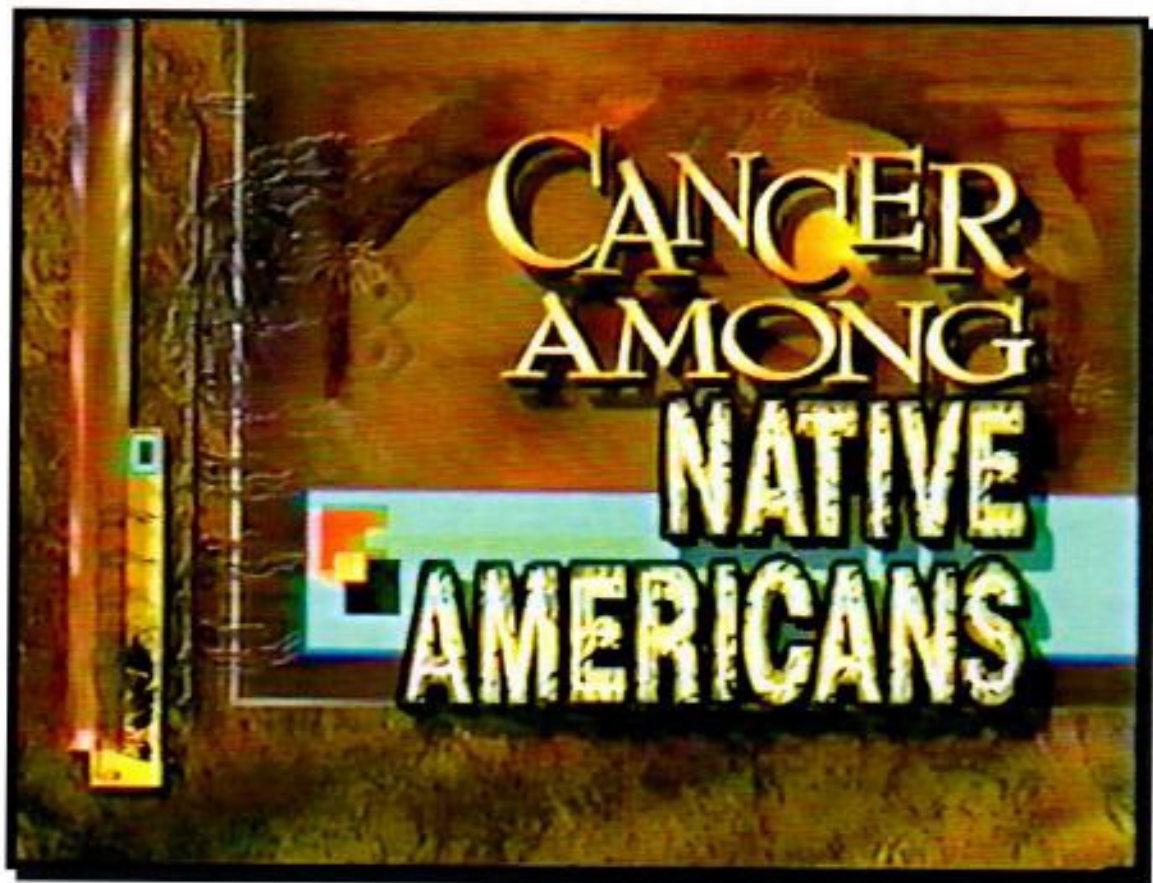


**Native American Breast Cancer
Survivors:**

Outlook on Life



Native American Interviewers:

Mary Helen Deer Smith (*Kiowa*), Judith S. Kaur (*Choctaw/Cherokee*), Mary P. Lovato (*Santo Domingo Pueblo*), Angela Russell (*Crow*), Barbara J. Stillwater (*Yurok/Inuit*), Don Thornton (*Western Cherokee*)

Special thanks to our Native American "patients" for sharing their stories to help others through this experience.

