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Karla’s Story: Facing the Fear of Diagnosis

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When Karla Baptise was first diagnosed with stage 3A breast cancer at the young age of 34, she had a lot of questions. What would become of the future she’d imagined for herself? Was this the end of her life as she knew it? What should she do next?

Because of her age, doctors struggled to give her concrete answers about her prognosis. She felt uncertainty and fear—but these feelings gave her perspective.

“I thought back to getting my master’s in Paris and how difficult it was being in the job market after. I started to regret my degree. But the diagnosis made those feelings disappear: it’s so important to live in the moment. *Of course* I should have studied in Paris!”

Fear is a normal part of a breast cancer journey. For many, the fear of receiving a breast cancer diagnosis can lead them to delay scheduling their mammograms or doing their recommended self-exams in the first place.

But Karla encourages people to face these fears. She is all too familiar with the anxiety that comes with regular screening—she’s been diagnosed with breast cancer four times. After undergoing treatment for her initial diagnosis in 2007, she was cancer-free for seven years, and would undergo routine mammogram screenings to check and see if her cancer returned. In 2014, a mammogram showed that her breast cancer came back and was now in her spine. Following treatment for that recurrence, she was cancer-free for another five years until she was diagnosed with breast cancer again. As of 2022, she is facing her third recurrence—but she’s not backing down.

“A breast cancer diagnosis can be a comma, not a period,” Karla reflects. “It’s common to think that a breast cancer diagnosis means life is over. We think, ‘No one will want me with this disease. My life goals will be impossible.’”

Karla is living proof that you can live an abundant, full life despite a cancer diagnosis. She enjoys time with her loved ones while reaching her goals, such as being an author and a dedicated breast health advocate.

For people like Karla who are experiencing recurrences and multiple diagnoses, living a full life relies on staying on top of cancer testing, even when it’s tough.

“Early detection and diligence are key. The earlier you find it the better. Even though you don’t want the diagnosis, the disease is still there,” Karla tells us, speaking from experience.

Because of her own experience receiving a later-stage diagnosis at just 34, Karla is particularly passionate about advocating for timely breast cancer screening among Black women. In the United States, Black women are more likely to be diagnosed with breast cancer at a younger age and are more likely to die from breast cancer than white women.

As an author, YouTuber, speaker and dedicated breast health advocate, Karla hopes to inspire more women to overcome their fear of screening and get the lifesaving care they need. She currently serves as Vice President for the Dallas Chapter of Sisters Network, Inc. which seeks to educate, empower and support Black women with early-detection of breast cancer and survivorship. In her memoir "Dig in Your Heels," Karla explores this topic and recounts her own journey through diagnosis, treatment and living cancer-free.

She encourages women to be active and take preventative measures, highlighting self-exams and routine mammograms as important parts of living a healthy life.

"You know your body best," Karla reminds us. "Get a second, and even a third, opinion if you don't think something is right. Don't let anybody tell you you're too young."

Karla hopes that her story and her advocacy will inspire other women, particularly in the Black community, to "dig in their heels" and stay on top of their breast health.

"With cancer, life is one day at a time," Karla says, considering the journey ahead. "You have to take it one day at a time."