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Inspiration and Celebration through Hope Abounds

It is a very sad reality that women in every community are diagnosed with cancer on a daily basis. Hearing the words, "it is cancer," not only affects the one being diagnosed, but also their family and friends. The patient may feel scared, uncertain, or angry about the unwanted changes cancer will bring into their life. There is nothing fair about cancer and no one deserves it. A cancer diagnosis is hard to take and having cancer is not easy. That is why a support group is vital to have during your journey with cancer. Luckily New Hanover, Pender, Brunswick, Sampson, Onslow, Duplin, and Columbus counties are blessed to have Women of Hope providing support to women who have received a cancer diagnosis.

Picture in your mind getting a phone call from your daughter or son, whom you have watched grow up into the wonderful person they are today. As you start to hear a tremble in their voice you ask what is wrong, then you hear the three words no parent ever wants to hear from their child, "I have cancer." This is exactly what happened to Kenny and Elizabeth Barnes in August of 2009. They were scared for their daughter because they were frightened of the unknown. Throughout their daughter's journey they learned what was not there. There was a lack of support programs, financial assistance, and a lack of educational programs. This is why they created the nonprofit organization, Women of Hope, which is for all types of cancer.

I became involved in 2011 when the Women of Hope Organization asked me to be the "face" of Rock the Prom. At the time I was unaware that my journey with Women of Hope was just beginning. Rock the Prom was a fashion show that showcased Sherri Hill, Tony Bowls, Jovani, and many more fabulous formal gowns, for local high school teens to get at a discounted price that day for prom. All of the ticket sales that day went to the Women of Hope organization. After that I became very involved with them helping with cancer survivor luncheons, auctions, a Hope Ball, and so much more.

Every year we all celebrate the day of our birth. We all anticipate that day and typically take it for granted, that is until you are diagnosed with cancer. Then that day of your diagnosis becomes permanently engraved into your mind. Every year after your diagnosis your birthday becomes a celebration of winning your battle another year. I have implemented a program to recognize these women on their birthdays. I have handmade over 100 purple cards for each patient to receive on their birthday. It is most important to celebrate yet another year of life, for they are uncertain for what the future holds for them. The second part of their celebration begins on their last treatment day, for they have reached a jubilant milestone in their journey. They get to ring a bell signifying their freedom in front of their family, for which I have made signs for them to hold rejoicing their excitement of their final day.

A new program is branching off from Hope Abounds, called A Kids Hope. I was honored to be named its ambassador by Kenny and Elizabeth Barnes. In my new role, I will be traveling to different colleges in North Carolina, promoting awareness of cancer and how it is imperative to be tested to see if you carry this in your genes. This college program will be called "Stepping into your Genes."

The title of Miss North Carolina offers a chance to be heard. We all know at least one person who has been thrown into the ring to fight for their life because of cancer. Life is full of ups and downs, and you never know when you will be on that spiraling down rollercoaster called cancer. For me, Miss North Carolina would be a position to represent our state and make a difference through my platform Women of Hope. I dream of the day, that Women of Hope will be implemented across the United States.
