

## WoH 444

### Breast Cancer/Margaret's Story

**Nurse Margaret/Voice:** One day I felt a lump in my breast. At the time I wasn't too worried as I had always had 'lumpy' breasts. But...this lump didn't go away so I went to my doctor...

**Carol:** Welcome to *Women of Hope*, I'm Carol...and I'm sure you know what we're going to talk about together today.

**Tammy:** And I'm Tammy. Yes, we've talked about breast cancer before on *Women of Hope* but it's good to make sure we're up to date in our understanding of this disease.

**Carol:** In 2010, 1.5 million people worldwide were told they had breast cancer. Margaret, is one of those people, and she's also a nurse. She told us some really helpful things about breast cancer that we want to share with you today. She loves to take any opportunity she can to talk to other women about breast cancer. If she hadn't found that lump and gone to her doctor, she may not have been alive today.

**Tammy** We're very thankful that she's still living to share her story. But before I ask Carol to do this for us, here are some facts about breast cancer.

Nearly 1 in 4 women in the world with cancer, have *breast* cancer. More women in the world die of breast cancer than of any other type of cancer.

**Carol:** I talked with nurse Margaret and asked her a lot of questions about breast cancer. It may seem like a simple question but I asked her first: 'What actually *is* breast cancer?' She told me:

Cancer occurs when normal cells in the body change and become abnormal and uncontrolled...then they form lumps or tumours. In breast cancer this happens somewhere in the breast tissue.

**Tammy:** What causes breast cancer?

**Carol:** We don't know the cause of breast cancer and we don't know how to prevent it. But there are some things we can do to reduce our risk, or find the cancer in its very early stages. We need to look for signs before we have any symptoms.

Knowing your family history is important. If you have female relatives such as a mother, sister, aunt, or cousin, who've had breast cancer, it may be that you have a greater risk of developing this type of cancer. A doctor can tell from a blood test whether you're at risk. Ask your health care worker for more information if you have a relative who has had breast cancer.

**Tammy:** How do we look for those signs of breast cancer?

**Carol:** I know that *self-examination* - or feeling your own breasts for any changes is important. Our nurse said that all women over the age of eighteen should be taught how to do this by their mother, teacher, sister or other female relative they trust...or by their health care worker.

**Tammy:** So if you see or feel any changes in your breasts go to your health care worker as soon as you can. Don't delay!

**Carol:** I asked our nurse to tell us how to examine our own breasts? She said: Every woman knows her own breasts better than anyone else. Examining your own breasts regularly helps you to know how they normally look and feel and to notice any changes in them. This is a quick simple way to check that there are no problems. It's best to do this when your breasts are not tender or swollen (which they can be just before your period). If you're not sure ask your health care worker.

**Tammy:** So how do we do it?

**Carol:** Most women find that it's best to examine their breasts when they're bathing or dressing. First, stand in front of a mirror with your hands on your hips. Look for any changes in the size, shape and colour of your breasts. They should look the same as last time you examined them.

Do they look the *same* size and shape? Are there any dimples in the skin? Is there any swelling...or bulging of the skin? Any dry, scaly skin or rashes? Check that there are no changes in the shape of your nipples or any discharge...(this could be a watery, milky, or yellow fluid or blood).

While you're standing in front of the mirror, lift both arms up and look under each arm for any changes in the armpit area.

Next, Lie down, perhaps on your bed, and place your left arm above your head. This spreads the breast tissue as thin as possible making it easier to feel. Open your right hand flat and using the pads of your middle three fingers, feel your breasts all over using light pressure first, then medium pressure. Feel up to the collarbone, into the armpit and across to the centre of your chest (sternum) and down to the rib cage. Use smooth up and down sweeping strokes or a smooth circular motion, don't use your fingertips or dig your fingers in.

Now do the same with the other breast - putting your right arm up above your head and feeling with your left hand.

**Tammy:** That sounds quite easy...so you have to feel with a flat hand, from the collar-bone right to the ribs, and from the middle of the chest to the arm pit, covering all of the breast tissue.

Do this by making circular movements, or up and down movements across the breast. You're feeling for any lumps, or any changes in the breasts.

**Carol:** That's right. And our nurse said: Remember that finding a lump or a change in your breasts does *not* necessarily mean you have cancer. Many women have lumpy, tender or swollen breasts during their menstrual cycle.

These changes disappear at the end of the menstrual cycle once a period arrives. But if you notice *any* changes it's best to check with your health care worker anyway. Finding breast cancer early is essential for the best treatment.

