Dr. Newman reminded me how young I am still. I felt so personally cared for that I didn’t even mind the reconstruction process. I just really looked forward to visiting the office because of that support. It made all the difference.”

#### SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

In the process of beating cancer, many women view breast reconstruction as the happy finish line, not realizing reconstruction is a process in and of itself. “Reconstruction is not the same as a breast augmentation,” says Dr. Newman. “When breasts are fully removed, we have to reconstruct from nothing. Our goal is to create optimal, natural-looking results while still helping patients understand the parameters of what’s realistically possible.”

For Patti Wade, realistic expectations really helped her navigate what became a prolonged and complicated reconstruction process. “My skin wouldn’t heal because of the chemo,” says Wade. “It was frustrating and uncomfortable but my family helped me

through it and Dr. Newman and Dzi were so caring and empathetic. It wasn’t easy, but the reconstruction felt like a completion for me. People say I was so positive going through it. That is so nice to hear. Life is good.”

#### MOVING ON

Trusting your intuition, surrounding yourself with solid support, and setting realistic expectations are all essential parts of the recovery process. “The final step,” says Dzi “is moving on.” Breast cancer becomes such an overwhelming part of a woman’s life that it can become part of her identity. Letting go and moving forward is the last leg of the journey. “It was strange when it was all done,” says Zuijderland-Varnes. “Coming in for our reconstruction appointments became such a normal part of our lives that when Dr. Newman said all was well and he’d see us in a few months, my husband said ‘So what? You’re breaking up with us?’ ... The relationships we built here were that strong.”

“We grow very attached to our patients,” says Dzi. “But ultimately them coming around less means cancer is no longer a part of their every day. We love when everyday concerns like a few extra laugh lines are the biggest reason they visit us. We’re happy to help with those sorts of normal worries. Although, to us, these women are already unbelievably beautiful.” <



Dr. Charles Newman, Jr. and Dzi-Long Newman, P.A.-C. with Brenda Smith, Patti Wade and Ilka Zuijderland-Varnes