



Dr. Jennie Bennett receives Broad Shoulders Award

by Kim James

With faith and optimism, Dr. Jennie Bennett has used her life-changing experience with breast cancer to reach out to women in the midst of the same storm. And, because of that, she is the recipient of the Houston Woman Magazine's 2009 Broad Shoulders Award. She has exemplified sincere friendship and provided comfort and support in good times and bad.

In April 1996, Bennett was confidently continuing along a path of success. She had received her doctorate in mathematics from the University of Houston and was actively pursuing a mathematics career. She had taught mathematics from the elementary to graduate levels, co-authored math textbooks, written articles for academic and professional journals and spoken all over the United States and in Canada.

It was at a national mathematics conference that her health was brought to her attention. While speaking, she had a nipple discharge. Once she returned home, she arranged for testing and a biopsy. Her physician happened to be a childhood friend, and he had the task of telling her she had cancer.

To Bennett, that statement was initially a death sentence.

"This cancer had come to take my whole life after building myself up," she said. She didn't have room in her life for cancer, was in the middle of a speaking tour, had to work to take care of her daughter. Bennett says she didn't feel strong enough to fight this battle. She was scared, angry and had many questions.

Her parents' influence, particularly regarding spirituality, is what changed her outlook from despair to hopefulness.

"I felt a force bigger than me could heal me," she says, "So I prayed, trusted and stood on the side of believing that I would be whole, I would have balance in my life, and I would be able to create a new life for others and not experience fear."

Realizing the courage it took to survive a breast cancer diagnosis, a mastectomy and treatment encouraged Bennett to reach out to other women.

"I knew deep down I was in the valley of hopelessness, and I know what it took for God to elevate me from that valley to walk up the mountain of hope," she says. "If I had that chance and navigated that road, then I had something inside of myself that would allow me to bless other women stricken with the disease," she added.

She began to meet with other women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer to help them understand their diagnosis and their treatment options. From this, Bennett created Reconstruction of a Survivor.

Reconstruction of a Survivor is a non-profit organization that provides support for women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. It aims to provide hope, healing and a renewal of the belief for a better future to women all over the globe. Women are provided with education regarding their diagnosis, given the opportunity to participate in a support group and encouraged to reach out to other women who have been diagnosed with breast cancer. The organization was approved as a 501(c)(3) in 2007.

Reconstruction of a Survivor's curriculum was written, Bennett says, so survivors would know there is life after breast cancer with nothing lost, but so much to gain. Understanding research that acknowledges the impact of faith in cancer patients, participants also examine the spiritual and emotional aspects of and beyond breast cancer. Bennett is currently working to share her curriculum with organizations serving women in Barbados and The Netherlands.

Bennett says a cancer diagnosis is a force that changes a woman.

“You come out of it a different person...and have a better quality of life than before the diagnosis,” she says.

Bennett is a 13-year cancer survivor. She feels her greatest accomplishment is bringing together women from different cultures, socioeconomic levels and religious backgrounds who share a common diagnosis of breast cancer and desire to live a healthy, fulfilling life.

“I am most proud of all the women who participate in our organization, their courage to answer tough questions about themselves and their families and their drive to help other women diagnosed with breast cancer.”

Amidst all other accolades and recognitions received, Bennett is most grateful for this new award.

“I have served on the Board of Directors for the world's largest mathematics organization. I thought starring in M.D. Anderson's Cleo Award commercial on Making Cancer History was a big deal. But to know that I have received an award that does not impact just me, but those who I have been blessed to help is the greatest blessing for me.”

For more information about Reconstruction of a Survivor, visit www.reconstructasurvivor.org.