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## Cancer survivor shares story with book, website and documentary

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Healing: One Step at a Time  
by Patricia San Pedro



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Cover Art for "Cancer Dancer"

Patricia San Pedro felt both confidence and trepidation the first time she went out in public with a thin layer of hair and no wig.

Having gone through a double mastectomy, chemotherapy and reconstructive surgery, she was sure her vanity could handle an outing to Roma Café on Calle Ocho.

When a little boy pointed indiscreetly and told his mother she was missing some hair, she simply explained that she had more hair than the bald man sitting nearby.

San Pedro, a South Florida executive at American Airlines and The Miami Herald before starting her own production company, has been determined to view her ordeal on the bright side.

"I turned everything around," explained San Pedro, 55, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008 and is the creator of PositivelyPat.com, a cancer support website. "I didn't focus on chemo as a nasty chemical. I thought of it as sacred juice and felt lucky it was available to heal me."

In addition to her website, San Pedro has published an e-book titled *The Cancer Dancer*, which is available in English, Spanish, and Portuguese. The English version of the book, including patient-to-patient and caregiver tips, is also available in hard copy.

San Pedro will be doing a book reading and signing at 4 p.m. Sunday at Books and Books in Coral Gables, 265 Aragon Ave.

She's also shared her story on film.

Just hours after her biopsy results came back, San Pedro began making a documentary of her

breast cancer journey. The hardest part though, she recalls, was telling her father, who had lost his wife to breast cancer years earlier. Antonio San Pedro reacted numbly to the news and cried through the night, she says.

Three years later, she has turned her footage and journal entries into a source of support and information for countless other women dealing with the disease.

The documentary, *Tengo Cancer (I Have Cancer)*, aired in October during National Breast Cancer Awareness Month on Discovery Familia, a Spanish-language cable channel. It has also aired in Latin America.

"I was totally against filming," said Lydia Sacasa, San Pedro's childhood friend. "I thought she was commercializing it because the camera was on 24/7, but when I saw the final outcome I saw the purpose."

Before the cancer, San Pedro co-wrote *Dish & Tell: Life, Love and Secrets* in 2005 with a group of businesswomen known as the Miami Bombshells.

"The information is critical for caregivers. We're clueless," explained Sacasa, who cared for San Pedro throughout her battle.

San Pedro's website, [PositivelyPat.com](http://PositivelyPat.com), features monthly articles by "Pat's Posse" and provides a space for women with breast cancer to share their own experiences. Pat's Posse includes University of Miami oncologists Dr. Stefan Gluck and Dr. Robert Derhagopian, as well as other health, wellness and spiritual specialists.

One of the tips that San Pedro thinks is important to share is that women with dense breasts cannot be accurately screened with a mammogram, but also should get a sonogram or MRI. She says it's important for all women to get mammograms, but those with dense breasts need to take the extra step.

"If your doctor won't order [a sonogram or MRI], get a new doctor," said San Pedro, who lives in Coral Gables. "And if you don't know whether your breasts are dense, find out."

In 2007, the most recent year the CDC says numbers are available, 202,964 women in the United States were diagnosed with breast cancer and 40,598 women in the United States died from the disease.

Debbie Cabrera, another cancer survivor who had her final reconstruction surgery last week, was sent to the "Link of Hope Sistas," San Pedro's support group, by a mutual friend.

"She took me under her wing," said Cabrera, who said San Pedro hosted gatherings at her house "where we shared info about health, nutrition, and sex."

"We're all there for each other and the new ones," she added.

San Pedro believes her documentary, book and website, are her ways of paying for the love and support she received throughout her breast cancer fight. She calls on her Link of Hope Sistas and other women who find her tips helpful to help others as well.

San Pedro hopes to continue receiving self-taped footage, tips and stories from other women going through their journey with breast cancer, so that information continues to be shared.

Cabrera, who appears in a video tip on PositivelyPat.com, is all for helping others.

“I think filming is empowering,” she said. “You get to be strong for someone else.”

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