Katherine Big Hail (*Crow*), Mary Lou Calabaza (*Santo Domingo Pueblo*), Mary Lou Davis (*Caddo/Cherokee*), Georgianna D. (*Fort Bend*), Ruth Demit (*Athabaskan-Tanacross*), Eloise D. (*Standing Rock Sioux*), Patricia Horse Johnson (*Kiowa*), Jennie Joe (*Navajo*), Frances Johnson (*Fish River Inupiaq/Yupik*), Candi Miller (*Haida*), Martha Red Willow (*Oglala Sioux*), Dominga Rosetta (*Santo Domingo Pueblo*), Angela Russell (*Crow*), Carolyn Shubert (*Fish River Inupiaq*), Carolyn Spotted Horse (*Crow*), Norma Staples (*Mandan/Sioux*), Gloria Suazo (*Taos Pueblo*), Cyndi Thornton (*Western Cherokee*), Evelyn Trujillo (*Yaqui*), Esther ("Bunny") Venes (*Inupiaq/Yupik*), Annie Williams (*Yupik*)

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this booklet is to share stories of strength from Native women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. The intended audience for this booklet is others who are going through a similar experience, and for their loved ones. Although we have made videotapes of these stories, for many Native families, print materials are easier to use. We have prepared these materials to help prevent anyone from going through this experience alone. Many Native American cultures discourage discussing personal health problems. But with a disease like cancer that is surrounded with so much misinformation (such as a cancer diagnosis means a death sentence), we need to help one another through the experience. By sharing such information for this booklet, the Native women wanted others to learn from their stories so that they would seek diagnostic services and if cancer is present, that it be diagnosed and treated in early stage of growth (while it is still curable). These women shared their stories to help others through this experience.

Our program had many delays in developing these materials. We experienced severe budget cuts and without the help of our current supporters (see the back panel of this booklet), we would not have been able to produce these materials.

It has been an honor to learn from these women.

Dr. Yvonne Kunkasetzjanov

OUTLOOK ON LIFE: STAYING HOPEFUL AND POSITIVE

. . . I have one child at home. And I remember thinking, you know my life is going to go on and I'm not willing to stop anything that I am doing. I don't have a whole lot of time to waste, I mean I'm not going to sit around and cry, I'm not going to sit around and spin my wheels.



Carolyn Shubert
[Eskimo]



Norma Staples
[Mandan]

I appreciate [life], my family more, my friends, and I didn't take things for granted anymore . . . [now] I enjoy [work] . . . when I thought I was going to die [and] . . . when I didn't . . . when, you . . . say "cancer," you naturally think your gonna [die], that's it, but now they have radiation and everything you

I even got my driver's license (laughter), which I was scared half to death to ever drive and since I had survived this operation I decided well, if I can survive that . . . the driver's test is nothing (laughter) and so I got my driver's license and so more or less since then it just seems that things are going up-hill. But it does, it is hard and it does take a lot out of you but if you have an understanding family and friends, that are willing to help you and to stand by you, hey, you can accomplish anything.



Esther Venes
[Inupiaq/Yupik]

Now I live day by day as it comes. I try to hold my head up high. My sisters they are strong women, my brothers they are strong and you come by and see me, that makes me happy. And I try to laugh all the time joking. That's what I do everyday you know. I work, that's what I do, take care of my grand babies . . . I got seven grand kids now and I'm happy, but I'm starting back where you know, now I got a chance to see my grand kids grow up (laughter), Ya I take them hunting sometimes going to . . . hiking, looking for wild spinach and go up to the mountain we find some . . . parsley, wild parsley and onions, wild onions. You should try 'em and eat 'em, keep you healthy.



Mary Lou Calabaza
[Santo Domingo Pueblo]



Katherine Big Hail [Crow]

sick and had the cancer and, . . . she survived and now she's like a witness to everybody.

[daughter translates] she's traveling, she travels a lot. She likes to travel and . . . well you know just before she was really sick . . . we don't let her drive anymore you know and then the other day I seen her take off, you know, so she's driving around again too . . . we got friends all over, . . . Even while we were in that store a lady came over to her and said "You're all right! This is amazing! This is a miracle." I think you know its speaking to the Crow Nation, you know, her. Because of everybody knew, heard about it, when she was real

And . . . now that I look back at it, I think it's . . . something that now I appreciate life a lot better.



Ruth Demit [Athabascan]

MESSAGES FOR OTHER WOMEN

Early detection. . . . keep in constant touch with your body and if you find something, . . . you need to go to a health care provider or even an elder and let them know what's going on so you can get it checked out, . . .

I definitely think that you should keep in touch with your family, no matter what. Always make sure your family is aware, knows what's going on, whether it be a mountain or a mole hill, make sure they are aware. And, be positive, stay positive, and make sure you do your self examinations. And make sure you get your mammograms done the way they're supposed to be . . . I'm trying to promote that because there's a lot of women that don't pay attention to their bodies. When there is something foreign inside your body you need to find out what it is. So, you need to be in constant touch with your body.



