## "I am lucky. I am afraid. I am fighting."

First Person

Breast cancer had taken
Jan Burgess
Madole's mother and threatened her own life.
Now, it was back.



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By Jan Burgess Madole

N DECEMBER, 1999, the paralyzing divorce that had consumed my life for 18 months reached finality. My then 15-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son were adjusting well and we had few financial concerns. The three of us looked forward to Christmas, and the approaching new year, with great excitement and anticipation. Unfortunately, this euphoria was short lived.

In January, 2000, I began experiencing a debilitating pain in my right side. Six weeks after walking out of court, I was told I had breast cancer — again. In 1993, at the age of 42, I had been treated for the disease. Now it was back, and had metastasized to my liver and spine. Tears clouded my eyes, and an overwhelming fear spread through my body. It was a feeling that remains very clear, yet indescribable, to this day. Compounding my terror was the fact that, 10 years ago, I watched my mother lose an agonizing 10-month struggle with breast cancer.

My advanced cancer was classified Stage IV, the final phase, and my prognosis was grim. My sister, my best friend, my fiancé and I crowded into a small examining room where my doctor told us my life expectancy might be as short as three to six months. Essentially, I was told to make contingency plans for my children and get my personal and financial affairs in order. In tears and shock, we drove home. I told my children everything. The three of us put our arms around each other, fell on the floor, and cried.

I began chemotherapy within days, losing all my hair. When my spirits were depleted and my body physically exhausted, my support team assembled and proceeded to put me into fighting mode. Their positive and optimistic approach changed me forever. My life line included, and still includes, my church, my dad, my fiancé, my sister, my two best friends, and, most important, my children, Shannon and Travis. They encourage me each and every day, as does my doctor, David Chan, a member of the widespread network of oncology offices of UCLA's Jonsson Comprehensive Cancer Center.

After six months of treatment my tumors decreased in size and I volunteered to participate in a study of the experimental cancer vaccine, Theratope. Dr. John Glaspy leads the study at UCLA, and Dr. Chan administers the vaccine in his offices not far from my home. I am very grateful to be part of the trial for this vaccine that seems to be keeping my cancer in check. I know I am lucky, I know I am still afraid, and I know I am continuing to fight the good fight.