**Carol:** On *Women of Hope* today we're sharing some information about breast cancer from our nurse, Margaret.

**Carol:** As you get older, another method of checking for, breast cancer is a mammogram or x-ray of the breasts. If you live in an area where mammograms are available and you are over 40, you should have a mammogram every 2 years. Or, if you have a family history of breast cancer...then have one every year.

**Tammy:** Carol you've had a mammogram haven't you?

**Carol:** Yes.

**Tammy:** So tell us what happens when you have a mammogram...

**Carol:** You need to undress above the waist. You will be given a wrap to wear. A technician will be in the room with you. Most technicians are women and will put your breasts in the right position to get the best picture. You will feel some discomfort when your breasts are flattened against the x-ray plate. This only lasts a few seconds. The whole procedure takes about 20 minutes.

The results will usually be sent to your health care worker within a week.

**Tammy:** Did our nurse tell us anything else we can do to check for breast cancer?

**Carol:** Yes...she said that you can ask your health care worker to examine your breasts for any unusual changes. Many women are reluctant to see a health care worker because of religious or social stigma associated with this

part of the body. Being afraid of treatment...or relying on traditional medicine may also mean some women don't ask for help until the disease is well advanced.

But we know that if breast cancer is found early, it can often be treated successfully and a person's life can be saved.

**Tammy:** Carol, do you know if a man get breast cancer?

**Carol:** Yes, they can, but it doesn't happen very often. But if a lump *is* found it's important to see your health care worker, just the same as for a woman.

**Tammy:** After this song, we're going to hear Nurse Margaret's own story of breast cancer. Don't go away...

**Tammy:** Welcome back to *Women of Hope*. We're looking forward to hearing *more from* our nurse, Margaret. Carol's going to tell you her story...

**Carol:** This is Nurse Margaret's story about how God brought her back to him when she had wandered away...

She grew up going to church and Sunday school but she didn't hear the good news about Jesus and believe in him until she was in her 30's. She and her husband went to church regularly, and read their Bibles and prayed together as a family. They brought up their two sons to follow God and generally lived to please God in their family life.

As her children grew into adults she worked more and more, becoming a manager. She was very busy, and attended social gatherings for work too... So she became more and more stressed and stopped going to church regularly...stopped reading her Bible so often and her faith in God faded into the background...

Then came the day that she felt the lump in her breast and went to her doctor. As she said, she was not too worried, as she'd always had lumpy breasts. The doctor asked her to have a few tests...a mammogram and a biopsy,

where they take a tiny sample of the lump through a fine needle and then examine it under a microscope in the laboratory. The doctor also examined her breasts. The doctor felt all over with the flat part of her fingers for any lumps and looked at her breasts for any unusual changes in shape.

Several days later she was told the results of these tests...she had breast cancer!

**Tammy:** That must have been hard for her to hear. I wonder how she felt?

**Carol:** She said she was shocked at this news!

**Tammy:** I'm sure she was. I think most people fear that moment when they might hear that they have cancer.

**Carol:** Yes. This was a difficult time for her...and her family...but this made her realise that she had to return to her God and her faith in Jesus. She knew that *she* had left *Jesus*...*he* had not left *her*. She knew that whether or not she survived this illness she *had* to put her trust in Jesus again. She said that as soon as she did this, she knew that everything would be alright...she would get through it.

**Tammy:** So what happened next?

**Carol:** Her health care team was made up of a surgeon, who would operate to remove the lump, an oncologist - a doctor who specialises in treating cancer patients, a breast cancer nurse and her local doctor.

**Tammy:** In most places your health care worker would be the person you would have the most contact with. They would advise you about who to see for treatment.

**Carol:** Some women who have breast cancer have to have the whole breast removed. This is called a *mastectomy*. I asked Nurse Margaret if she had had a mastectomy.

She said fortunately she didn't have to have her whole breast removed, just the lump and the surrounding tissue. She was very thankful to God for that.

**Tammy:** So after that, many people have to have chemotherapy - a course of medication they give you to kill any remaining cancer cells. Did our nurse have to have chemotherapy?

**Carol:** Yes she did. These drugs also damage normal cells, which is why many people have bad side effects from chemotherapy. Fortunately the normal cells can recover.

**Tammy:** I wonder what it's like to have chemotherapy?

**Carol:** She told me they put the drugs directly into the vein, so this meant she had to go to the hospital or clinic and have a needle inserted into her arm...the drugs were then put into her through a tube over several hours.

