

Native American Cancer Research Corp.

Veronica Cavanaugh, "I've been called the 'Thrivers'!"

In Veronica' Words:

Veronica is an American Indian of the Keetoowah Cherokee Tribe of Oklahoma. She is 57 years of age, she is also 15 year, 3 times; *Breast Cancer Survivor.*

Veronica was first diagnosed with breast cancer in her left breast in 1994, she was residing in Oklahoma. She received treatments of chemotherapy and radiation from a clinic in another city. "When I was going there for treatments I remembered thinking; how out of date the equipment looked", Veronica noted. "It was hard for me to get back and forth for treatments, the hospital did not offer any type of assistance no group support or anything, and I just felt so alone."

"Then again in 1999, Veronica heard those horrible words, that all too familiar word... **cancer** which had returned to her left breast. Veronica still residing in Oklahoma returned to the same health facility for treatment. "The first thing I remembered was the doctor telling me, "You have no choice, no other options; you are going to have a *mastectomy*", and that was that! I wasn't sure if I even understood the word, *mastectomy* but you already know something's inside".

Veronica stated that again she was not offered any type of financial or emotional assistance or any type of referral to some other place that works with cancer patients. I did receive gas vouchers from the American Cancer Society to get to and from radiation treatments. "There were no Indian support groups that I knew of; or that I was referred too. I didn't know how to ask, Indian people don't always like to ask for help, you know. For the longest time I was very aware of the loss of my breast, I felt weird, I didn't know how to dress; so I just would not go out.' she said.

In 2006, Veronica moved to Colorado to live with her nephew. She just couldn't believe this could happen again, it was now 2007. Once again the fears and depression and feelings of being alone took her over. ***"Before I got the third diagnoses, I already felt as if something was wrong", I was hoping and praying, 'Lord no, not again! Why me?'"***

"I reached out to the Denver Indian Health and Family Services (DIHFS) and they referred me to the Native American Cancer Research Inc. (NACR) office in Lakewood". NACR, Native Sister Rose Lee introduced Veronica to the Survivors Support Group and NACR staff. "It was a tremendous blessing to be introduced to these women, at a time when my need was so great, they gave me more than financial and emotional support; it was like I was a part of a family", she remarked. "To have those women support and care for me made a difference in my fight to survive; it is remarkable how they give of themselves to help other struggling with cancer, God Bless them. "Now I volunteer for the Native American Cancer Research, so American Indian women realize the importance of having a mammogram and early detection as I often say; every women matters!"

Veronica was recently chosen to represent Native American women in Portraits of Courageous Beauty: Achieve a higher level of portraiture as you work with breast cancer survivors, creating powerful imagery that will culminate in a published book & exhibition (www.workingwithartists.org). Additionally Susan Blake Photos of Veronica were displayed at the Denver Public Library in 2009.



Photo by Susan Blake
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"Now I volunteer to have American Indian women realize the importance of a mammogram and early detection because,"

"Every Women Matters!"

