

For one musician, breast cancer at 24 aligned priorities

By Archana Prasanna

Standing under a blend of vivid stage lights, decked out in expressive clothing and listening to the buzz of the audience would seem like a surreal moment for most, but for her, it's everyday.

Asha Mevlana, a soft-spoken violinist with a hint of rock n' roll swagger, is living out her dream as a professional musician., but the decision to pursue a career in music came after passing a significant juncture in life.

In 2000, her friends gathered with food and wine and held a party that was meant to ease the awkwardness of the effects of chemotherapy. It was a hair cutting party. One by one, her friends cut off a piece of her hair until she was left nearly bald.

"I decided that the easiest way to accomplish this was to involve my friends in the process," Mevlana wrote on her website.

At 24, Mevlana had breast cancer. While most of her peers were securing their futures, she was forced to confront the thought of dying and not having one.

In an instant, her aspirations of having a career in public relations were overshadowed. The feeling of invincibility vanished within minutes of hearing the upsetting diagnosis.

"It was as if I was in a daze," she said.

The painful months of treatment began with a lumpectomy. She just didn't fit the stereotype of most breast cancer patients. Even before reaching the major milestones in life, life-altering decisions had to be made. Choosing between different forms of medications and treatment centers was overwhelming. The varying opinions from doctors were not reassuring. Rather, the situation was made even more complicated.

The first treatment was particularly scary.

"As they prepared to inject me with the red AC, I became very scared and began shaking. Why was I letting someone inject poison into my body?" she wrote. "The nurse told me to think of it as an army of red soldiers going in to kill all the bad cells. Psychologically, this made it much easier to deal with."

Mevlana turned to the Young Survivor's Coalition (YSC) to find a group of women her age, going through the same ordeal. She explained they helped her find a "chemo buddy." Along with friends and family, the YSC was another strong support system.

The four rounds of chemotherapy, followed by radiation, was an exhausting period of time, but the cancer cleared from her system. Gradually, the physical distress faded away, but the mental



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torment persisted. The fear of recurrence and consuming thought of cancer was difficult to handle.

Nonetheless, over time, this too subsided. When asked about her outlook on life now, she responded, "I feel lucky."

This change in perspective prompted by her survival brought about the courage to pursue her lifelong ambition of becoming a violinist.

Ditching the corporate life in exchange for an electric violin, Asha, now passionately teaches and performs with a well known Australian band called Porcelain. Now, she spends most of her time on stage performing intricate violin riffs and has also been seen with various artists such as Gnarl's Barkley and The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Despite the success, she takes the time to share her story as its one that embodies courage and independence. This should be a beacon of hope for the thousands of young breast cancer patients.

Ashamevlana.com

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