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MAGAZINE

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It's a *Z Thing*
Inside the *generation*
that plans to
CHANGE
THE WORLD

In
*the***BIZ**

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BEING YOUR OWN BOSS
is easier than you think

+ Fork in the Road:
From "You're fired!"
to FIRED UP!





COMPASSION THROUGH CATASTROPHE

So much more than a series of sobering statistics and clinically cauterized medi-logues, Susan G. Komen's Faces Of A Warrior program offers a glimpse into the thriving livelihoods of this disastrous disease's survivors.

TEXT BY RYAN JARRELL

It's the type of news no one is truly prepared for. To all outside observers, Tamara Rodriguez's life was almost preternaturally on track. A Haitian emigre who successfully pursued a higher education in Accounting at the University of Miami, Rodriguez had a number of blessings to celebrate in her rich and varied life, not the least being the birth and rearing of her daughters, Emma and Cora. Bouncing buoyantly between employment as CFO at family-owned Fatima Group, 5 gym visits a week, school activities and a bevy of accessory community commitments, finding time for anything in Rodriguez's weekly schedule would be an onerous task. So when she was diagnosed in October 2014 with invasive breast cancer, the question for her was less about *why* and more about *how*? How would this 35-year-old wondermom cope with an arena of life no one can fully fathom? "If I had to use 2 words to describe myself before my diagnosis, it would have been: independent and feminine," she says. "After my diagnosis, I felt weak. My doctors recommended a double mastectomy and 6 months of chemotherapy. I

would lose my hair and my breasts. I never once thought about what it would be like to have my breasts removed – the only thing on my mind was what would happen to my daughters if I died. I felt like I had failed them."

Every bit as resilient as she is resourceful, and willing to put every ounce of her grit and determination into recovery, Rodriguez did what so many of us deem impossible: she found a seedbed of strength and compassion in her temporarily weakened state. "I wanted my daughters to know that the mommy they loved and admired with hair was the same loving and passionate mommy without hair. I wanted to remind women around the world that our breasts do not define who we are. This was my intent while writing *Hair To The Queen!* Today, my relationship with my daughters and husband is stronger than ever and I realized that my femininity and my strength came from within and it never had anything to do with my breasts. Today, I feel more confident and determined than ever!"

It's stories every bit as heart-rending and fortifying as this that are catalogued so compassionately by Susan G.



Komen's *Faces Of A Warrior* program, an inspiring facet of our local Komen affiliate that seeks to empower and inform other people going through breast cancer-related struggles with the powerful example of those who have survived and thrived through similar challenges. Spearheading the effort is Sherri Martens-Curtis, Executive Director of the Fort Lauderdale/Miami Branch of Susan G. Komen. She's a tireless advocate for the population affected by this malignancy. "The best thing about this program is that it benefits everyone," says Martens-Curtis, whose own mother passed away in 2006 from breast cancer. "The warrior feels she is able to pay it forward and the sponsee feels she has someone to reach out to when she needs help, that she's dealing with someone who's walked in her shoes."

Launching the program 4 years ago with only 20 participants, *Faces Of A Warrior* has grown gainly, hammering home the message that invasive breast cancer doesn't spell the end of a life lived richly within the sizeable segment of our population facing this difficult diagnosis. This further allows Susan G. Komen (currently the largest source of nonprofit funds dedicated to the fight against breast cancer) to continue the work they do so well.

And, intent on speaking to our peculiar present circumstances, Martens-Curtis wants to stress that, in the aftermath of Irma, these types of organizations will need more aid than ever. "Our community needs support now," she urges. "People are dealing with problems like transportation that have become exponentially more difficult after Irma hit. Anything people can contribute will be appreciated, and 75% of donations stay in the local area. You can really make a difference in a neighbor's life."

Now in remission and resuming the full and fast-paced life she's most comfortable with, Tamara Rodriguez is honored to be able to provide the high level of loving support that she attributes to her hard-won recovery. "The support saved me," she concludes. "I didn't even want to do chemo – I was just so depressed and almost wanted to give up. The courage of my daughters gave me the strength I needed to fight. My family and friends carried me through, and the program allows me to be that support for others."

Interested in making a difference with this truly awesome institution? The Miami leg of the Susan G. Komen Race For The Cure takes place Oct. 14. For more information or to learn ways to get involved, visit KomenMiaFtl.org. **M**