

## "More to Give" - Vicki's Journey Toward Surviving Breast Cancer

By Coral Paul, Communications Specialist

For many people, October means pumpkins, cooler weather and the start of the holiday season. But it's also the month when pink ribbons appear everywhere – on shirts, in-store windows and across social media. From the charity walks and runs, to the words "Breast Cancer Awareness," these symbols hold a special meaning that changed Vicki Christmas' life forever.

At 34, Vicki noticed a lump on her breast and went to her doctor to have it checked. Her doctor sent her for a mammogram and a biopsy. A mammogram is an X-ray of the breast and helps detect changes or abnormalities, often before any symptoms appear. In Nova Scotia, routine mammograms are recommended at age 40 for people without symptoms, which makes Vicki's experience an important reminder: knowing the signs and recognizing symptoms is just as important as routine checks, even if you're younger than the recommended age.

Just a few days later, she got the news no one wants to hear - she had stage 4 breast cancer. The diagnosis came on October 4, and by October 7, she was scheduled for a mastectomy. A mastectomy is a surgical procedure that removes all tissue from the breast, often to treat or prevent breast cancer.

The news hit fast, and the reality even faster. In just a few days, Vicki's world had changed completely. But even in the middle of the fear and uncertainty, she made a promise to herself: "I'm not going anywhere. I got too much to do. I got too much to give."

Recovery after the mastectomy was not easy. The days after surgery were filled with pain, fatigue and limits she had never imagined. Simple things, like reaching for a cup of tea, getting dressed or braiding her hair became challenging. But the hardest part wasn't always physical – it was emotional.

Vicki struggled with how she saw herself. Losing a breast made her question her identity and feel less of a woman. Some days were filled with anger and frustration. Other days, she felt guilt for surviving when some of her friends in treatment didn't. But through it all, she tried to focus on the small victories — a day when she could move more easily or a moment of laughter with family or simply getting through another day.

Becoming a grandmother gave her even more motivation. Holding her grandchild reminded her why she was fighting: she wanted to be there to watch her grandbaby grow. That promise to herself — "I'm not going anywhere. I got too much to do. I got



more to give," — carried her through the toughest days.

Now, Vicki wants everyone to hear her message: learn the signs, pay attention to change and don't wait to get checked. She shares it not as a lesson she learned too late, but as a reminder she hopes others will act on sooner.

Her message to anyone facing cancer is simple but powerful:

"Believe that you can beat it. Cancer is a test of who you are and what you can accomplish. It doesn't define you."

Vicki's story reminds us that surviving cancer is not just about the body — it's about determination, hope and the courage to keep pushing forward. It's about living with purpose, being there for the people you love and finding strength you didn't know you had. It's been 21 years since Vicki was first diagnosed. Over two decades later, she

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## “More to Give” ... continued

still carries the scars, the lessons and the determination that got her through those early days.

**Wela’liek Vicki:** The Tajikeimik team sincerely thanks Vicki for sharing her story with us. Vicki, we know it

took courage to revisit such a difficult time of your life, and we admire the strength you’ve shown. And to anyone living with cancer, we hope Vicki’s story encourages you to take things one day at a time and to know that you are not alone.

For more information on how Tajikeimik’s Mi’kmaq Cancer Care Program, or to access our resources, visit: [www.mhwns.ca/programs/mikmaq-cancer-care](http://www.mhwns.ca/programs/mikmaq-cancer-care)

## Know Your Normal

The following is a resource provided by the Nova Scotia Breast Screening Program, and it outlines 5 important breast changes to look out for:

### About Us

Tajikeimik is the new and developing health and wellness organization that is leading health transformation on behalf of Mi’kmaq communities in Nova Scotia. In collaboration with Chiefs, Grand Council, and Health Directors, Tajikeimik will build on and evolve the health and wellness services and programs used by Mi’kmaq people in Nova Scotia; improve health service delivery; and strengthen coordination with Federal and Provincial health system partners - with the goal of improving overall health for Mi’kmaq and communities.

Elukuti’kw wjit naji-wlo’lтинenew utanminal. (We are working toward better health for all in our communities.)

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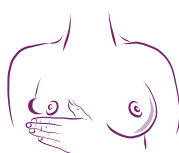
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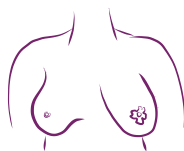
## BE BREAST AWARE.

Touch and look at your breasts regularly so you know how they normally look and feel – even take notice of any changes that are part of your regular cycle. Knowing your breasts will help you spot any changes quickly.



A lump in the breast, or a thickening or hardening of the skin.

Dimpling, puckering or depression in the breast or new inversion of the nipple.



Changes to size, shape of one nipple or breast.

Bloody or clear fluid leaking from the nipple.



Rashes, redness, heat, swelling, discomfort, or focal pain in one breast.

All new breast changes should be checked out by your health care provider. Not all new breast changes are cancerous but they do need to be assessed to ensure they are normal.

## MYTH-BUSTING

MYTH:	FACT:
Antiperspirants cause breast cancer.	No, there’s no evidence to support this claim.
Wearing an underwire bra causes breast cancer.	No, there’s no evidence to support this claim.
If I don’t have a family history of breast cancer, I won’t get it.	No, most people diagnosed with breast cancer have no known family history.
Breast cancer always causes a lump you can feel.	No, breast cancer might not cause a lump, especially when it first develops.
Putting a cell phone in your bra can cause breast cancer.	No, studies have not found an increase in the risk of breast cancer.

## THIS IS TRUE.

We encourage everyone to look and feel for changes in their own breasts, but mammograms are still the most reliable method for increasing the chances of early detection of breast cancer.

Talk to your health care provider to see if screening is right for you.

To book anywhere in Nova Scotia:

1-800-565-0548 (toll free)  
(902) 473-3960 (local)  
[breastscreening.nshealth.ca](http://breastscreening.nshealth.ca)



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