

## FLINT NATIVE CANCER SURVIVOR SHARES HER STORY *by Chevas Samuels*

The Harden Family has been a familiar fixture in the city of Flint for decades. The family ran the popular mom and pop business called Harden's Market that closed back in 2012, but it left Flint the best parts it could ever offer - its beautiful daughters: Minetta, Sheena, Sherri and Tonja. Tonja, the youngest Harden sweetheart, spoke to me about her recent cancer diagnosis and treatment.



### **CS - How did you find out you had Cancer?**

One day while on vacation I decided to do a random breast self-exam and felt a lump.

### **CS - What did it turn out to be?**

Stage 2 Triple Negative

*Triple negative breast cancer is a cancer that tests negative for estrogen receptors, progesterone receptors and excess HER2 protein. These results mean the growth of the cancer is not fueled by the hormones estrogen and progesterone, or by the HER2 protein. So, triple-negative breast cancer does not respond to hormonal therapy medicines or medicines that target HER2 protein receptors. Still, other medicines are used to successfully treat triple-negative breast cancer.*

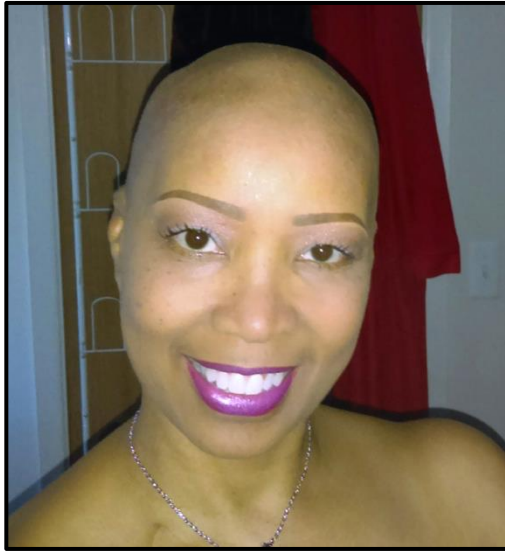
*(BreastCancer.Org December 11, 2018)*

### **CS - What was your initial reaction?**

I was stunned & speechless. Dying was never an option in my fight. Of course, you have those thoughts when it's quiet and you're all alone, but I decided from day 1 I was going to beat my diagnosis.

### **CS - Does your family have a history of Cancer?**

Distant relatives only. No one in my immediate family.



**CS - What was your treatment regimen? Surgery? Chemo? Radiation?**

I had a lumpectomy, 3 rounds of chemo, and 6 weeks of radiation. I had surgery in January, chemo immediately following, radiation following chemo, and was diagnosed cancer free in October.

*According to BreastCancer.org, Triple-negative breast cancer is typically treated with a combination of surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy.*

SMILING THROUGH TREATMENT

**CS - What was your support system during your treatment?**

My main support system was my sister Minetta, who wasn't working at the time, and my best friend who took off work frequently. My mom and other sisters were there as much as possible. Their support was extremely helpful and played an integral part in my healing process.

**CS - What, if anything has changed? Personal outlook?**

I am closer to God, and more spiritual because of this experience. I never lost FAITH in HIS healing power.

**CS - What do you think about Cancer in the black community? Are we afraid of diagnosis or are we misinformed/under-educated about Cancer?**

I just recently joined an advocacy group at Karmanos Cancer Institute\* and discovered startling statistics. Black men & women are dying from cancer at a much more rapid rate than any other demographic. I truly believe it is largely due to lack of information coupled with low income, lack of job availability, and little to no insurance coverage.

*Blacks have the highest death rate and shortest survival of any racial/ethnic group in the US for most cancers. The causes of these inequalities are complex and reflect social and economic disparities more than biological differences. Socioeconomic disparities reflect inequitable access to opportunities and resources, such as work, wealth, income, education, housing, and overall standard of living, as well as barriers to high-quality cancer prevention, early detection, and treatment information and services.*

*Although the overall racial disparity in cancer death rates is decreasing, in 2012, the death rate for all cancers combined was 24% higher in black men and 14% higher in black women than in white men and women, respectively. Moreover, the racial disparities for some cancers (e.g., breast) are increasing. (Cancer.org, Cancer Facts & Figures for African Americans, 2016-2018)*

**CS - What advice would you give to the Black Community, women AND men, about Cancer survival?**

I would give the same advice that is frequently given when it comes to Cancer. Keep yourself informed and get regular check-ups. No one knows your body better than you...take care of it! If there's anything that concerns you, don't hesitate to go to your doctor and find out what it is. The sooner you discover it, the sooner the healing will begin. If you don't have insurance, get some ASAP!!

**CS - Anything else you want to add?**

Please don't ever give up. A diagnosis is not necessarily a death sentence. Keep the faith. 90% of healing is mental. Be blessed!



TONYA TODAY

*If you'd like to contact Tonja, you can reach her on Facebook (Tonja Harden) or Instagram (Ms\_Talk2Tee)*

*\*The Karmanos Cancer Institute is the largest cancer research and provider network in Michigan. It has 15 treatment locations and its headquarters are located in Detroit.*

<https://www.karmanos.org/home>