



## *cancer survivors featured in national campaign*

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**W**hispering Pines resident Eli Arroyo-Allen woke up Dec. 16, 2008, knowing it would be one of the most challenging days of her life. Her husband was deploying overseas with the Navy.

But her husband's departure wasn't the only obstacle she would face that day. Her doctor called to give her the results of a recent biopsy and told her three of the most disheartening, fear-inducing words a person can hear.

**"You have cancer."**

Beginning treatment for breast cancer without her husband by her side could have discouraged her. But with the support of loved ones and an optimistic outlook, Arroyo-Allen won her battle. Her enduring spirit caught the attention of General Mills, which selected her to be a Survivor Ambassador in its 2010-2011 Pink Together campaign for breast cancer awareness.

"We were drawn to Eli's passion, conviction and strength in her words, and the fact that she turned this scary moment into something so positive," said Andrea Stein,



## Survivor

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supporters who share their own stories, offer words of encouragement and send and receive virtual flower bouquets.

During October, the Survivor Ambassadors are also featured on the boxes of several General Mills products, such as Cheerios, Green Giant frozen vegetables and Fiber One granola bars.

"My boss called me not long ago and said 'Do you know what I'm looking at?'" Arroyo-Al-len said. "He said, 'I'm looking at a Fiber One box with your picture on it.' It was kind of strange. The next morning he showed up to work with a full case of them."

It may be a bit odd for Arroyo-Al-len to be strolling down the cereal aisle at the grocery store and see her own face staring back at her, but the visibility the Pink Together campaign has given her provides her with an opportunity to reach out to other survivors and tell them they aren't alone.

"When I finished my radiation, I made a commitment that I was going to do something," Arroyo-Al-len said. "I did have something in mind on a smaller scale, but when this came, it was the answer to my prayer. This was my chance to really get out there and make a difference."

General Mills first noticed Arroyo-Al-len because of comments she wrote on the Pink Together Web site about her experience with cancer. Arroyo-Al-len joined the online community at the recommendation of a friend.

She started reading other people's stories and

### BY THE NUMBERS

■ 2.5 million — the number of breast cancer survivors in the United States

■ 1 in 8 — the number of women in the United States who will develop breast cancer at some point in their lives

■ 207,090 — the number of estimated breast cancer diagnoses in women in 2010

■ 1,970 — the number of estimated breast cancer diagnoses in men in 2010

■ 680,000 — the number of survivors and supporters who share their stories at PinkTogether.com.

■ \$2 million — the amount of money General Mills, as part of Pink Together, is donating to Susan G. Komen for the Cure to advance breast cancer research and education

■ \$1 — the additional amount of money General Mills will donate to Susan G. Komen for the cure for every story, comment or virtual bouquet sent to PinkTogether.com during October

sending them messages of encouragement before posting her own.

"It became a place where I would go for hope," Arroyo-Al-len said. "It was just a place with a common feeling."

Before her diagnosis, Arroyo-Al-len was healthy. She had yearly physicals, but she had never gotten a mammogram. The first time she went, she wasn't expecting to walk away with a breast cancer diagnosis.

"I was the first person in my family to have cancer, period," Arroyo-Al-len said. "The word cancer can kind of bring you down to your knees."

When she got the news, her first thoughts weren't of herself, but of her mother, her husband and her 20-year-old son

— What would they do if she didn't survive? Would they be OK?

"I know I'm a strong support for my family, so they were the first thing that came to mind," Arroyo-Al-len said. "I thought, 'How am I going to beat this, because I've got to be here.'"

Her husband tried to delay his deployment, but his efforts were un-

successful. With her son by her side, Arroyo-Al-len began undergoing treatment at Duke University Medical Center.

"(My son) came every weekend to be with me," Arroyo-Al-len said. "It was something to look forward to. Knowing my husband was coming home, that was a motivation. I started focusing on the brighter things in life."

Arroyo-Al-len started focusing on what she could do. She changed her dietary and exercise regimens. She reconnected with her faith. She spent as much time as possible with her family. After making it through radiation, chemotherapy and two surgeries, Arroyo-Al-len finally received some good news.

Her mammograms were clear.

"It was overwhelming," Arroyo-Al-len said. "I remember standing in the hall at Duke and shaking because it was just such an accomplishment. This was something I really did not have

full grasp of. There were a lot of factors involved in my success."

She initially kept a blog about her experience before joining the Pink Together community. Once she was contacted by General Mills, the campaign flew Arroyo-Al-len and the four other Survivor Ambassadors to company headquarters in Minnesota for photo and video shoots. On the Internet and in the grocery store, Arroyo-Al-len's smile now encourages others with the disease to keep their heads held high.

"We were interested

in assembling a group of people with unique and compelling perspectives on battling breast cancer, and with a sincere motivation to support others who have been touched by the disease," Stein said. "Choosing five Ambassadors from the many amazing people we considered was extremely challenging."

Her involvement with Pink Together also allowed Arroyo-Al-len to

start her own local organization, Loving Life/ Amando La Vida, to offer support to breast cancer survivors and education about the disease. The group has an emphasis on the Latina community, though anyone is welcome at the meetings. Arroyo-Al-len recently hosted a Loving Life/ Amando La Vida event in Sanford that drew nearly 50 people.

Arroyo-Al-len's fight with cancer was a rough journey, but she said she has emerged a stronger person. With a little help from Pink Together, she is dedicated to ensuring

the same is true for other survivors, and that those still overcoming the disease never feel alone.

"When you sit and read the stories, not all of them are negative," Arroyo-Al-len said. "There are a lot of stories of triumph. That is what we need to focus on. We're hoping to tell others, 'You can do this. You can achieve this goal.'"

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