

**Jill Cheng**  
**Mother, Wife, JCC Member and Breast Cancer Survivor**

*"You have breast cancer."*

They are four words that separate what life was like before cancer and what life is like after cancer. Life, as any cancer survivor will tell you, is never the same. Wife, mother, JCC member and breast cancer survivor Jill Cheng knew that the instant she heard those words in August 2011.

"I was home alone when I answered the call from my gynecologist. I think I expected the call. What I remember most about that day is thinking '*will I get to see my daughter grow up?*'"

Jill's official diagnosis was *invasive lobular carcinoma*. "I have always been healthy, and I have always been vigilant about having an annual mammogram. I had dense breast tissue, which makes it difficult for a radiologist to detect cancer on a mammogram, so I would always have an ultrasound following the mammogram. At the time of my diagnosis, my routine mammogram was scheduled for a few weeks later. But one morning I thought I saw something in my reflection while I was getting dressed. I immediately checked and felt a lump I had not noticed before. My gynecologist scheduled a mammogram immediately, and shortly after, I became a statistic."

While Jill was 1 of the approximately 230,480 new cases of invasive breast cancer among US women in 2011, according to the American Cancer Society, the only number that matters is the one relative to survival rates. Jill credits her team of doctors and nurses for providing her with, not just exceptional healthcare, but also the support necessary to allow her to trust that they "*had this*."

"My oncologist understood that it wasn't just me that was affected by this, but also my husband, my daughter, my family and my friends. Her main objective was that I just focus on me and let her and the rest of the doctors focus on my treatment."

That treatment was 'aggressive' – 20 weeks of chemotherapy, 7 weeks of radiation, followed by reconstructive surgery. The confidence Jill had in her doctors allowed her to balance her new 'normal.' "I was determined to keep everything as normal as I could. My daughter was going into the fourth grade and I tried to keep our routine as normal as I could so she wouldn't be worried. I was very lucky to have wonderful friends who stepped in to help on the days I had treatment so I could rest. I am convinced my efforts to live normally enabled me to get through treatment. Once my doctors and I had a treatment plan in place I was at my best because I knew exactly what I had to do to get healthy and that allowed me to feel in control."

Like any cancer patient, there are good days and there are bad days. For Jill, there were no bad days that couldn't be overcome without a positive attitude. "I think the hardest time was right before I started chemotherapy, just the anticipation of what to expect was scary and overwhelming. Once I got through my first treatment I knew I could get through what was ahead. You have good days because you realize how fortunate you are to be alive, to have been diagnosed early, and to have access to amazing care and amazing doctors. You end up hearing from so many people who share their stories and have had a positive outcome that you focus on your own positive outcome. You don't take anything for granted and appreciate all the wonderful things in your life."

Jill credits her healthy habits, which includes working out regularly, for giving her the added strength she needed during treatment. "I believe it helped me to deal with some of the side effects of the treatment. Seven years after my diagnosis, the JCC has given me a place where I can be active and comfortable to try new things, especially things that may be out of my comfort zone."

Because life is never the same after a cancer diagnosis, taking care of oneself has new meaning. "Taking care of me now means that I make even more time for the things and people which are important to me. I want to be around for my husband and daughter so I want to be healthy and strong, which means I make time to exercise and do things that make me happy."

Jill has been cancer-free for nearly 7 years. If she can be indulgent and impart some advice to all women, it's simply, "Don't let any fear of the possibility of having cancer prevent you from seeking care. Don't put off having a mammogram. If you are faced with a cancer diagnosis, don't be afraid to ask any questions you have, get second opinions, and challenge anything that you don't understand."

While recalling the fear, confusion, anger and grief of a diagnosis can still be painful, Jill wouldn't change a thing about this journey. "You realize just how strong you really are, and you definitely appreciate what is truly important to you."