

How One Strong Woman Promotes Early Mammogram Screenings

JORDAN GASS-POORE¹ on 10 November, 2013 at 04:58



While awareness and fundraising efforts gained widespread attention throughout October, which is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the fight against the disease and promotion of early detection through mammograms continues year round as San Antonio resident Danae Quijano can attest.

A baseline mammogram, the first to which subsequent mammograms are compared, may have saved Quijano's life.

Although Quijano doesn't have a family history of breast cancer, as a precaution she had a mammogram performed at age 35.

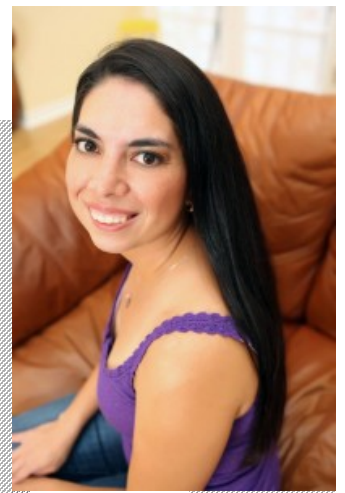
About five years later, during a regular self-examination, Quijano said one of her breasts felt "more swollen" than usual.

It wasn't enough to alarm her, but to be sure, the next day she called to make an appointment with her obstetrician. The appointment ended with the obstetrician referring Quijano to a specialist because she believed she might have breast cancer.

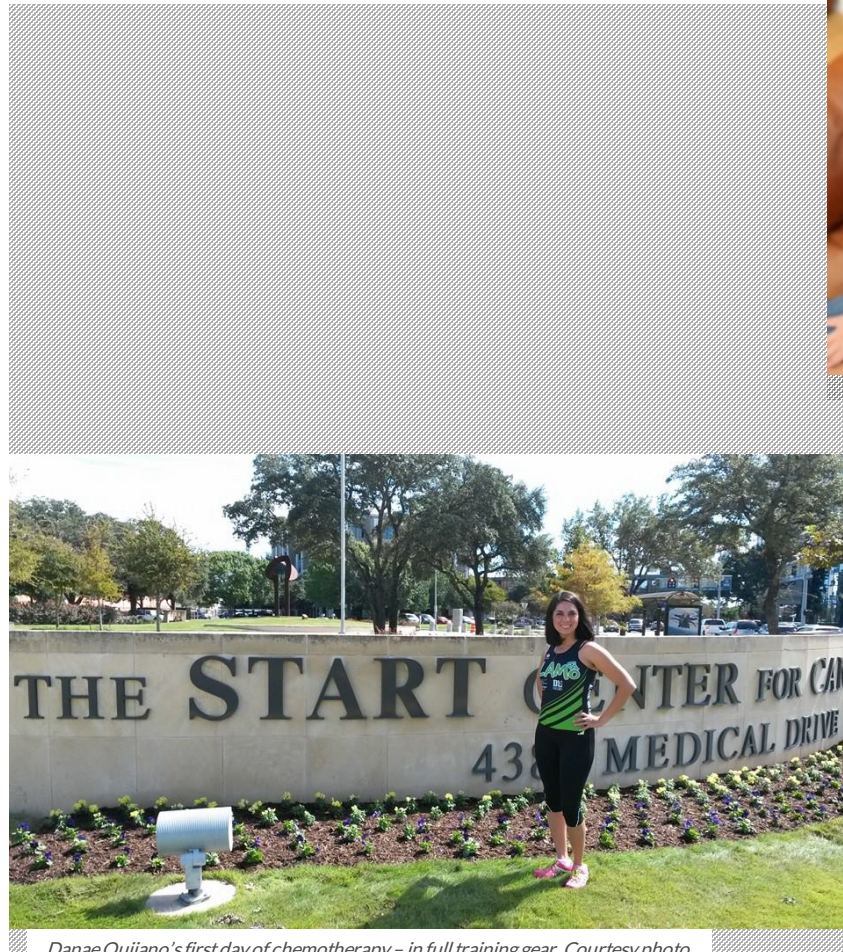
Quijano was diagnosed with stage three-c breast cancer last month.

The Mayo Clinic and the American Cancer Society, among others, recommend that women begin scheduling annual mammograms at 40, although not all organizations agree on these guidelines.

Quijano is a vocal advocate for mammograms – the earlier, the better. And the statistics back her up.



Danae Quijano



Danae Quijano's first day of chemotherapy – in full training gear. Courtesy photo.

There are an estimated 250,000 breast cancer survivors living in the U.S. who were diagnosed at age 40 or younger, according to the [Susan G. Komen](#) Foundation, a Dallas-based, national nonprofit organization with a branch in San Antonio.

Because early detection is key to surviving breast cancer, San Antonio's University Health System has implemented [Healthy U Express](#), which brings the benefits of high-tech mammography to employers and organizations. The mobile mammography vehicle offers screenings by appointment at various locations in Bexar County. Each exam takes 30 minutes and the digital images are read by radiologists affiliated with the University of Texas at San Antonio's Medical School. Same-day results are available and can be reported to physicians at the patient's request.

Various [local clinics and centers](#), like CentroMed and Christus Santa Rosa's Mobile Mammography Unit, offer mammograms on a financial sliding scale for low-income, underinsured and uninsured women 40 years old and older.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, more than 60 percent of women over 40 in 2010 had a mammogram within the past two years.

Receiving the news that she had breast cancer was difficult for Quijano, she said, but telling her family and friends also was a challenge.

