

Let's be proactive about our health

"One never knows what life has in store for them" is an oft-quoted adage.

Our oldest daughter scheduled her first mammogram shortly after her 40th birthday last September. I had informed her that the recommended age to start mammograms was lowered to 40 in April 2024. I told her it would likely be a breeze. Typical of firstborns, she conscientiously heeded my advice while I had even forgotten about sharing the age-change information.

Unexpectedly, she received a call a few days later informing her that they needed more images because something looked a bit off. Further screening and biopsies ensued and ultimately she heard the dreaded words: "You have cancer." More specifically, *hormone receptor positive* breast cancer. As with any diagnosis of this type, it was shocking.

There had been no history of breast cancer on my side of the family, but we've since learned of a link to the same type of ductal cancer on my husband's maternal side. A few years prior, a young cousin had undergone surgery and chemo/radiation for triple negative breast cancer.

During that time we checked in on our cousin and sent words of encouragement to let her know we were thinking of her. We sent her a pink beaded bracelet along with a white one with the word "bada**" on it to remind her how strong she was when things got tough. This year, she's been a great resource for our daughter and she even re-gifted the two bracelets to her.

In March our daughter, her husband and numerous medical teams began a journey no one ever wants to take. Thankfully, her father-in-law is a medical professional and he provided knowledge and guidance. The rest of us were cheerleaders giving moral



Gayle Kerman, of Getzville, encourages women to get mammograms.

support and encouragement.

I'm happy to report that after undergoing a double mastectomy and simultaneous reconstruction, she got a clean bill of health and no chemotherapy or radiation was required. She was one of the lucky ones and we hope there are no more surprises in the future.

Recently we've learned of a friend whose breast cancer has returned and will need surgery. She will be the next member of our sisterhood of the traveling bracelets, and we will be lifting her up in spirit and reminding her to keep fighting.

October will arrive soon and many will be promoting breast cancer awareness. While I am not a medical professional, here are some facts culled from legitimate websites: Besides skin cancer, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in the U.S. Breast cancer rates rise by about 1% each year but the rate for women in their 40s and younger is increasing. Approximately 9% of new cases are happening to women under age 45. Thirteen percent of the female population in the U.S. will develop breast cancer in their lifetime. Breast cancer remains the second-leading cause of cancer death in women behind lung cancer.

As I instructed my young daughter, I am urging all women, especially those in their early 40s, to schedule yearly mammograms. In addition, research your family history to determine if you are at greater risk. Do self-examinations, be active and eat healthy. Be vigilant and keep in mind another well-used phrase: "If you have your health, you have everything."