



“And so I made two promises to myself that became my beacons: to trust my instincts and to **be well** as I completed the steps that I had to do to **get well.**”

## Our Stories

### MEREDITH

*I was honored to be asked to share my story with United for HER's many supporters. And yet, I struggled with shining a spotlight on such a highly personal (and painful) experience, one that isn't quite behind me. Then a bit of grace: an email floated across my desk as I sat down to compose this, with these words contained within it: "And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others."*

*And thus, with deep gratitude to its author, Marianne Williamson, I had direction in what I wanted to share, and why.*

*This chapter of my life began when I was 39, my children the tender ages of 6, 3 and 1. I was chasing them around the pool one late June day, amongst a yard full of friends and kids, and some small movement registered a lightly painful pressure under my right arm. My fingers detected a lump there, the size of a large grape. I considered it only for a moment before dismissing it as the likely result of a recent cold (I'm wiser now). I had, after all, just had two breast exams at routine well-visits at my gynecologist and primary physician. A happenstance breakfast conversation a week later with a friend whose 39-year-old sister (young, fit, with children just the ages of mine) had just had a double mastectomy changed everything. I was jolted from complacency, and called for an appointment with my primary from the parking lot.*

*The concerned looks from my doctor a few days later led to scans, then biopsies, then the much anticipated and very dreaded phone call. I learned while driving with my husband on the Schuylkill Expressway on my 40th birthday that I had stage 3 breast cancer that had spread to several axial lymph nodes. We somehow navigated home and started dialing our closest family members.*

*It seemed improbable. In fact, it seemed impossible: I had done everything right. I have never been a smoker, I run and do yoga several times per week, I have a great diet, I am a nearly life-long vegetarian and an avid organic gardener and cook. I breastfed all three of my children for two years, with the exception of my youngest who was still breastfeeding at the time (we had to curtail that early).*

*Somewhere in the tornado of the first week after my diagnosis, a wonderful nurse handed me a clean, new binder to organize the deluge of paperwork and CDs that would follow—a welcome kit to breast cancer. She showed me a tab toward the back, with information about an organization called Unite for HER, and praised its brave founder, also a breast cancer survivor. UFH's services sounded enlightened and wonderful, but I could barely hear her words over the rush of the mounting panic in my brain.*

*And so, I stumbled through the ensuing weeks, thick with more tests and second (and third) opinions. I cobbled together "my team" of doctors to shepherd me through the journey that is cancer treatment, and brought to them my pages of questions that didn't seem to be covered in their*