





shaken

TO THE CORE

Forty-year-old **Stephanie Wiki** faced up to breast cancer and Christchurch's February earthquake in the space of a week

Early in February I dreamed I had breast cancer. I examined my breasts but couldn't find anything. There were times when one was a little tingly and my nipple had started to invert but you had to look hard to notice. Then on Sunday, February 20, I felt tingling and reached down to find a pea-like lump.

I booked in for a mammogram and ultrasound. I was planning to leave for my appointment at 1.15pm on Tuesday the 22nd when my computer flew off my desk, the light fell from the ceiling and things started flying everywhere. I raced outside to see big dust clouds coming from the hills. I headed for the car as I couldn't reach my family by phone. I made it out of the street just before others had to abandon their cars due to liquefaction.

My husband Warren was already home and we collected our 12-year-old son Kaleb from school. Our daughter, Tori, 19, was working on the other side of the city and it took her six hours to reach home. She hadn't received our texts and had no idea if we were safe.

I can't tell you how surreal it was. Our house wasn't structurally damaged but we live in the eastern part of the city and are surrounded by the red zone. But on the night of the

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quake all I could think was, 'Oh my god, I've got a lump in my breast.' I hadn't told anyone except Warren.

Christchurch Hospital was in an emergency situation so I made an appointment at the Auckland Breast Centre and went on to have a mammogram, ultrasound and a biopsy.

My dream proved prophetic - I had breast cancer. I wasn't surprised, to be honest; that's why I felt I couldn't wait to be seen in Christchurch. I didn't ever think I was going to die or anything, but deep down I'd known and I wanted it gone.

From there things moved quickly. I flew home to break the news to Mum and Dad and then it was back to Auckland for a double mastectomy and immediate reconstruction. Both breasts being removed meant I wouldn't be faced with the same situation again in five years.

After my surgery we stayed in Auckland for 10 days before heading home to Christchurch. There were so

many aftershocks. I was in bed and even rolling over was painful, so I just lay there and hoped the shaking wouldn't get any worse. The roads literally had holes in them and people had to swerve to avoid them. Warren would drive me to my check-ups and I'd be holding on for dear life.

Through my job I'd been involved with health issues from an insurance point of view, specifically advocating for non-funded drugs. Plus I sponsored the Pink Dragons, a dragon-boating team of breast-cancer survivors. I didn't think for one moment it would happen to me. I'm healthy, we live well and I have no family history of the disease.

We're looking at moving to Auckland. It's a little bit to do with both my breast cancer and the earthquake. We won't sell our house, it will still be there as home, but it's surrounded by devastation. The earthquake was horrible. We just concentrated on getting through; it was like we put it out of our minds. I remember not looking at the missing persons list purposely because it was too much to cope with that and cancer.

But I always knew I'd be okay. I did have to succumb to being looked after for a while, which was tough for a control freak like me. But recently I was being bossy and Warren said, "She's back!" **N**