

The Chronicles of Hope are the *real life* stories of those helped by Komen for the Cure's commitment to the care, research and understanding of breast cancer. These are their—and our—stories.

When Kate Sommer was 8 months pregnant she felt a lump in her left breast. Her obstetrician assured her that it was a blocked milk duct saying, "Women don't get breast cancer at 29. Don't worry about it." At her 3- and 6-week postpartum checkups the doctor reiterated his initial theory and did not recommend a mammogram for her until the breast tissue began to pucker. Kate received her initial diagnosis of stage II invasive interductal carcinoma when she was 30 years old. She had a bilateral mastectomy followed by six months of chemotherapy.

At the time Kate was a stay at home mother with two small children. Her son, a baby at the time, was oblivious to her treatment. But her five-year-old daughter struggled with the literal removal of Kate's breasts, often having nightmares that other body parts had been removed from either her mom, or herself. Kate's fears were more specific. She recalls thinking, "I have two small

"The fear was not about losing my breast, it was about losing my life."

children. I am 30 years old. I don't want to die."

Five years later, Kate found another lump.

On the morning of her son's 6th birthday, she found out that it was a recurrence of cancer. When she sought a second opinion the new doctor refused to look at her and spoke only to her husband. The doctor predicted that Kate had metastatic disease and only three years to live. This news was shattering. Kate couldn't get the words out of her mind. Her husband wanted action. He asked that she be treated with a stem cell transplant—an aggressive therapy that is not often used to treat breast cancer—but was told that she was not eligible...yet. Kate felt like the doctor was saying, "You are terminal, but you just aren't *terminal enough* for me to do anything for you."

Kate returned to her original oncologist who counseled, "She doesn't know who you are. She doesn't understand your fight. Maybe it *is* mets, but there are a lot of options out there and there is still a lot to come." As it turned out, Kate's cancer had not metastasized and she was treated with radiation followed by tamoxifen. Her daughter asked all of the tough questions including if Kate was going to die. Ever the teacher, Kate responded, "We could be hit by a bus tomorrow. Mommy is going to be here for as long as she can."



Survivor
Kate Sommer

Diagnosis
**Stage II Invasive Interductal
Carcinoma/Metastatic**

Years of Survivorship
26/3

"There are so many times when I should say no and I don't. I can't, when it's Komen. Komen is empowering and survivors need to be empowered."

Twenty-three years into her breast cancer odyssey, Kate was playing golf when she believed that she sprained a muscle in her rib cage. After three weeks of constant pain, her husband urged her to make an appointment with a friend who was an orthopedic surgeon. The doctor took x-rays and then referred her for an MRI. Kate received a call on the same day asking her to return to the office. The surgeon also called her husband saying, “You need to be with your wife when she comes in for this appointment.” The MRI revealed that Kate’s cancer had metastasized throughout her rib cage. Further testing revealed that there was also a tumor in her liver. Kate and her oncologist are fighting the cancer. Since June of 2010 Kate has been on six different treatment regimens designed to keep her cancer at bay.

“I decided that ignorance was bliss. When I looked at other people, I didn’t know their stories, but I guessed that at this age (30), most did not have the taste of mortality in their mouths. I value that lesson, but there are times that I wish I still had the ignorance.”

Looking back on her journey, Kate remembers the isolation of being a young woman with breast cancer in the 1980s. Her three sisters and mother lived in the area, but Kate was determined to get through it on her own. When her children wanted to swim, she learned to ignore the stares she received from others at the pool during and after her breast reconstruction. She overcame the depression she developed as young woman who had to face her own mortality. She refused to let the cancer dictate her life, even after subsequent diagnoses. Today, Kate is a teacher, her children are grown and she recently celebrated her 35th wedding anniversary. With a reference to the poet Dylan Thomas, Kate declares “I will not go gently into that good night.” Her resolve is as strong now as it was 26 years ago.

INVOLVEMENT WITH KOMEN

Shortly after her second diagnosis, Kate went to her first Race for the Cure in Washington, DC and she was inspired. She thought “This is it! I was meant to see this. We need to do this in Omaha.” She prayed, “Keep me here and I will continue to do this fight.” She organized her local Junior League to bring the race to Omaha in 1994 and she has worked on the Race ever since. She was also a founding member of the Omaha Affiliate and has twice served as its President.

When asked about the Affiliate, Kate responds, “I’m proud of the outreach and grants that we have slowly been able to build up across the state of Nebraska.” They serve 91 counties, many of which are rural and where women may have to travel great distances to receive treatment. The community grants provided by the Affiliate have provided awareness and education programs, support groups for survivors, treatment assistance and programs to help pay for transportation, rent and childcare so that women don’t have to decide whether to pay their rent or receive their medical treatment.

“I believe that I am making a difference in the fight against breast cancer when I do *anything* for Komen.”

Kate has also been involved in programs on the national level. In 2010 she served on a Survivorship Task Force at Komen headquarters focused on identifying needs and gaps in survivorship issues and services. Later, and only six months after receiving her own diagnosis of metastatic breast cancer, she participated in Komen’s Metastatic Roundtable which she describes as “the best experience I’ve ever had at Komen.” She remembers thinking, “We are sitting in a room at the largest, most powerful breast cancer organization in the world and we are giving them input that is so important and this organization is listening. It was a powerful experience and one that I will never forget.”

KOMEN’S COMMITMENT

Komen is committed to supporting those, like Kate, who are living with metastatic breast cancer. In addition to investing more than **\$80 million** in metastasis research since 2006, Komen also provides [educational materials](#), and Affiliate funded grants across the nation. Read about other survivors in our [Chronicles of Hope Series](#) on the Research and Scientific Programs page of Komen.org.

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