Hello, its Breast Cancer…

It was Friday, April 23, 2021 and I was waiting in the car pick up line at my son, Zions’ middle school to pick him up, I was early so I began talking on the phone with my Sister (not biological) and 10 minutes into our conversation, my other line started beeping alerting me that someone was trying to call me. I told my sister hold on, clicked over to answer the other line and it was my Doctor who informed me that she had the results from my biopsy that I took a few days before. She said, Cassandra you have Breast cancer. I took in a deep breath, a single tear fell from my left eye and I asked her with my voice cracking, what stage and she responded it was preliminary stage 3, however, we don’t know for sure until other tests and maybe surgery. I asked her if she recommended anyone or any hospital and she told me two Doctors, one was close and the other was further away. I asked who was the best and she informed me, I told her I have to let my husband know before making my choice so my doctor let me know she didn’t usually do this but she gave me her personal cell number and told me to call her back after discussing with my husband so she could set it up and I assured her I will. I clicked over to my sister on the other line and told her what my doctor told me, it was brief silence, then I told her I gotta call Joe (my husband) to tell him, she understood we both said bye and I love you sister (as usual) and hung up. I was still early for picking up Zion from school, I was first in the car line, people were just now starting to pull up behind my car. I tried calling Joe twice, no answer, I didn’t want to leave a message, I needed to tell him this now so I made a U turn from the car pick up line at Zion school and headed the few miles home to wake up Joe from sleeping to tell him the news. My heart was in my stomach and my stomach was in knots as I drove home. I pulled into the driveway, raised the garage door, pulled into the garage, turned the car off and went into the house headed straight to my bedroom where I left Joe. He was sleeping so good, I didn’t want to wake him. I sat on the side of the bed where Joe was sleeping and gently shook his legs to try to wake him up, he was sleeping so good he didn’t wake up so I kissed him on the forehead, he opened his eyes and jumped because I was in his face. I said baby, my doctor called me with my results of the biopsy, I have breast cancer baby. Joe looked at me with sadness and disbelief in his eyes, I put my arms around his neck as he sat up in the bed and we cried together briefly and I assured him God already told me no matter what, God got me so we gonna be alright. I consciously breathed in and out to make sure I kept breathing. Joe got out the bed and stood up to try to get dressed as I told him we gotta go pick up Zion from school, I let him know I was in the car line to pick him up when the doctor called me, and I had tried calling to tell him, but he didn’t answer the phone. As he was getting dressed it was clear he was distraught, tears were still coming from his eyes. I reached for his hand as he dressed and stood for us to leave and held his hand as we walked out our bedroom, down the hallway, past our children’s bedrooms to the 4 stairs leading to the main level, walked through the living room through the dining area off the kitchen to the garage. I drove us to Zion’s school, picked Zion up, explained why we were late (Zion knows I’m punctual) and drove us home trying to act normal until we reached our house to tell Zion. As soon as we entered the kitchen from the garage, I stopped Zion from heading to his bedroom by telling him me and Joe had to tell him the results of my biopsy. Zion had a look of fear in his eyes as he asked me what the results were, I told him it was positive for breast cancer, he hugged me with tears in his eyes. I told him everything is gonna be alright, I told him we trust God especially for tough times like these. We stood in the kitchen, in an embrace until he stopped crying, and I calmed down. When I released him from my hug, he turned to walk to his bedroom, needing alone time. I allowed him to take his time processing this news, meanwhile, Joe walked out to his spot in the garage to smoke him a Cuban cigar and have a drink. I told him we gotta call my doctor back, together to discuss treatment options. I sat down in the garage with him and we called my doctor back from my cellphone. She immediately expressed her prayers to my husband and myself for this journey. Her sentiments were so warm and calming. We decided on the Cancer Treatment Center, she put in a call for us to her associate there and let us know they will be contacting us for a consultation appointment in about 2 weeks. I was thinking two weeks is so long to wait to find out if I’m going to live or die?! What kind of breast cancer do I have? What is gonna happen to me? All of my grandparents [assed away from cancer. Life just got mad real! I told Joe we have to tell our children, our parents, our family and friends. It was surreal. I didn’t have the words to speak, couldn’t formulate the sentence, “I have breast cancer” so I sent everyone a text filled with hope. The rest of the day was a whirlwind. My sisterfriends all came over despite me saying in my text, I didn’t want any company. These heiffas don’t listen! Then Joe cousin Aja and her husband came over too with breast cancer support gifts for me. I had no idea where Joe was while we were sitting in the basement. My mind was so cloudy. I had begun journaling days ago to document my feelings and emotions.

