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Fearless: Gettysburg Breast Cancer Survivors

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Fearless: Gettysburg Breast Cancer Survivors

Abstract

As we reach the end of Breast Cancer Awareness month, Surge would like to recognize breast cancer survivors. For today's Fearless Friday, we are honored to highlight four brave and fearless Gettysburgians: **Joyce Sprague**, Academic Administrative Assistant for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; **Anne Lane**, Associate Dean of Academic Advising; **Julie Ramsey**, Vice President for College Life and Dean of Students; and **Sandy Buhrman**, Administrative Services Assistant for the Center for Career Development. These women are truly fearless for persisting in the face of adversity, advocating for other women, sharing their stories and inspiring others. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, breast cancer, survivors

Disciplines

Other Medicine and Health Sciences

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

FEARLESS: GETTYSBURGIAN BREAST CANCER SURVIVORS

October 31, 2014



As we reach the end of Breast Cancer Awareness month, Surge would like to recognize breast cancer survivors. For today's Fearless Friday, we are honored to highlight four brave and fearless Gettysburgians: **Joyce Sprague**, Academic Administrative Assistant for Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; **Anne Lane**, Associate Dean of Academic Advising; **Julie Ramsey**, Vice President for College Life and Dean of Students; and **Sandy Buhrman**, Administrative Services Assistant for the Center for Career Development. These women are truly fearless for persisting in the face of adversity, advocating for other women, sharing their stories and inspiring others.

Breast cancer is a term that refers to a malignant tumor, or harmful cells which divide uncontrollably, originating in the breast. If cancer cells get into the lymph nodes, they can spread to other parts of the body; the "stages" refer to how widespread the cancer cells are. The earlier a person is diagnosed, the better the prognosis. Although breast cancer is much more common in women, it can and does affect men as well.

Joyce was diagnosed in May 1989, and at the time had little information about the disease. She was diagnosed with Inflammatory Breast Cancer, a rare and aggressive form of the disease, and her first doctor said she only had three months to live. To other women who have been diagnosed, Joyce says, "find someone who will fight with you as much as you want to fight," and that people should not look at their circumstance. Humor and support from others, especially her husband, was vital to her. "If you know someone who has had a diagnosis, continue to be there for them; even if you aren't close just an occasional card or wish is enough," said Joyce. "Don't treat them differently because they are still the same person."

Anne was diagnosed in 1998, after having missed a few annual mammograms, and was initially surprised because she didn't have any of the risk factors. A biopsy found that the cancer was invasive and had spread to other parts of her body. She credits having had a very supportive family with supporting her emotionally, and said she received expressions of love and support from all over the community. Others' support can truly have an impact on someone during a difficult time like this. "It's good to have a cheering squad, and someone to listen and be encouraging," Dean Lane said. Her main takeaway from her experience is to never take your health for granted, and although you can't control what happens to you, you can control how you react to it. "Having an illness brings you to realize how precious life is and how precious the people around us are, and how fortunate we are to have friends and loved ones," said Dean Lane.

After losing her father to cancer at a young age, **Sandy** believed it was only a matter of time before she would have to deal with the "Big C." Sandy described feeling relief upon receiving her diagnosis. "I didn't have to think about it anymore, I knew it was here and could now face it," she says. She wasted no time in her fight against cancer and went in for a series of surgery to remove the cancer, followed by months of chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Despite the major side effects she experienced, Sandy did not let cancer stop her from enjoying life, work and vacation. She also credits the unwavering support of her family and friends during that time, "I always had someone with me when I went in for chemo," she explains. It's been four years since her last treatment and Sandy is anticipating next year when she will be celebrating her fifth year as a Breast Cancer survivor, and her 45th wedding anniversary!

Julie knew her doctor would return with a breast cancer diagnosis after the series of tests he performed on her in 2011. Her first thought after hearing the news was that she "was not ready to die." "I felt unprepared," she said, but decided that she was "ready to do what needed to be done, and not complain," in order to recover. Her attitude to cancer was one she carried with her in many aspects of her life. It was like "an assignment," "a challenge" and she was going to get through it. And that she did! While the experience was a challenging one, she explains how she found a lot of beauty in it. "It's like a paradox. It's a horrible thing, but you learn so much and you get so much out of it," she says. "I still would not wish it on my worst enemy," she adds jokingly. Dean Ramsey acknowledges the help of family and friends for helping her during that period, offering just the right amount of support when she needed it. She also credits cancer with helping her understand and witness firsthand the "medical industrial complex," and found the medical world to be the most frustrating part of dealing with cancer. She encourages everyone to be respectful, and constantly reminds herself to be mindful of others. "You have no idea what's going on with people. Everyone is struggling with something and it's important to be really respectful of that."

Our fearless Gettysburgians have used the experiences they had during this difficult time to be an advocate and support other women who have been diagnosed. **Joyce** has taken her experiences with breast cancer and used them to help other women and considers it an honor to be in a position to empower others. She is a trained volunteer for the American Cancer Society's Reach to Recovery Program. **Anne** helps students and others learn more by speaking to Buzz Myers' First Year Seminar class and at Gettysburg YWCA as well as to individual women. "I think no one benefits from secrecy; people need to know what the risks are," she said. **Julie** found that her frustrations with the medical world encouraged her to get more involved in the medical community and she currently serves on the board of the Gettysburg Hospital as an advisor to the medical community. Through donations to charitable organizations and her church, **Sandy** continues to contribute to the breast cancer movement.

We recognize these FEARLESS WOMEN, and all who have been affected by breast cancer, for their courageousness every day and for keeping hope alive in the face of remarkable adversity.

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