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April Samuels

BY DEBRA GLORIA | PUBLISHED MAY 05 2014

I met Debra Gloria in May of 2009 through church. In July of 2009, I was fortunate enough to attend my first Debra Gloria Photography exhibit, and it was called "Underneath My Clothes" – a result of several of Debra's heartfelt "phototherapy" sessions. The exhibit featured some amazing photos of strong women who were touched by physical ailments that are not normally seen in day to day life – such as anorexia, patients of mastectomies, masochists, etc. I remember being most affected and touched by the woman, Karen Olsen, who had a double mastectomy due to breast cancer. This portion of the exhibit was very emotional and left a lasting impression.

A year later, on October 26, 2010, I was diagnosed with triple negative breast cancer and on November 10 I underwent a double mastectomy without reconstruction. Not long after my surgery, Debra asked if I would like to have a phototherapy session. I told her immediately "it isn't something I want to do, but I feel it's something I should do". On December 15, I had surgery to have the chemo port installed which inadvertently punctured my lung. I was hospitalized for an excruciatingly painful five days with a chest tube. I showed up 15 pounds lighter for my phototherapy session, on December 22, two days after I got out of the hospital. It was important to me to keep the scheduled phototherapy session appointment, and I'm glad I did.

Throughout the entire session, Debra was amazing and compassionate producing an extremely tasteful end result. We talked about my struggle with breast cancer – through diagnosis, surgeries, the lung puncture and the upcoming (at the time) chemotherapy while she captured the conversation in stills. I'm so glad that moment in time is forever encapsulated – it is a time for all my future days to compare against. I was emaciated from the hospitalization and my scars and tribulations were fresh – both physically and mentally. These photos provide me with a point of reference where I can now see – literally – how far I have come. The session helped me move beyond what is seen and strengthened me in ways I can't describe.

In October of 2011, Debra Gloria Photography held its second "Underneath My Clothes" exhibit featuring both me and Karen Olson (who had since passed away from the disease), with proceeds to go towards breast cancer



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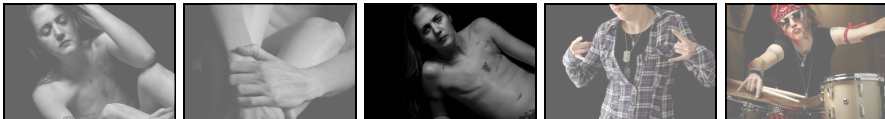
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awareness.

I'm now three-years cancer free and I've had the joy of working with Debra for multiple "happy time" shoots for me as a professional drummer and as the founder of Breast Cancer Can Stick It!, my nonprofit I started after being diagnosed. In fact, Debra was recently hired to do a photo shoot for my extended family. Debra's work is nothing short of amazing. Her style is relaxed and natural, with the ability to showcase your own personality. In addition, her turnaround time is lightning-fast. I look forward to my next shoot with Debra and would recommend her to anyone who wants to walk away with a fantastic final product; guaranteed.



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