

# Soul Awareness

Retired schoolteacher Michael Kovarik, 64, lives with his partner on their farm in Greenwich, New York. He has metastatic breast cancer.

March 15, 2021 By Michael Kovarik

---

It began with a lump near my left nipple. I was sure it was only a cyst, so I wasn't concerned. But when I heard my doctor's voice, his words stopped me cold.

I was now one of the rare cases of male breast cancer. Stunned, my inner voice screamed out, "Wait, men don't get breast cancer!" But we do—about 1 in 100 cases are in men. I was diagnosed with Stage I in 2007; other detections soon followed: a chest wall recurrence in 2010 and Stage IV metastatic breast cancer in 2015.

My advocacy was born with my initial diagnosis. I found a place within the Male Breast Cancer Coalition where I could share my story as a man, a gay man, living with breast cancer. It expanded with the recurrence and fully blossomed with my metastatic diagnosis as I connected with the community within METAvivor. I embarked on a more intense schedule of speaking, traveling, mentoring and lobbying Congress. As I immersed myself, I pushed aside the raw emotions that accompanied each diagnosis.

I was determined that people know that men get breast cancer, that men get metastatic breast cancer. I desperately wanted people to be aware that Stage IV needed more in general—more funding for research, more acknowledgement, more support, more inclusion within the breast cancer community.

I connected with many amazing individuals: patients like me and their families, friends and caregivers, doctors, researchers, those within the pharmaceutical industry wanting to help. Each became family.

Yet as I was working to build awareness, I was unaware myself that I had buried unresolved emotions, cleverly hiding them within my passion for advocacy. Seeing many of my new friends die of this disease fueled my passion to advocate harder.

But beginning in late 2019, I began to notice that each loss, every passing, stole a piece of my heart and soul, creating a void deep inside. I cried, exploded in anger and fear, pleading with the universe to stop this pain, stop taking these gentle souls!

I was losing me.

I needed to make some drastic changes. I stepped away from advocacy and sought to relearn the joys of silently gazing up at the stars, embracing the peace of being in nature, truly taking in the beauty that surrounds me here on our old farm in upstate New York. Here, where I can lose myself in weeding the vegetable garden, whose bounty will nourish us. I embraced the centeredness that fills me as I create new gardens and enhance those already established.

I felt healing as my hands worked in Earth's soil, felt the gifts of stillness and meditation. I began to notice the beauty in each action, to rediscover the balance my spirit is yearning for, one steeped in honoring those who are gone, holding for now a space that advocacy may once again occupy, cherishing the beautiful souls in my life now and gifting myself the time to heal my spirit and soul.

---

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

<http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/article/soul-awareness-michael-kovarik>