Cindy Thorton

[Western Cherokee]



Carolyn Spotted Horse [Crow]

. . . By going back to work . . . in fact I went back, first part of March and I still had two more treatments, and I was still, well I wasn't bald but I still had to wear that wig and the people that I work with were really nice and were understanding and that helped a lot. And the supervisor came down, to be around people and not to be home, if you get sick, . . . it helped to be around people . . . and not withdraw because you didn't ask for it to happen to you but it did and it's nothing to be ashamed of . . . do breast exams, examine [yourselves], if [you] do it every month and then if there's a slight change then [you're] going to know . . . You just go in early and not wait, . . . you should just go right in.

I think you would have to tell them; don't give up hope and don't think that that is the end, you know. I think you can . . . there's a lot of . . . avenues now, treatments and new things, and so you don't have to have that feeling of doom I think that people had in the past about cancer. I think there's powerful things out there now . . . if you think something's wrong, I think you need to know your own system, you can tell, I can tell when I'm sick, I can tell when I feel bad and I think I knew that there was something really wrong with me and we just couldn't figure it out and I think you need to listen to your body, pay attention and if you think something's wrong, keep at it . . . And go in and do breast exams, that's absolutely important, I think those mammogram are vital for getting an early detection.



Mary Lou Davis
[Caddo/Cherokee]



Martha Red Willow
[Oglala Sioux]

To get early treatment, find a support group, speak to someone, let your feelings out, your fears, and just take it day by day . . . there's times that you think that you're too tired and you just can't go on anymore and you don't have the strength or energy or anything. A friend of mine had told me, 'it's better to wear out than to rust out.' And I think that's a wonderful saying, God love her for saying that. And also, don't have self-pity, don't pity yourself, you know, there's so many people that are gonna say "oh, poor thing you know, I felt so sorry for her", don't because [it] just [weakens] you. And my mother, she's is so wonderful, she's my best friend, my mentor. She had always told me because I always had a weight problem, always ate junk food, you know I just didn't take care of myself, and she had always told me, 'God gave you but one body, take care of it,' and it's so true . . . I keep thinking, if I

wasn't around I wouldn't be enjoying my beautiful granddaughter that I love with all my heart, she's my goddaughter also. I'm very, very blessed to have her and to see my children getting older . . . I have come across a lot of people that are having breast cancer or had it, it's good for me to speak with them and to relate and to let 'em know that you know, there is life after cancer. A lot of them have retired, some aren't doing so well, but when they see someone that is working and raising a family it gives them hope and that's all I want is to give people hope to let 'em know that they can go on and life does get better, it does.



Candi Miller
[Haida]

. . . have a mammogram, get it checked out because early detection really is very important. I know of a lot of women that are frightened by their discovery and choose not to do anything about it, but something can be done if it's detected at an early age or stage.

I really think that everybody should have a mammogram even if they don't feel any lumps . . . Go to the doctor, get a check-up, and pray a lot 'cause that's what pulled me through is prayer, and friends. You need your friends and your family and your grandchildren, they keep you going.



Norma Staples
[Mandan]



. . . if you discover a lump or anything like that, just take care of it right away, don't put it off cause you never know what it's going to be, you know; whether it's going to be cancer or if it's not, . . . I think that's about the best advice I have.

Gloria Suazo [Taos Pueblo]

I feel like that if I would have checked my breast like they tell us all the time to do then I might of found it sooner because the mammograms didn't show. And I would, you know, I would just suggest you check your breast, you know, as often as, well at least once a month anyway and I'm sure, you know, if it's there that you will find it . . . I think one thing is that if you tell yourself that, that you're healing and that you can be healed, that I think that is one of the main things is that you have to be strong for yourself, because nobody can do it but you. It's like what we have been learning all this weekend that its all inside you; all these things that will help us are there and they're all inside of ourselves . . . I think that . . . not to be afraid . . . And we can do it all, we can all be survivors.



