

# Laurasjourney.com

## An Alaska Native woman shares her truth about cancer on the Internet

Laura Revels (Tlingit) isn't the type to follow a script about how to react to cancer. When she started a web blog (journal) at [www.laurasjourney.com](http://www.laurasjourney.com) to share her experience of cancer with others, she did not give advice like, "Look for the silver lining in this."

Laura says that it's not about how to have a positive attitude. "It's about telling the people who follow on their own cancer journey that there will be pain, not for all, but most of us, and that they'll be scared. It's about telling them that on most days, their kids will be the biggest reason for keeping up with treatment."

Laura is a two-time cancer survivor. The first time around, she found the lump during a breast self-exam. She went to the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage to have an exam and a breast screening. She was enrolled in the breast and cervical cancer program at the SouthCentral Foundation. In January 2004 her cancer was confirmed and she had a surgery called a lumpectomy. That means it was caught early enough that only the lump was removed, not her breast. She did not need further treatment.

Afterward, Laura continued getting mammograms because she understood, first-hand, that the best way to survive cancer was to find it early. Unfortunately in 2007, she was diagnosed again with breast cancer. "This time it was an aggressive personality type of cancer," she says. Treatment was also more intense with weeks of chemotherapy and radiation.

"I tried to find others to learn from because when I know what I am up against, it helps lessen my fear," Laura says. "But in 2007 there were no support groups for Alaska Natives or lists of other Alaska Native women with breast cancer." There were also no personal stories from Alaska Native or American Indian women with cancer on the internet. So she wrote her own.

That's when [www.laurasjourney.com](http://www.laurasjourney.com) was launched. Blessed with a great sense of humor, an open heart, and a gift for bare-bones truth, Laura began writing entries into her web site the first day she started chemotherapy. "I chronicled what I was going through for those that will follow, so hopefully, another woman wouldn't have to be scared all the time like I was."



For more information, visit, [www.laurasjourney.com](http://www.laurasjourney.com)

A portrait of Laura Revels, (Tlingit) is featured on the back page of this issue of Native Women's Wellness.

## Straight Talk

*...I will not sugar coat my feelings on here, so I am warning you now. I am here to share my story, of how I am going to make it through the chemotherapy, radiation, and all the good stuff that comes with trying to be cancer-free. I believe knowledge is power, and in the power of healing in sharing your story....*

*I also have to do a disclaimer here, for cancer is not anything to mess around with by yourself. This site is not to tell you how to deal with cancer, give you medical advice or anything of that nature. I will tout about regular cancer screenings here and there, for early detection is the best prevention....*

*So my friends, let us put one foot in front of the other and begin this journey.*

—From Laurasjourney.com “Why I Write”

## Advice

*Number 2: Do not eat many of your favorite foods during the week that follows chemo. I ate too much of my favs: shrimp salad (green) and rice pudding, and because several times I became ill, I can hardly bring myself to eat either one now.*

—Laurasjourney.com “If Only I Knew”

*Number 10: Please, if you do not know me very well, do not offer advice unless I ask for it or tell me some “natural” way to beat cancer or its side effects. And please, do not try to “diagnose” me, especially if you have never had cancer.*

—Laurasjourney.com “Talking to Someone With Cancer”

## Links to Cancer Information

*...You can see [Breast Cancer.org](http://BreastCancer.org) for more information about radiation and boosters; I don't understand the whole business about protons and stuff, at least right now I don't, but as I continue this journey, I'm sure I'll learn all about it!*

—Laurasjourney.com “Radiation”

## Share Your Comments

*November 7: Hi Laura: ...This is a very moving site, it signifies the importance of women getting breast exams and taking care of themselves.*

—Comment entry by “Nat” at Laurasjourney.com “About Me”




Bead artist Jennifer Jones, (Yupik) beaded this square, which she calls “Rough Weather Ahead.” It is the logo for the Beading for Cause project.

“Alaska doesn't have the highest rates of cancer, but it is the number one killer of our people,” says cancer survivor, Laura Revels. That's because women often wait to get their screening until cancer is in its late stages.

Laura says that breaking the silence about cancer will help people go for cancer screening sooner. “We do have the power to heal ourselves, but before that, we have to start talking.”

“For many Alaska Natives, healing—and talking—is best done through the arts, and through the use of hands,” Laura says. So she and a fellow cancer survivor, Jennifer Jones, (Yupik) started a beaded quilt project called, Beading for a Cause. Four to fifteen survivors or family members get together every week in Anchorage, to bead squares about what cancer has meant to them.

The squares collected from Alaska Native cancer survivors and their loved ones will be used for a cancer awareness quilt to be hung at the Alaska Native Medical Center Oncology Center in Anchorage. The goal is to have 365 squares to share at the Alaska Federation of Natives Conference, which was the number of Alaska Natives diagnosed with cancer in 2006. 

To learn more about the beaded quilt project, visit <http://sites.google.com/site/beadingforcause/>