Super Mom — Or, What It's Like to Be a Mom and Get Cancer...

I know enough about breast cancer to know there are no "guarantees," though my children need to have them.

December 22, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

Hi, I am Super Mom (supermombc.com) — your friendly neighborhood superhero who brings you the real truth about being a one-boobed mama who has survived cancer but cannot handle homework with my 8 year old! Let me tell you more in this piece for Wildfire Magazine all about being a parent AND cancer patient...

My original life "plan" was to consider getting married and having kids when I turned 40. If I had followed that path, I would not have been able to have children as I was diagnosed at 39 years old with estrogen- and progesterone-positive breast cancer. I know so many people, though, who were diagnosed younger than my age at diagnosis and were able to have kids miraculously either naturally or through adoption fostering, and I know others who have resigned themselves to not having children or who did not want children — there are so many permutations of life as a woman.

Having children is one of the most amazing, hard, terrible, magical, life-changing things in the world. For me, being a mom is what defined me — it became my only identity, for better or for worse, from the day I delivered my daughter in 2007 and my son in 2010 (one natural delivery, one C-section, both sucked except for the end results — oh, and in between, two miscarriages).

I was alone with my children more than I was with my partner, my much-beleaguered husband, or anyone else. I spent years carrying, balancing, running and being the be-all and end-all for the kids because there was no one else to do it and I had lost myself, anyway so what difference did it make if I did not do anything for me — what did I matter anymore now that I was a mom?

I left my six-figure-a-year job in NYC to be with my kids. To being an entrepreneur, balancing it all ONLY when my kids were at school. Being a mom was all I had time to do — for better or for worse.

When I had to sit them down and tell them mommy was sick, they were 6 and 9 years old and I was their whole world. I did not do this maliciously or because I wanted to be the best mom in the world (at least, not consciously) but because I did not see any help in the world — period.

I learned during my diagnosis, treatment and beyond, though, that there were people who wanted to help, who could help and that I never would have opened myself up to because I was “mom” and I had to “do it all.”

My daughter was 9 and she processed everything in a matter of being a soldier — she asked me right away if I was going to die and I, of course, told her “No, no doctor has said that I will die, I am ok.” She guessed that they would cut off my boob as I told them I had a boo-boo there. My son was more emotional and upset — the day of my first chemotherapy, when I came home and went right to bed, he sat beside my bed on the floor crying. (Sorry, kids, when you are old enough to read this, I am sharing your secrets).

Once my treatment was over, though, my daughter had to learn to process her feelings of fear, anxiety and the biggest fear of all — that of, “Will my parent die?” When I was a child, my mom was in a life-threatening car crash and then she left my family (sorry, mom) and I could understand the fear of losing a parent — even now, I am lucky enough to have both my parents still alive and of course I worry if they were to die even now at almost 42 years old.

We are all learning how to navigate this world of unknown — I hope to continue to be NED but my diagnosis was less than 2 years ago and I know enough about breast cancer to know there are no “guarantees” though my children need to have them — they ask often to confirm that I am well and healthy — and for now, I can continue to tell them, “Yes.”

The impact of cancer is that of continual ripples — I recently decided to remove my ovaries to help keep my hormones in check and the realization that I will not have any more children sometimes hits me and I feel gluttonous as I am so so lucky to have the two that I have. I am one of three, though, and my paternal grandma, who raised me, also had three children. I am resigned to the fact that with or without cancer, I was lucky to have gotten my two children as I had two losses in between those pregnancies.

I hate thanking cancer for anything but I do know that without it, I never would have stepped down from being the Type A control freak uber-mom to knowing that if I am not taking care of myself, no one is going to be ok and instead of being guilty and doubting myself, I know I am a kick-ass amazon mom (or at least the best I can be).

© 2026 Smart + Strong All Rights Reserved.

http://beta.docker.cancerhealth.com/blog/super-mom-what-its-like-to-be-mom-get-cancer