

Alabama Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition (ACCCC)

# Survivor Spotlight



## *Linda in her own words...*

"I was diagnosed with breast cancer in January of 1990 at the age of 42. My two boys were 13 and 14. Because my husband had been diagnosed with severe heart disease at 32 and had already undergone two heart bypass surgeries in nine years, this diagnosis made me not only fearful for myself but for my family, particularly my children. My treatment included a modified radical mastectomy and because I had three positive lymph nodes, I underwent approximately 12 months of chemotherapy and 18 months of baldness – something my

boys thought was a neat thing to show to their friends."

"The pizza delivery man on the other hand was taken aback when I showed up at the door without my wig or scarf. It was during my treatment though that I realized how really fortunate I and my family were. I worked at UAB where we had one of the nationally designated Comprehensive Cancer Centers—one that received substantial research funding. I felt assured from the beginning that I was getting the best care possible in a facility that I was very familiar with. My family had very good insurance so the medical costs were not a substantial worry. I had a great social support network in my family, friends and co-workers and I had full time help at home for my family. Mine was a very different story from many of the other individuals and families I met during my treatment series. These were cancer patients with no insurance, no social support network, no help at home, and transportation problems. I remember one gentleman that I met who came to the hospital the night before his treatments and slept in one of the surgical intensive waiting rooms until the next morning so he would be at the clinic on time for his treatments. He did this because he was from out of town and this was the only travel arrangements he could make—there was no HOPE Lodge for him at that time."

"Realizing the hardships that many people had to endure while, at the same time enduring the ravages of this diagnosis and treatment led to my becoming a volunteer with the ACS. Learning about the wide range of services that this organization provides—information and education about cancer prevention, early diagnosis, treatment, patient services, and patient support—the Hope Lodge. What a difference this can make in peoples lives and then there is the research. I want people to know that 65% of cancer is preventable and what they can do to protect themselves. But if they are diagnosed with this disease, I want them to know about and be able to access all the resources they need so they can spend all their energy beating their cancer. My personal experience and professional interest also led me to become involved with the Alabama Comprehensive Cancer Control Coalition (ACCCC). This statewide group of community and professional volunteers has the great responsibility of developing a state cancer plan to guide our state in reducing the incidence and the impact of this disease in our citizens. The members work to ensure best practices in education, patient services, research and public policies are being implemented statewide to address cancer prevention and control. With more promising research we can look forward to, more cancer survivors and our current knowledge of prevention can lead to a 65% reduction in cancer diagnoses. However, we cannot achieve success on any front without everyone having access to knowledge and to prevention, treatment, and survivor services. I want to do my part in making that happen in our state, so others can be as fortunate as I have been in surviving my cancer diagnosis."