



## Novi woman fights cancer with daughter's help

Juanita Gee has a lot of reasons to get up each day and fight her stage four, terminal breast cancer, which has caused her so much pain and difficulty over the past six years. Among those many reasons is one big one as to why she strives to stay positive: her daughter Alexis.

"She's a blessing for me and I probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my daughter," said Gee, a Novi resident.

She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2008, when her daughter Alexis was only 2. However, she was cleared in 2009, only to find out in 2010 that the cancer was back and had metastasized. She now undergoes a daily regimen of medicine and has begun radiation and surgeries.

"It's treatable, but not curable," is how she describes her situation.

Her story is one that isn't always talked about. Juanita's husband, overwhelmed by the diagnosis, left her soon after, unable to cope, leaving her without a crucial piece of support. In spite of this, she has found a way to live and thrive with her daughter at her side each step.

It's this story she wanted to tell so people would understand and, in some cases, might even find their own inspiration.

Both mother and daughter agreed to share their journey with Novi director/producer Keith Famie for his television documentary series *The Embrace of Aging*, which airs on Detroit Public Television. She was in the show's third episode "Fighting Cancer," which aired Oct. 26.

In that episode, the producer stepped into the lives of three brave women who are all living with breast cancer. Between doctor's appointments, chemo and radiation treatments, medical professionals help the audience better understand what breast cancer is.

While planning the series, Famie found a lot of similar stories of support and survival about breast cancer, but he wanted to have another perspective to go along with those stories. He found that in Juanita.



She was hesitant at first to put their lives out there for viewers, but the deciding factor was about bringing understanding to some misconceptions about people with terminal cancer, while also helping others relate who might be in a similar situation.

“Her story represents a different look into the fight against cancer, not one always told,” Famie said. “It’s insightful and emotional, yet very endearing to see the bond between mother and daughter.”

He said there’s a lot people can learn from the series. Juanita said she did. Even though she lives it daily, she said after watching their episode she came to a better realization how much she and her daughter have and are going through together.

It’s made her even more appreciate each day she has with her daughter.

“I have a strong, brave little girl who has given me the inspiration to live as full of a life as I can,” Juanita said.

There may be another opportunity to see the episode when Detroit Public Television repeats it. The next one, episode four, is 2:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 2, and it’s called “Men and Women.” In this episode, they hope to shed some light on how to grow old with your life partner — and still be in love.