

About the Black Health Story Series

The Black Greek Letter Consortium (BGLC) will speak directly to the Black American community about our unique health needs and experiences with the Black Health Story Series. Through weekly blog posts written by Black leaders during Black History Month, we will increase awareness about health disparities and encourage health literacy. Our community is historically underrepresented in

medical research and we are doing our part to achieve health equity. After this series, we hope that our readers will speak up when they feel something is wrong, prioritize visits to physical and mental health care providers to start the new year in the know, and consider participating in the *All of Us* Research Program.

BREAST CANCER TRIED TO TAKE ME

Written by Jennifer JJ Jones

In my youth, as people around me were diagnosed with breast cancer, I remember thinking how tragic it must be for them. I didn't understand what it would look and feel like to be forced to have your breast removed. But then, in 2013, I was able to answer those questions and experience those things for myself. In one moment, my entire life changed.



As my doctor diagnosed me, all I could think about was how my children would handle this. They lost their dad, grandmother, and grandfather (on both sides) to cancer. Their only experience with cancer was death. *Grade 3 infiltrating ductal carcinoma with focal lymphovascular permeation* was what my doctor told me, but I didn't care what they called it—I was going to beat it. I was determined that cancer would not be my final story.

Now and then, I think about what I could have done to prevent this, but I had done everything I was supposed to do. I had my annual mammograms, I conducted self-examinations, but cancer snuck up on me despite all I did. I can't say I was ready for it, because no one is ever prepared to hear they have cancer. However, what I was prepared for was the fight; I never stopped believing and trusting in God and knowing that I was going to beat it. My doctor told me that I should keep doing what I would typically do, as much as I could, and so I did. After seven rounds of chemo and 34 bouts of radiation, I was in remission for four years and five months before it returned.

On December 22, 2017, I was re-diagnosed with breast cancer in the same breast along the incision of my lumpectomy. This time I had a bi-lateral mastectomy and chemo (side note, chemo is no joke). After my first fight with cancer, my doctor told me I had a 40% chance of reoccurrence. I never thought it would come back, but here I was in a place I had never thought I would be in, let alone for the second time. I can't say that I was better prepared for this second time, because I wasn't. But still, I was ready for the fight.

They say that if the cancer is going to return, it is within the first five years. It has now been three years and nine months since my last treatment, and I cannot wait to ring the 5-year bell. What keeps me pushing forward is my promise to myself that I made years ago: cancer will not be my final story.