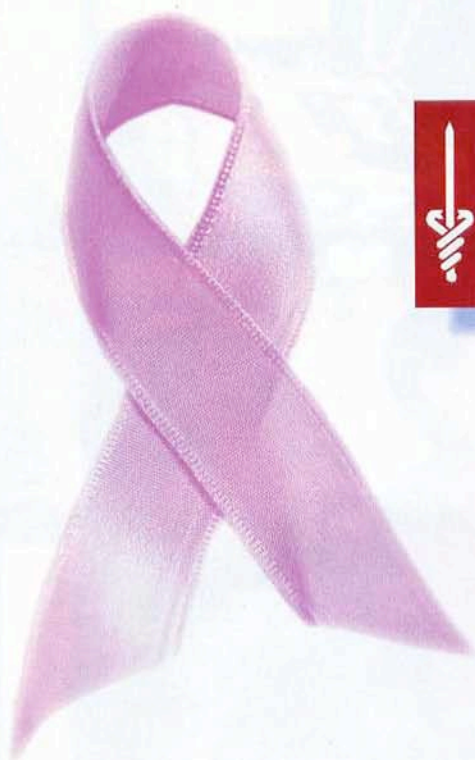


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Surviving Cancer

By Asuncion Garma Balon



Nurse, sewing enthusiast and San Francisco Giants fan, Asuncion Garma Balon has faced—and beaten—not one but two breast cancer diagnoses, one in 1987 and then in 1996. “Talking about your diagnosis is good for you,” says Mrs. Balon. “My first reaction was shock: why me? But if you keep it to yourself you might get depressed, thinking you’re all alone. I take comfort in knowing that my family, my relatives and my friends are my priceless treasures, for they encouraged me to be what I am today.” She is a seven-year survivor.

A positive mental attitude and faith in God also served as sources of strength for Mrs. Balon as she went through surgery, radiation therapy and, later, chemotherapy. The American Cancer Society offered her support through its Reach to Recovery program, in which trained breast cancer survivors provide information and support to women who have been recently diagnosed. Now she herself has become a volunteer with Reach to Recovery, and walks annually in Making Strides Against Breast Cancer, an event to raise awareness and funds to fight breast cancer.

“Cancer plays no favorites,” says Mrs. Balon, a native of Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, who relocated to the United States in 1971. “I count my blessings: There’s so much to be thankful for.” Work remains a focus for Mrs. Balon; every day she gets up early to work in the operating room at a medical center in South San Francisco, California. “It makes me forget the past disease. I don’t have time for that. It’s behind me now.” ■