**Tammy:** I've heard of people having quite bad side effects from chemotherapy.

**Carol:** She did have some side effects, including several bad infections - as the drugs damage your immune system for a while. Your immune system helps protect you from illness.

After she finished the course of chemotherapy, she went on to have treatment called *radiation therapy*. In this treatment a narrow beam of radiation from a special machine is pointed at the cancer tumour. This also kills any remaining cancer cells and reduces the risk of the cancer coming back. This made the skin on her breast and chest very red and sore, like sunburn.

Following both of these treatments she also started taking tablets to reduce the risk of this cancer returning. The tablets stop your body producing the hormone oestrogen, which can 'feed' the type of breast cancer that she had. She'll probably have to take these tablets for the rest of her life.

**Tammy:** On *Women of Hope* today Carol is telling Nurse Margaret's story of having breast cancer. So, how is she now?

**Carol:** It's now five years since she was first diagnosed with cancer and she's returned to work. She's healthy now, although there's no guarantee that this cancer won't return.

She told me she had to really think about what was important in her life...things such as her relationship with God and her family and her church. She wrote about this...would you like me to read what she said?

**Tammy:** Yes, please read it to us...

**Carol:** 'As I look back at the time surrounding my illness and treatment, I can see the hand of Jesus all the way through. God's timing is always perfect. He stopped me in my tracks and brought me back to himself at just the right time. God was saying to me **be still and know I am God.**

I knew he was with me all through my treatment, and that he had total control over my illness. Jesus' love for me, and the prayers of my church and family and friends, helped me through that time. I learned that in times of trouble like this it's very comforting to have people praying for you. It gave me a real sense of peace.

Ever since this time, I've been *sure* that Jesus is with me all the time, and I'm *very sure* that he will *never* leave me. God's word says: **I have made you and will carry you. I will take care of you and will rescue you** (Isaiah 46:4).



During difficult times I try not to pray for God to *change* my situation but for him to give me his strength to get *through* the hard times. I pray for him to guide me and comfort me.

Now that I'm well, I thank God every day for good health. There's always the risk that this cancer will return...maybe years from now, but I draw strength from knowing that God has power over illness and dying. If we put our faith and trust in Jesus, death is not the end, but just the beginning of a wonderful new eternal life in Heaven.

If I'm tired or discouraged I remember that Jesus said: **Come all you who are weary and I will give you rest** (Matthew 11:28). And when I'm tired, I go to one of my favourite verses in the Bible where God says: **Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint** (Isaiah 40:31). Wow – that gives me such hope. I know that God will give me the strength to keep going.

As a follower of Jesus I know that I have a sure future...because I've put my trust and faith in *him*...not because of anything *I* can do myself. Jesus loves us so much he came to give his life for us. He took the punishment for the wrong things that we've done. You too can put your trust in him. He gave his life for you and me. God is all-loving and all-powerful...we need to remember that every day.'

**Tammy:** Thanks Carol... Let's listen to this song that tells us about God who loves us...

**Tammy:** Thanks for sharing Margaret's story with us today Carol. I've learned some things I didn't know about breast cancer. I hope you have too.

**Carol:** Nurse Margaret said she loves to share with other women how God helped her through this very difficult time.

**Tammy:** Before we finish I'd like to ask Mornette to share some more thoughts about praying to our amazing God who cares for us in times of trouble. Welcome Mornette.

**Mornette:** Thanks Tammy. We have so much to praise God for don't we!

Do you ever give compliments, or tell someone that they have behaved well or achieved something special? When you see someone do something very kind and thoughtful, or you see a lovely work of art, praise just seems to come naturally, doesn't it?

Do you ever do that as you pray - tell God what you appreciate about his character? *Praise* is a type of prayer, where we talk about God's character...his mercy, his goodness, love and faithfulness, and the wonderful things he has made and done in this world. We tell God how much we appreciate him ... or what we appreciate about him.

Because God's character stays the same, we can praise him even in times of trouble. Then our focus shifts from *our situation* to *God* who is with us in *every* situation. That's why one of the Bible writers said, 'I will praise the Lord at all times, his praise shall always be in my mouth.' (Psalm 34:1) When you think about God, what do you want to praise him for?

**Tammy:** I can think of many things...can you? Thanks Mornette. It's time for us to go now. If you would like to tell us your story, do contact us at... We look forward to being with you again soon. Goodbye.

**Carol:** Goodbye for now.

