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What worked for me

Mary Beth Gadus, 56, Indianapolis, retired small business owner

Two decades later, she's still fighting

I am alive because of the grace of God, great insurance and cutting-edge breast cancer research by Dr. George Sledge and his team at the Indiana University Simon Cancer Center.

I was diagnosed with breast cancer 20 years ago, when I was working full time and had a 2-year-old and 4-year-old. It was invasive ductile breast cancer, estrogen-positive, the same type my husband's mother had died from before we were married.

I had a single mastectomy and took chemotherapy for six months. Dr. Sledge called the treatment "chemical warfare" because if the cancer came back, I would die. At the time, anti-nausea drugs and those to increase my white-blood cell count weren't available. But I decided to take this "chemical warfare" because I wanted to be able to dance at my sons' weddings.

After that, I went about my life, but in 2000, the cancer came back at the mastectomy site.

I had massive radiation and my ovaries removed to stop estrogen flow. I took Tamoxifen, which helps stop cancer cell growth in women with estrogen-positive tumors.

Both times, I had been working out with a trainer. I did a lot of water exercises and swimming. I've tried to walk a lot, too. I have a healthy food intake and a fairly low-fat diet.

Once again, I went about my merry way, and in 2004, it had metastasized and attacked the top of my left femur. Dr. Daniel Wurtz of the cancer center removed the tumor from my leg and inserted a titanium rod. I received massive radiation and two more new chemotherapy drugs, plus Zometa, which I'm still taking, to strengthen bones and fight cancer cells.

In 2005, Dr. Sledge put me on Femara, which decreases estrogen production. I had worried that I wouldn't see my youngest son graduate from high school. But now he's 21 and at Purdue University, and my oldest is 23 and a Butler University graduate.

In 2006, I had a stress fracture in the femur, weakened from radiation. Late last year, the titanium rod broke, causing extreme pain and refracturing the femur. A new rod was put in, but the femur never healed. I had been walking with a cane, going to physical therapy, trying to swim. In August, the rod broke again and the femur was shattered, so I had a partial hip and femur replacement.

I've stayed positive and healthy, and I'm blessed to have access to the research of Dr. Sledge, Dr. Kathy Miller and others at the cancer center. They have changed breast cancer treatment protocol and made life-saving discoveries.

But I know how desperately they



GADUS' ADVICE TO OTHERS WITH CANCER

» **Never give up hope.** A

cure or finding may help you live easier with your disease. Dream big. Envision the future, and envision you in the future.

» **Stay active.** The more active you are, the better your mental health. Go to physical therapy, and exercise not only the body, but also the mind.

» **Eat healthy.** Keep a low-fat diet, and try to eat as many hormone-free products, such as organic milk, as possible.

need seed money to get ideas off the ground. So I formed a research-funding group called 100 Voices of Hope through the IU Foundation. I want 100 women with breast cancer or others to give \$1,000 each to help this incredible team's research.

We're trying to raise \$100,000 by Dec. 1. Interested donors should contact Mary Maxwell, the center's director of development, at (317) 278-2130.

I remain active, and I'm very healthy, despite having cancer. I'm hoping I can play golf again next season and ride a bike.

★ As told to Barb Berggoetz at barb.berggoetz@Indystar.com.