Journaling had been something I learned from going to therapy years ago. In 1998 when I had my premature twin sons, I began to remember my childhood and began to have nightmares about me being molested and raped so much so that one night I peed in my bed, I woke up so upset. I shared what happened to me with the twins’ father, we will call him Leon. He really didn’t know what to say or how to help me through this devastating reality I was now faced with not only in my nightmares but also in my day-to-day living. Leon and I had a small one bedroom apartment on 68th Jeffrey, we had a car and I worked at a company called Zonta International downtown Chicago where I worked as a glorified receptionist among other duties. I began working at Zonta years ago when I was about 20 years old in 1996, I found the job listing while attending college at Harold Washington college downtown Chicago, I was home for two semesters to save up and buy me a car to go back to school at Grambling State University. My father got Leon a job at the Hotel Intercontinental where he worked as a chef. We struggled paying bills with these two jobs, paying for childcare so we can work, car note, car insurance, rent, groceries, etc., So when Leon lost his job due to his many tardies and absences, life became harder and I was more frustrated than ever.

Using my faith to escape poverty.

Sweet home Chicago…

My maternal Grandmother would get so upset with me not wanting to learn how to cook, I would tell her, I’m gonna make money Grandma, somebody gonna be cooking for me! I’m going to college so I can make my own money. Growing up I loved, school, I loved learning and socializing with my peers. I was the first daughter to my mother but second child and I was my father’s first born daughter born a day before his first fathers day. I grew up in a family of 3 children, my older brother is 3 years older and my younger sister is two years younger than me. My mother is the youngest child to her parents, she has an older brother and an older sister. My father is the first son to his parents, he has an older sister, Auntie Adrian who we affectionately called Auntie Aggie, then my aunt Cassandra who passed away from crib death at about 3 months, then my father, Auntie Sharon, Uncle Anthony who we called Uncle Boobie and uncle Kimble who was about 10 years older than me. My father was 20 and my mother was 21 when I was born. They were young. We were always surrounded by love, both sets of my grandparents partied together with the family every weekend. We would usually gather at my paternal grandparents’ house every Friday night, Saturday and Sunday after church. My grandma Janet (pronounced Jeanette) would cook along with my aunts and mother, the men would usually be talking mess, gambling, playing records or hanging out in the alley. My first cousins all grew up with me, most of us were a year apart from one another. We all fiercely protected each other, everyone knew our family on Ellis Avenue in Chicago, we grew up in the Woodlawn area. As children we played outside all day long until the streetlights came on. Once those streetlights came on, we were back in our neighborhood or in our home. We played double Dutch jump rope, we rode our bikes and big wheels, we waited for the ice cream truck to beg our parents for money to buy ice cream from the ice cream truck. In the hot summer days back then we would turn the fire hydrant on in the neighborhood, they would place something in the flow of water to escalate the water and it would shoot out like a large fountain to cool ourselves off. I remember how we would throw each other into the huge flow of the water, cars would either come through slowly or reverse from the block to not drive through the water to wet their cars. This would go on until someone called the fire department or police and they would come threaten everyone and turn it off. The summertime Chicago back in those days was so much fun, we would hang out with family, play with cousins late into the night catching lightning bugs, placing them in jars or putting them in our ear lobes like earrings. We went to the Taste of Chicago downtown Chicago; we didn’t have a car, so we caught the CTA (Chicago Transit Authority) everywhere. Before school started and summer began, we all went to the Bud Biliken parade. My mother used to pack sandwiches and snacks in a cooler that we carried along with blankets to sit on as we waited to watch the parade, we had to wake up early in the morning to catch the bus and find a good spot. It was so much fun watching the bands, dance groups, and seeing local celebrities and classmates participating in the parade. But with everything in life there is ebb and flows right? Welp, back in those days, I also went through seeing my aunt and uncle argue and physically fight, I witnessed my parents arguing and hated being woken up t the sound of that so much so that I wouldn’t really spend the night at my cousins’ house because of the fighting, I couldn’t sleep, couldn’t rest, was always scared. After seeing my parents argue more, I would take the weight of it on myself by trying to be the best child, I would stay clean instead of getting dirty outside hen we played, I would be an excellent student and get good grades in school, I would go to church with my great grandmother to give my parents something good in their lives, something worth sustaining in their marriage. Growing up living in poverty but being unaware usually until I asked for things, they said we couldn’t afford. That would boggle my mind as a child seeing my parents and family party, drink, smoke, play different records, play the lottery, etc., even in my young mind I would silently judge them. I would think like, if they didn’t do all these things we would have enough money and at least have a car so that we wasn’t walking to the laundromat or to the grocery store pulling our buggy or cart that we used to load up our groceries or loaded up with our dirty laundry to walk to the laundromat because we didn’t have a washer and dryer in our apartment. Then, I was molested by two trusted family members on two different occasions. I didn’t tell anyone because I didn’t want to cause conflict. I didn’t want to get them in trouble. They were only about 3 years or so older than me so I didn’t feel as if they were doing it to harm me, but they did it because they had free access to me at a time they were growing up and their hormones were taking over their young bodies. One was oral (me as the giver) and the other was actual penetration. I had to be between the ages of 5-7 when this occurred but the trauma of this would follow me the rest of my life in one way or another. I wonder why I felt it was up to me to protect everyone around me even above myself. Back then, I remember how I would fall or have any scar from playing physically and I would consistently peel the scar or wound until it bled no matter how much pain it caused, I would sit there and peel it every time the scar scabbed over. I began to feel so ugly inside because of what I endured. I began to not like myself and wanted to be darker skinned. I remember going down south one summer when my parents were separated, and my father and uncle Boobie were living in South Carolina. My maternal grandparents drove us down south one summer and we had a great time. It was my sister, my two cousins Teneshia and Tinesha and we used to spend our days eating candy, making up dances or going to the swimming pool. I remember seeing how dark people would get from being alongside the swimming pool in the summer and I wanted my skin to be darker toned. By this time I had begun to have problem skin, acne and because I had the habit of peeling my scars I would bust the bumps on my face and pic at them and at this time I was fairer skinned and it really looked bad so I said hey if my skin was darker people wouldn’t see these marks on my face like they could because I was lighter. I defied my uncle girlfriend who told us to wait on Uncle Boobie before going to the pool and I went anyway, I led myself and my sister and cousin to the pool, we had a ball. I remember having a great time and intentionally sitting outside the pool to get a darker complexion. And if I’m honest, that was also my way of fading into the background, embarrassed, and not wanting to be seen since I was molested. Eb and flow right?

