

FIND YOUR MBC VOICE

MBC Voices at the Table | Living With It

Meredith Vieira, TV Producer/Host

Jamil Rivers, Living with MBC since 2018

Felicia Johnson, Living with MBC since 2003

Beth Fairchild, Living with MBC since 2014

Michael Kovarik, Living with MBC since 2015

Felicia Johnson:

I was keeping everything pressed in, pressed in, pressed in and when I got my metastatic diagnosis, I imploded, and I became a term that I use and that's functional depression.

Meredith Vieira:

Living with MBC can feel like being on a roller coaster with ups and downs along the way. I'm Meredith Vieira and I'm joined by Jamil Rivers, Felicia Johnson, Beth Fairchild, and Michael Kovarik, advocates living with metastatic breast cancer can attest that while not every day is easy, it is possible to have a full life.

Mental health is so important, yet for years, you didn't seek any support with therapy. What was that about?

Felicia Johnson:

Mentally, I was descending into the deep dark pit. My social worker at the hospital, she says, "You know, I think you need to get help." I felt ashamed because, how could I fail and not be able to take care of myself mentally?

Meredith Vieira:

Did race have anything to do with it?

Felicia Johnson:

Yes.

Meredith Vieira:

Are there expectations and limitations around mental health when it comes to the African American community?

Felicia Johnson:

Yes. I think the key thing is we don't tell our business. It stays in the house, in the family.

Jamil Rivers:

It's the socioeconomic issues. It's due to access to care, lack of insurance, our distrust of the medical system.

Felicia Johnson:

How are you going to open up to some stranger that doesn't know anything about the black experience? And surprisingly, when I started opening up, it was as if someone had taken a shovel and began to help me dig the root out.

Meredith Vieira:

Michael, if I asked you, what is it like to live with metastatic breast cancer, what would you say?

Michael Kovarik:

It's a rollercoaster. The ups are the amazing people you meet on this journey. There are the dips, but you can be happy living with metastatic breast cancer. The healthiest gifts I'm giving myself is to feel the feelings and I do a

lot of crying. It's the cry of seeing something beautiful. I could see if a dad and a young kid together. I could see something in nature that I love, because I want to look for the good, because it's only then that I can start moving forward and get myself back self-centered.

Meredith Vieira:

When you're living with something like stage four, I would imagine hope sometimes can be elusive. Where does your hope come from?

Beth Fairchild:

When I was first diagnosed, I was 34 and they gave me two years to live, and I was devastated. But how I was able to reconcile, at what point would there be enough life? And I think the answer for me is never. No matter how long I live, if I had a healthy mind and I was aware, I would always want to see the next thing. There's never going to be enough. It became evident to me that it didn't matter if I died at 34 or 94. And so the gift to me was that I lived that day. Every day, I wake up, I sit up, I put my feet on the floor. I'm alive, I'm breathing, and that's what gives me hope.

Jamil Rivers:

I think for me, it was that first day was devastation and the next day was, "I have to do everything I can for my kids." Everybody sees me. It's like, "Oh, you got it together. You're so poised and you're on point and you're assertive," but all the breakdowns, the crying in the middle of the night, the worry that my kids are going to forget me. And if you keep that negativity and those thoughts and let it fester, I actually believe it can make your cancer worse.

Meredith Vieira:

What resources do you all use to make your journey just a little bit easier?

Felicia Johnson:

Develop a skillset of, do I need to do yoga? Do I need to write in my journal? Something that's going to decompress the you inside of you.

Michael Kovarik:

Get into meditating. It's not denial. It's not pushing anything away or hiding anything, it's being right there in that moment.

Beth Fairchild:

You have to have contrast in this world. You can't appreciate how beautiful and full your life is if you haven't experienced a hardship. That's the gift of cancer. Of course, I would give it all back tomorrow, but...

Meredith Vieira:

Is the final message to folks who've been diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer, your journey is, what?

Jamil Rivers:

Complicated, ongoing. I say overdose on support.

Felicia Johnson:

Your mental health is...

Meredith Vieira:

Paramount.

Felicia Johnson:

Paramount. Imagine taking an elevator and you're under the basement and I started coming up floor by floor. I actually remember the first day I felt joy again. Am I cancer? No. I am Felicia Stephanie Johnson who happens to have de novo metastatic breast cancer, and I can still live.

Dedicated in loving memory to our long-time friend Michael, a vibrant voice and unforgettable presence among the breast cancer community. His advocacy and unwavering hope for all people living with mBC will live on.

Michael Kovarik
1956-2021

Use our [Treatment Discussion Guide](#) to have a more informed conversation with your doctor.

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