

# YOU + US

TOGETHER FOR HEALTH AND HEALING • FALL 2016



## BREAST CANCER AT 23

Markie Layton faced cancer as a young single mom—but she never felt alone, thanks to her favorite people and her AIS Cancer Center care team

*San Joaquin Community Hospital*

 **Adventist Health**

**YOU CAN, WE CAN, BEAT CANCER.**

*Read stories of support, understanding and empathy.*

# MARKIE'S STORY

Loving life—and  
fighting breast cancer



**HOPE  
IN FULL**

**BLOOM:** Markie Layton and her daughter, Braylee, share a moment of fun and support. Braylee is a constant source of joy and courage for her mom.

**As a young woman** of only 22, Markie Layton already thought she had her hands full. She was adjusting to a new town, a new home and the challenges of raising a 3-year-old.

She didn't realize her toughest challenge was still ahead.

In November 2015, just two days after her 23rd birthday, Markie learned she had breast cancer.

The discovery came after a benign cyst in Markie's right breast became painfully inflamed. When she visited Quest Imaging at San Joaquin Community Hospital (SJCH) for an ultrasound, a tumor was detected next to the cyst. A biopsy of the tumor came back as positive for stage I cancer.

"At first, I couldn't believe it—cancer?" Markie says. "Then I was just really, really scared. I wanted it out of me."

### Caring support through tough times

Markie met with Vikas Ghai, MD, FACP, an oncologist at The AIS Cancer Center at SJCH. Together, they decided on a treatment plan that was right for her. She would undergo a mastectomy of her right breast. She had her surgery in February 2016 and began chemotherapy in March.

Markie felt confident in the exceptional care at The AIS Cancer Center—and comforted by Dr. Ghai—from the beginning. "Dr. Ghai was so attentive," she says. "He answered all my questions, and he really cares."

During her three weeks of chemotherapy, Markie became extremely ill.

"Chemo was very hard for me," she says. "I had to be hospitalized twice." She also lost her beautiful brown hair as well as 10 percent of her body weight.

Through the worst of it, she knew she had something heartening to cling to: the unwavering support of her favorite people—her boyfriend, Justin, and her daughter, Braylee.

They always made sure she felt loved and reassured her that everything would be OK, she says.

Braylee, about to turn 4, offered a dose of courage that continues to inspire her mother.

"Braylee has done so well," Markie says. "She would tell me: 'Don't be sad, Mom. Your brown hair will grow back.'"

### 'I'm happy with the person I've become'

For now, Markie keeps herself stylish with a collection of beautiful wigs, and she feels much better. She's moving on, but her life is still touched by cancer. She takes two different medications. For the next five years, she'll receive monthly injections to keep her ovaries from producing estrogen. This temporary, menopause-like state reduces her risk of a recurrence. It also means she has to accept that she can't get pregnant anytime soon.

Still, Markie remains optimistic about her future. In fact, she believes staying upbeat is a powerful weapon against cancer—and she wants others to know that.

"I blocked out any negative energy because you have to fight, but in a positive way," Markie says. "Make sure you're surrounded by positive people."

Markie is grateful for finding just that at The AIS Cancer Center. "The doctors, the nurses, everyone there is so great," she says. "They are your team, but they become family."

As far as facing breast cancer so young, Markie has found something positive about that too. She uses her experience to open a dialogue about cancer and breast health with other young women.

She's also gained a certain wisdom—a more meaningful appreciation for life.

"It was devastating, but I have a whole new perspective," Markie says. "I've changed, and I'm happy with the person I've become."



Markie (in her blonde wig) enjoys being able to play with her daughter.

## GENETIC TESTING AND BREAST CANCER

# Targeted treatment, better outcomes

Based on their family history, some women seek genetic counseling and testing to learn more about their specific risk for breast cancer. That knowledge can help them take steps to protect their health.

Genetic testing can also be beneficial after a diagnosis of breast cancer. Surgeons and oncologists at The AIS Cancer Center at San Joaquin Community Hospital (SJCH) use it—along with other tests—to tailor specific treatments. This helps ensure patients get the best possible care and recovery.

Learn more. Visit The AIS Cancer Center's website at [wecanbeatcancer.org](http://wecanbeatcancer.org). Search for "Genetic counseling."



### What about the cost?

One concern about genetic testing may be the cost. At The AIS Cancer Center, genetic counselors work with insurance companies to get the tests covered. In rare cases where the testing is needed and not covered, The San Joaquin Community Hospital Foundation has set up community-donated funds to help patients get testing.

