

## **Breast Cancer Connections: My Personal Relationship with the Month of October**

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It's Shan's hugs, smile and laughter I miss the most. Her love of life and working with children will always inspire. But it is her breast cancer story that has made a difference for young women across Canada. Shan was only 24 when she lost her life to breast cancer.

Shan's breast cancer symptoms were repeatedly misdiagnosed by her health care providers. The cancer had time to spread and Shan was diagnosed late with metastatic breast cancer. Living her beliefs, Shan accepted the tests and breast cancer treatments with determined optimism. Sadly, the predictions of hope were not to be realized and Shan passed away a few months later.

October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, reminds me of both the negative and positive aspects of breast cancer awareness, particularly for young women. Pink ribbons and breast cancer organization marketing identifies the cause, but not the vital education components of breast cancer prevention and early detection. Education is rarely a part of the pink washing that occurs during October.

Young women, who have no routine screening available, need to understand their risk of the disease and be informed about their breast health. Knowledge of the disease, self care strategies and self detection are critical in helping to improve outcomes for young women diagnosed with breast cancer. One out of nine women in Canada will face the disease in her lifetime.

Since 2007, Team Shan Breast Cancer Awareness for Young Women (Team Shan) has been raising awareness, but also educating young women during October and throughout the year. Named after Shan, Team Shan reaches thousands of young women every year with their breast cancer risk and breast health information. Thousands of young women reached in communities, high schools and on college and university campuses

Young women have responded positively to our efforts, understood their risk, taken action and shared information with friends and family. They have appreciated Team Shan efforts and thanked Team Shan for not forgetting them in breast cancer messaging. This is what October should be all about.

Young women diagnosed with breast cancer have also responded, thanked Team Shan for educating young women and for making a positive difference in their breast cancer journey. Shan's Story has impacted their breast health choices and also influenced some of their health care providers. Earlier detection has made a positive difference in their personal outcomes.

Team Shan breast cancer awareness campaigns and education activities in October have changed October from awareness to Breast Cancer Action Month. This was our hope in 2007 and ten years in we continue to make a difference for the young women following in Shan's footsteps!

Shan's dreams were lost, but her goal 'to provide young people with the knowledge to reach their potential and achieve their dreams' continues through Team Shan. Shan's spirit continues to teach and encourages young women to take care of themselves.

## BIO

Lorna is a Registered Nurse and Health Promotion Specialist. Lorna brings her public health expertise to her role as President of Team Shan Breast Cancer Awareness for Young Women (Team Shan). A national charity, Team Shan is named after Lorna's daughter Shanna. In Shan's memory, Lorna shares Shan's Story and Team Shan breast cancer messaging with young women across Canada. Lorna has published and presents regularly on the issue of breast cancer in young women. Please visit Team Shan at [teamshan.ca](http://teamshan.ca)

