

FIND YOUR MBC VOICE

MBC Voices at the Table | The Diagnosis

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

Tim Watkins, Michael's Partner

Leigh Ann Wyrick, Beth's Daughter

Michael Kovarik:

Hope, wow. There's a lot of hope out there. I have a lot of hope with the doctors that I have. I have a lot of hope that I can live a much longer life and even though I may have to take medication, I'm living and I'm enjoying. I have hope for all those amazing, amazing women and men that I've gotten to know and love dearly. I want them to be able to hope and dream and live.

Stat on screen: This year, over 284,000 people in the United States will be diagnosed with invasive breast cancer. 6% of women have metastatic breast cancer when they are first diagnosed.

Reference: Cancer.net: <https://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/breast-cancer-metastatic/statistics>

Meredith Vieira:

Metastatic breast cancer, also known as stage four breast cancer, is breast cancer that has spread to other parts of the body. I'm Meredith Vieira, and I'm here with Jamil Rivers, Felicia Johnson, Beth Fairchild, and Michael Kovarik, four people living with metastatic breast cancer.

Jamil, I just want you to walk me through, how did you discover you have metastatic breast cancer?

Jamil Rivers:

I just had a lingering cough.

Meredith Vieira:

A cough?

Jamil Rivers:

Yeah. I have young kids. And so, you know with young children, we always have colds and coughs running through the house. Something just told me, well, let's do a mammogram.

Meredith Vieira:

So you were pushy, you were going, "I want this."

Jamil Rivers:

Well, I have a history of fibrocystic breasts. After all the series of tests, it was confirmed that I had metastatic stage four breast cancer that has spread all over my body. Of course, I'm thinking terminal.

Meredith Vieira:

So how do you process that?

Jamil Rivers:

You're not going to die tomorrow, you're not going to die next week, but we're going to take it step by step.

Beth Fairchild:

It's hard to really put into words how my cancer diagnosis has affected Leigh Ann. She was 14 when I was diagnosed. For the last seven years, cancer has just been her life.

Meredith Vieira:

Nobody at 34 thinks they're going to be diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. And I don't think your experience was quite like Jamil's in the way you were treated.

Beth Fairchild:

I was given my diagnosis over the phone. I didn't really understand. I mean, I knew stage four was bad.

Meredith Vieira:

You hadn't even heard of the word metastatic.

Beth Fairchild:

I didn't. I had never heard the word metastatic and I didn't know that people died of breast cancer. I thought you had your mastectomy and your chemo and then you went on to live a normal life, because that's kind of what we're told. That's just not the case. Once it moves beyond your breast, it's a terminal illness.

Meredith Vieira:

The reality is also, I think you've learned that there are treatments out there and that you can live with this disease.

Beth Fairchild:

Part of my advocacy is making sure that we maintain a good quality of life with the treatments that are available.

Felicia Johnson:

The timeline for cancer in my family started in 1974 and continued for 37 consecutive years. Not only do we have the disease, we also carry the BRCA1 gene. 11 women diagnosed on my maternal side. I go in for a general checkup, he's giving me a breast examination and he says, "There's a lump in your breast, Felicia." I was so proactive with the mammograms. Why am I stage four? Hope has so many different definitions. I had to lose it in order to appreciate it.

Meredith Vieira:

Michael, you're in a very small club of men diagnosed with breast cancer.

Michael Kovarik:

Everybody was telling me it was a cyst, so I actually went to the doctor by myself. And the first words he said to me were, "I wish I had better news." All I could hear was this voice in my head going, men don't get breast cancer, I've never heard of a man getting breast cancer.

Tim Watkins:

How come you're always the younger looking one?

Michael Kovarik:

I smile more.

Tim Watkins:

I don't know about that.

Stat on screen: Breast cancer in males is a rare disease. Less than 1% of all invasive breast cancers occur in males. Reference: J Breast Health. 2016 Jan; 12(1): 1–8. Male Breast Cancer. Published online 2016 Jan 1. doi: 10.5152/tjbh.2015.2711

Meredith Vieira:

If somebody is diagnosed today, what is the advice you would give them, so they get the best access to information?

Jamil Rivers:

Who knew that breast cancer was so complicated? It just put me on a path to learn as much as I possibly could to make sure that I could get the best care.

Michael Kovarik:

And to me, the most important thing is there's someone else there with you. You're not going to hear 99% of what's being said.

Felicia Johnson:

Having that cancer buddy or cancer coach that can give you the baby steps.

Beth Fairchild:

Advocate for yourself, absorb all the information that you can, because knowledge is power and you can't ask for things that you don't know about.

Meredith Vieira:

I want to thank you all very much for sharing your stories about your diagnosis with stage four metastatic breast cancer.

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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