## THE POWER OF A POSITIVE FIGHT

*"I blocked out any negative energy because you have to fight, but in a positive way. Make sure you're surrounded by positive people."*

—Markie Layton, breast cancer survivor

# UP CLOSE & PERSONAL

*Nurses who know what it's like to battle cancer*

The AIS Cancer Center at San Joaquin Community Hospital (SJCH) has a team of experts ready to help each person facing cancer. That includes a unique group of women who personally know the fear and struggle—three SJCH nurses who are also breast cancer survivors.

These RNs offer compassionate care to patients at The AIS Cancer Center. They may have much in common, but each of their stories is different. They range in age and ethnicity, showing what we already know—cancer can happen to anyone.

**"I've made  
it my mission..."**

—Karen Coston, RN,  
Charge Nurse for  
Outpatient Clinic,  
The AIS Cancer Center



**Karen Coston** is a Marine Corps veteran, a nurse, a mother of five children and now a cancer fighter. During a routine examination, doctors discovered a mass. After a mammogram, ultrasound and a biopsy, her fears were confirmed—she had markers for breast cancer.

Karen has a strong family history of cancer. Her mother died from breast cancer at the age of 42.

Now she wants to share her story with other women. "I feel like as women we do not do enough to empower, encourage and help one another," she says.

To help women better

understand breast cancer, Karen has started an educational event called "The Core of the Cure." She funds the free event herself, which is held twice a year. She invites 200 women to Hodel's Country Dining, where they receive education on breast cancer and other topics, along with being treated to fun games and raffles.

"I had a friend die from cancer," Karen says. "I've made it my mission to educate as many women as I can."

Karen's advice to women is simple: "Listen to that little voice inside you if you think something is wrong with your health. No one knows your body like you do. Don't put off important exams or tests because you're busy taking care of everyone else."



**Have you had your mammogram?** Request your appointment today at [wecanbeatcancer.org](http://wecanbeatcancer.org).



**"You have to stay positive."**

—Sayma Salmon, RN,  
Nurse, The AIS Cancer  
Center Clinic

**Sayma Salmon** had a pain in her breast that wouldn't go away. When she went to her primary care doctor, she was told it was nothing to worry about. Yet four months later, the pain was still there. That's when she pushed her doctor for a digital mammogram. When the results came back just minutes later, she learned she had breast cancer.

"I was in shock," she recalls. "There is no history of cancer in my family." Being a nurse made the diagnosis worse. "I knew the cancer was bad. I was depressed, sad and angry."

Doctors recommended Sayma have a double mastectomy to reduce her chances of cancer coming back. In addition to surgery, she had six months of chemotherapy. Through it all, she continued to work. During her recovery, her husband and brother-in-law, both doctors, helped her focus on the positives in her situation.

"You have to stay positive," she says. "I now thank God. He made me strong enough to get through this. I'm glad I can share my journey of hope and faith with others."

*Hope is the thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings the tune without the words,  
And never stops at all.* —Emily Dickinson

**Melina Thorpe** has a family history of breast cancer and worked as an oncology nurse. Still, for months, she put off getting a mammogram. Just days after finally finding time for the exam, she got her diagnosis. "It's a sisterhood no one wants to join," Melina says. Fortunately, she had support from her co-workers, friends and family. After getting genetic testing to determine the best treatment for her, Melina underwent a lumpectomy and six weeks of radiation therapy.

Now, seven years later, Melina feels that her treatment made her a better nurse. "I have a lot more empathy now and just feel like I'm here to give others hope," she says. "Patients need to know that there is life after breast cancer."

**"Patients need to know that there is life after breast cancer."**

—Melina Thorpe, RN,  
Director, The AIS  
Cancer Center





# A lock on FEELING GOOD

*Kelly Giblin, of Lemonade Locks, knows all about turning lemons into lemonade.*

**If someone** had ever told Kelly Giblin she'd be selling wigs in a cancer center, she would not have believed it. A successful paralegal for many years, Kelly loved her job. Then, an unexpected medical condition changed her life—and the course of her career.

## **Lemons into lemonade**

Kelly's dramatic shift in direction started a few years ago when she noticed a patch of hair missing from the back of her head. She was eventually diagnosed with alopecia areata, a type of hair loss that occurs when the immune system mistakenly attacks hair follicles. Losing large patches of her hair was traumatic, and Kelly started wearing a wig to help bring back her self-confidence.

"It's the best and worst thing that ever happened to me," Kelly says. "I remember walking into a wig shop, and the entire experience was awful." She ended up in a tiny room like a broom closet trying on wigs that were both unattractive and uncomfortable.

It wasn't long before Kelly decided she wanted to take that sour experience and make something sweet out of it.

She began researching wigs online and discovered there were better options for herself and other women. She soon started selling and styling wigs from home on nights and weekends.