10/1998 it was all a dream

I jumped out the bed, embarrassed that I wet the bed as a grown woman who is now the mother of identical twin boys!! I jumped in the shower, kind of numb, not a tear came from my eyes, but no doubt I was heartbroken and in pain. This thing had been like a nightmare I would have off and on but now I recalled that it was not a nightmare but actually my reality. I had been molested. Whew. I said it outside my inner thoughts pushed the words out my mouth forcefully. Once I finished showering my body and drying off from a towel I grabbed from the towel rack. I exited the bathroom with a towel wrapped around my body and told my children’s father, we’ll call him CF, I told CF what I recalled of my nightmare and that it had actually happened to me in real life as a little girl. I let it out and walked out the bedroom away from him because I couldn’t take any stares or looking at me in a way that I would feel embarrassed, dirty and ugly. It always made me uncomfortable when anyone stared at me too long, it was as if the person looking could see into the ugliness that happened to me. I had consciously stayed hidden under baggy clothes, not trying to fix myself up to look attractive and at one point in high school after I was raped at 16, I used to layer my clothing, mostly my pants. I would wear an extra pair or two of sweats or whatever under my pants. I was skinny back then so all my clothes were like a size 0. Sometimes the clothes under my clothes would have blood stains on them from my menstrual period. In my mind, if I had a smell then no one would want to sexually abuse me.

Crazy how becoming a mother now brought up these feelings and emotions in me. For days after this happened it stayed on my mind. Had I repressed these memories since I was a little girl? My world was forever changed because not only was I raped at 16, I had to mentally battle my reality of being molested too. I called my Great Auntie and shared it all with her, in which she shared with me her experience of being sexually abused as well. We were now trauma bonded for life.

Leaving little Cassandra…

I remember clear as day the night I was penetrated and when I was made to perform oral sex. Two separate events, two different people. Being that my family partied a lot and the partying included drinking, smoking, dancing to music, playing cards, talking mess, etc., The children were all left to hang out in the back of the house out of the way of the grown people. I was one of the first girls born in the family it was mostly boys before me.

The rape Spring 92