Evelyn Trujillo
[Yaqui]



Francis Johnson
[Fish River Inupiaq]

Just try to be brave and we got love ones on earth and try to encourage yourself to keep on going. Try to do what you do before you have your surgery. Do them all over again, that helped me, knitting, crocheting, sew, it help you forget, you forget what is going on sometime; time [goes] so fast, before you

know it, it's bedtime (laughter). ...take a walk . . . Going camping and . . . go berry picking and picnics up in Nome, and [to] go camping is good for me anyway, we drink good running water back there, good water back in Council, cool water and you can get fresh river fish really supposed to be good for everybody.



Angela Russell
[Crow]

You have to have a basic belief that you're gonna be okay, but I guess even more important is that you want to live, I think at some point you've gotta reconcile that death is possible, of course death is inevitable for all of us down the road, but when you get a diagnosis of cancer I think you've gotta really decide, do you really want to fight this, because if you decide you don't wanna fight it, I think you really can die faster . . . I guess the message I would give to them is that you are an important person, you're

valued, you need to be on this earth right now because of certain things that you alone can do. And you need to take care of yourself, if there are any symptoms, you need to go in and get yourself checked out.

Don't be like me, wait too long. Just have faith each and every one of you, be strong and tell your parents and tell your brothers and sisters and pray together and I know you got beliefs in each family, they got their own beliefs, believe in that and have courage, be strong, pull together . . . Just be open, I was open. I was scared, still scared now. I talked to you, I talked to everybody that had cancer. My auntie she's got cancer too. I talk with her, we have long talk yesterday, go for a long walk. Pick wild spinach, go



Mary Lou Calabaza
[Santa Domingo
Pueblo]

up to the mountains, pick parsley, that's what I do, walking . . . Be strong, don't be afraid. Take care of your health and live day by day. Be happy to see the sun come up again the next morning when you wake up. And I know you believe in your own beliefs, in Pueblos they got their own beliefs, pray to that. And when the sun go down there, just tell the sun "I hope to see you tomorrow when I wake up" and be happy, be blessed for that day.

Lots of people get really worried about that cancer. They get more sick, they're self worrying, you know about that. But I didn't, every time I go down and see the doctor, I say, "I got no more cancer on me." When I went to see him last month he said . . . Everything is fine now. Boy, I thank to God, I always pray to help me. I'm really glad I got no more cancer. I don't worry about it now, lots of people that when they have cancer they worry about it. . . . they won't get well when they worry about it like that all the time, think about it.



Annie Williams
[Yupik]



Jennie Joe
[Navajo]

I think that most women have to remember that they more than anybody else know about their body. I think we can tell when something isn't really right and I think you need to go with that intuition, I think you need to do something. I didn't want to find out but I also knew that if I didn't find out that it may be something that I regret; and I also know that you can survive cancer now, which many people sort of used to think it was something that was irreversible, that

know it, you'll die . . . that cancer doesn't have to be a death sentence, that there is a way to deal with it and the earlier you can get help, your chances are much better and that we shouldn't have to fear it and not talk about it, it's something that should be discussed.



Katherine Big Hail
[Crow]

(translated by daughter) she said . . . well if I'm healed, through her faith, she said I got healed, completely healed, you can be healed too. She really fought, . . . for her healing. But she wasn't alone, the family was right behind [her], we all supported her and I think a cancer patient really [needs] . . . alot of support, encouragement. . . . She said to the other cancer patients, people that have cancer, she said, "if you're willing to get healed you're gonna get healed." Even from the help of your doctor, pray for your doctor, you know, work with him, like work with your doctor. (Native tongue) Ya, and then she said just go ahead with the treatment they're helping you too so work with them, work with the doctor.

Now . . . , I'm completely recovered. I'm able to get . . . my left arm up as high as my right. I use my left side, just as much if not more than my right side. And, I've got a good job, got a great boyfriend, and my daughter is working in . . . , Phoenix and she's planning on going back to school and I'm just altogether happy and I'm just really happy that I did survive and I am really happy that I have this chance . . . , to tell people please don't wait, don't be afraid to tell someone.



Esther Venes
[Inupiaq/Yupik]

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For further information, Contact

Native American Cancer Research
Corporation

3022 South Nova Road

Pine, CO 80470-7830

Webpage://www.NatAmCancer.org

Layout,Graphics & Photo Enhancements by: Rick Clark
Morning Dew Computer Productions, Pine, CO
(E-Mail: dontdoam@aol.com)

Cover Graphic: Neil Thompson

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In Honor & Memory of ***Katherine Big Hail*** [Crow]