One day, Kelly shared the story of her search for better wigs with her Rotary group—and that led to the offer of a special partnership with San Joaquin Community Hospital (SJCH): *Would Kelly be interested in opening a wig shop at The AIS Cancer Center?* "I knew I wanted to help," she says. "I didn't realize I'd leave my career to do it. But I'm glad I did."

Kelly named her wig shop Lemonade Locks because of the old adage, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." Lemonade Locks has been in business for more than three years.

"I love helping women who are nervous about losing their hair or have lost their hair because of cancer treatments or other

**Where wigs bring about sweet smiles.** Lemonade Locks is a full-service wig boutique located on the second floor of The AIS Cancer Center, 2620 Chester Ave., Bakersfield. To learn more, visit [lemonadelocks.com](http://lemonadelocks.com).



issues," Kelly says. "You see many of these women through their cancer treatment and form a real relationship with them."

### Fun and affordable

Kelly helps about 20 women a week find attractive wigs. She'd like to help even more, but she knows that some women are hesitant to come into the shop.

"No one wants to lose their hair," Kelly says. "That's why I have made my shop as fun and inviting as possible. We also encourage women to bring friends and family with them so we can have a wig party! Everyone tries on fun styles."

Cost is another concern for some women considering a wig. "I never turn anyone away because of money concerns," Kelly says. "We always make it work."

Women going through cancer treatment get 30 percent off their first two wigs. If someone can't afford a wig, The SJCH Foundation has a fund to help.

"I've also had cancer survivors come back and buy a gift certificate for someone who can't pay for a wig," Kelly says. "I set the certificate aside and use it when needed. It's a beautiful way to pay it forward from one woman to another."



Jacqui Engstrand, RN, often spends her lunch hour knitting for Knitted Knockers.

## Knitting with a special purpose

The name Knitted Knockers might take you a bit by surprise, but women who receive these handmade gifts are more likely to shed tears of joy and thankfulness.

Knitted Knockers are soft, comfortable, knitted prosthetics for women who have undergone mastectomies. They're given to women who are waiting for reconstructive breast surgery or to those who can't or choose not to have reconstructive surgery.

The AIS Cancer Center at San Joaquin Community Hospital (SJCH) is the only place in Kern County to offer these free prosthetics, thanks to Jacqui Engstrand, RN, a nurse at the cancer center.

Jacqui actually learned about the Knitted Knockers project from one of her patients. "I have been a knitter since I was 7 years old. I immediately looked the project up online, and decided

it was something I wanted to do for my patients and other cancer survivors in our community," she says. "It combines two of my loves: caring for cancer patients and knitting."

What makes these knitted prosthetics so special is that they are lightweight and can be worn just four weeks after surgery, unlike traditional types of breast prosthetics. Knitted Knockers come in all sizes and colors. The soft prosthetics can be worn in regular bras and swimwear. They are made from durable, washable, nonwool sport or baby-weight yarn. Once a knocker is knitted, it's stuffed with polyester fiber fill, or Poly-Fil.

It's now Jacqui's mission to bring this world-wide project to every woman in Kern County who needs it. She even joined a local knitting group, What the Knit, to recruit other skilled knitters to support the project.

### WAYS YOU CAN JOIN THIS CARING CAUSE

Local knitters have been working away, Jacqui says. However, the demand is great, and more helping hands are needed.

- Knitters who would like to help can find the pattern online at [knittedknockers.org](http://knittedknockers.org).
- Finished pieces can be dropped off at The AIS Cancer Center.
- Donations of yarn or Poly-Fil are also appreciated.
- For more information, email: [EngstrJA@ah.org](mailto:EngstrJA@ah.org).



**GETTING REAL:** Kelly Giblin's own experience with hair loss helps her relate to the women she serves.



## YOUR CHANCE TO WIN!

Somewhere within *YOU + US*, we've hidden a picture of a white flower. Find it, take a selfie with the page and post it along with the hashtag **#MeAndSJCH** to Facebook, Twitter or Instagram—and you could win a...



pink portable Bluetooth speaker!



#MeAndSJCH

Find me



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# You Can. We Can. Beat Cancer.



The AIS Cancer Center

You don't have to leave Bakersfield to get high quality cancer care. The AIS Cancer Center provides your family with academic-level medicine without a trip over the Grapevine.

- The most experienced cancer specialists – including the area's **first** board-certified female breast surgeon.
- Kern County's **first** 3D mammography – proven to be 41% better at detecting breast cancer.
- An exclusive partnership with UC Davis that gives our patients access to the latest advancements in cancer care.



San Joaquin Community Hospital  
Adventist Health

[WeCanBeatCancer.org](http://WeCanBeatCancer.org)