

## I'm a Survivor.....



I never knew that those three words in a Destiny's Child song would resonate with me to the deepest level possible. Sometimes in life you can have the most profound experience which changes your whole being, turns your life upside down, your perspective, focus and priorities and that is exactly what happened to me three years ago.

I call it my "*from the valley to the Mountaintop experience*". Many people already know that I am extremely proud to be one of Operation Black Vote's Parliamentary Shadows 2010 and alongside that I am heavily involved in raising Breast Awareness and lobbying MPs but prior to 2007 this was not my focus. Breast Cancer did not even register on my radar and in many ways I was ignorant about the disease until that fateful day in October 2007 when I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer aged 27.

As you can imagine it was so unexpected because of my age and there being no family history however the signs had been there at least a year prior but I had not made the connection and by the time I had been diagnosed the tumour was so significant in size that breast conservation was not possible and the only option was to have a full Mastectomy with an

immediate reconstruction, followed by Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy. I went on a journey and part of that journey was difficult but in the end it proved enlightening. It was my awakening and led me to reflect on my life and I know this may sound a little clichéd but I know I am a better person for having gone through this experience. I refused from the beginning to be a victim to Breast Cancer and to let it cast a shadow over my life. It has totally changed my perspective on life and I have become more focused and determined to make a difference in anyway that I can.

I have already started to help influence Government policy, raise breast awareness and help fight to ensure that there are no barriers to equal access to treatment for all. In the future I aim to be in the position to propose and shape Government policy and input real perspective. Whitehall is calling and I am ready to answer!

Having been encouraged and inspired by so many strong, positive women and men along the way, I am truly honoured that now I have become a voice for all those affected and deeply humbled that my experience is helping to empower and inspire others to know that they are not alone, that a diagnosis is not the end and that they have the power within them to make a difference.

I am working at both Constituency and National level to make a difference. I became involved in trying to influence cancer services at a local level and have a say on the quality of care for patients through participating in a local Cancer Taskforce and Cancer Locality Group as a Service User Representative. This is such a fantastic opportunity to be a voice for those affected by Cancer and help influence local services and how they could be planned and better run. I am also delighted to be on the National BME Cancer Patient Advisory Panel. As a member of the panel I

provide information to the NHS in order to help support and improve cancer services; and to give cancer patients and carers from a Black and Minority Ethnic background a voice and an opportunity to share their experiences.

This year in particular, I have been working closely with the fantastic and pioneering Charity Breakthrough Breast Cancer and proud to be a part of their Campaigns & Advocacy Network. Through them I have had the opportunity to raise the awareness message within the media most recently on BBC Radio London and in the Sun Newspaper. This will continue and I am delighted that other media outlets have shown an interest in working with me in the near future.

This year Breakthrough gave me the opportunity to attend the Labour Party Conference where I met with a number of MPs face to face and in fringe events. I discussed with them the ways they can support and improve Breast Cancer Services. I also encouraged them to support Breakthrough Breast Cancer in its work to deliver better outcomes for people affected and help create a future free from the fear of the disease. All I spoke to listened to what I had to say and were sincere in their commitment to help.

I also recently attended Breakthrough's flagship lobbying event in Westminster where I joined forces with over 70 Campaigns & Advocacy Members to urge our MPs and the Government to secure vital improvements in the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. It was an incredible and successful event where we were able to play a major role in influencing future breast cancer outcomes and secure commitment from MPs and the Government.

I was honoured to be asked by Breakthrough to deliver the closing speech for the two-day event which I did. The feedback I have received has moved me considerably because so many within the room felt inspired and drew strength from my strength. That moment it really hit me how far I have come and how determined I am to do so much more. It really cemented for me the reason why I do what I do and has continued to fuel my passion to make a difference.

It is such a privilege to be a part of something so special – which will make change, help to save lives and influence policy. I feel very humbled to just play a small role in being able to achieve this. Keeping breast cancer high on the political agenda is important to me and I will continue to actively promote the work of Breakthrough, in particular highlight their campaigns such as the brilliant Touch, Look, Check (TLC) as well as work in partnership with Politicians, charities, trade unions, various organisations and my own employer to bring about change and I assure you I will campaign tirelessly for that change!

One of the most important personal aims for me is to raise Breast awareness particularly amongst younger women and Black and Minority Ethnic women and men. I will continue to share my experience in a positive way and help educate others. Saving lives, empowering others and helping to influence change is my burning motivation and I am proud to finally have become the change I want to see.

**Nicole Reece**

*Breakthrough Breast Cancer has launched the UK's first iPhone app aimed at encouraging women to be breast aware. You can download it at [ibreastcheck.com](http://ibreastcheck.com).*

*Link to the Sun article -*

<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/woman/3185862/Why-were-fighting-to-KO-breast-cancer.html>