

## Donielle Potts Story



All four of my grandparents were diagnosed with some form of cancer. It was hard to admit, but after genetic testing and reviewing my family history, I realized that cancer runs in my family. So, when I got diagnosed in 2016, I thought that was it! The test results showed I had stage 2, grade 2 breast cancer. To top it off, I had a clinical diagnosis of inflammatory breast cancer, which only has a 50% survival rate. I was nervous. Even though I was not afraid to face death, I did not want my fears to stop me from living. So I went to work! The only way I know to squash fear is with knowledge. So I did research from reputable sources. I read books and articles, asked questions, took pictures and notes, and frequented the local library. I got all the answers until I was not afraid anymore. I adopted the motto: "Feed your faith, and your fears will starve." Several years and many procedures later, I am still here to fight another day. I want every cancer patient to know it is ok to be scared. Do not recoil, surrender, or give up. Find YOUR WHY. Why will you fight? Stare death in the face and dare to live!

While I recovered from the effects of chemotherapy and a double mastectomy, I looked in the mirror one day at a face and body I no longer recognized. I had to pull myself together for my husband, my family, and my medical team. Most important of all, I had to pull it together for myself. So, I got out my "weapons of war." I opened a case and pulled out my implements. This time they had a greater purpose. This time besides the obvious beautifying strokes of my pencils and brushes, I used these tools for survival. I decorate my skin like an indigenous warrior. Every stroke and color has meaning and intent. It is a ritual, it is a rite of passage, it is ceremonial, and it is symbolic. When putting on my makeup, I began to call it:

### **WAR PAINT**

**Every stroke is a symbol of defiance of death**

**It hides blemishes and imperfections**

**It hides pain and sorrow**

**It masks fears and vulnerability**

**It gives me courage to be seen, when I'd rather hide**

**It gives me poise when otherwise I should fall to pieces**

**Although I'm changed inside and out...**

**It reminds me:**

**-I am feminine**

**-I am strong**

**-I am beautiful**

**-I am woman**

**I go to war every day I am alive; every moment I am awake**

**I paint my face like I am painting my soul**

By: Donielle Potts 7/23/2016