"Sorry to be so blunt," Quijano's text message began. It was a warning to friends and family that what she was about to tell them wasn't good news – it described her recent breast cancer diagnosis and her upcoming medical treatments. But Jen Barker, Alamo 180 assistant coach, could only remember the text's opening line as the rest was a blur.

Barker said she stopped what she had been doing and called Quijano, her friend and trainee, while trying not to "freak out."



Danae Quijano (left) and Jen Barker. Courtesy photo.

"I wanted to cry and I wanted to laugh," said Barker, adding that the tone of the text message fit Quijano's no-nonsense personality.

So, in the spirit of Quijano, Barker said she got to work on a no-nonsense plan of her own.

"Going Bald to Beat Breast Cancer" is a fundraiser Barker started last month to help ease Quijano and her family's \$20,000 worth of out-of-pocket medical expenses so they can focus on the mental and physical aspects of her diagnosis.

"The last thing you need when you're trying to win a battle with cancer is worrying about finances," said Barker, who had her head shaved by Quijano last week on KEN5's "Great Day SA."

"I wanted to show her she's not going to be alone," Baker said. "We're a team."

Having surpassed the original \$5,000 goal by \$640 in its first week, Barker said other friends and family members of Quijano's have volunteered to shave their heads at various financial check points.

Barker said in an email that "Going Bald to Beat Breast Cancer" has raised \$11,310 as of Oct. 25.

Alamo 180, a local multi-sport training facility has changed both Barker's and Quijano's lives. The duo see's their pairing as coach and trainee in August, just months before the diagnosis, as fate.



Quijano (left) hugs her close friend and trainer Jen Barker after Barker shaved her head on television to raise money for "Going Bald for Breast Cancer," Quijano's medical expense charity fund. Courtesy photo.



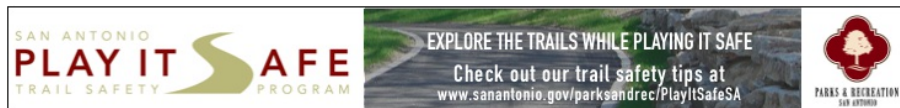
Danae Quijano and Jen Barker's Alamo 180 group pose for a photo after a long run. Courtesy photo.

After struggling with her weight, Quijano said she began training with Alamo 180 last year for its annual Rock 'N' Roll Half Marathon, though Barker wasn't her coach.

Quijano said she lost 25 pounds and began participating in triathlons. Her physical and mental health substantially improved.

The Saturday before Quijano was diagnosed with breast cancer last month she completed a 12-mile training run for the Rock 'N' Roll Half Marathon, which will take place on Nov. 17, a typical occurrence for the physically active mother of two.

"She's a beast," Barker said.



Danae Quijano crosses the finish line. Courtesy photo.

Quijano's cancer hasn't spread, but her left breast will be removed at the end of her six-month treatment in April, she said.

Quijano said she wore her triathlon suit to her first chemotherapy treatment last month as a way to keep up her morale, much like her use of analogies, which she finds to be therapeutic.

"My marathon just got bumped to an ultramarathon ... Chemo's my swim, the mastectomies my bike, radiation is my run and the finish line is my new boobs," said Quijano with a laugh. "I'm going to fight like a triathlete."

The diagnosis didn't scare Quijano, she said – it was the thought of how it would affect the lives of her children and husband that put her on edge.

Having grown up with teenage parents, Quijano said she has worked hard to give her children what she didn't have and has felt anger towards her diagnosis because the disease could take it all away from them.

Quijano said she and her husband told their children about her diagnosis a week after they received the biopsy results.

"I was keeping a secret and it was killing me," Quijano said.



Sean Lewis, a 12-year-old San Antonio resident, donates \$100 to "Going Bald to Beat Breast Cancer" in person to Danae Quijano's close friend and trainer, Jen Barker. Courtesy photo.

Her children haven't seen her cry; instead, Quijano said she waits until they're in bed and cries privately in her room. But the sadness has been short lived lately because of the support she's received from her family and friends.

Alamo 180 employees' help has extended to providing Quijano and her family with meals and transportation to-and-from treatment.

"I wasn't in a position to feed my children," said Quijano. "I can crumble to the ground and be a mess or I can choose to be happy."

Barker said Quijano is meditating, eating well and continues to exercise with the Alamo 180 team.

"It's a family," she said. "... If anything is good from her illness it's (that) women really got to get a mammogram."

Komen San Antonio will continue to bring awareness of breast cancer and raise funds for its cure during this year's **Race for the Cure on April 5 at the Alamodome**.

To get involved with the event, people can **register online** until noon on April 5 to race individually or as part of a team. Participation types vary from competitive and noncompetitive 5 and 10Ks for adults and children 17 and under.

Volunteers are also needed for the organization's "**I Am The Cure**" program that aims to educate and motivate race participants and onlookers to take an active role in their own breast health.

*Jordan Gass-Poore' is an English/mass communication senior at Texas State University- San Marcos. She began her work as a paid intern for The Rivard Report in June 2013. Her previous and current intern experience includes the **New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung**, **The Austin Chronicle**, **Slackerwood** and the **Austin American-Statesman**, among others. Contact Jordan via jgasspoore@gmail.com or follow her on Twitter [@jgasspoore](https://twitter.com/jgasspoore).*

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A former Rivard Report intern, Jordan Gass-Poore' is now interning at The Los Angeles News Group in California. She is an English/mass communication senior at Texas State University. She has also worked as a paid intern for LMG Communications. AT&T is a client of LMG Communications. Jordan's previous and current intern experience includes the New Braunfels Herald-Zeitung, The Austin Chronicle, Slackerwood and the Austin American-Statesman, among others. Contact Jordan via jgasspoore@gmail.com.

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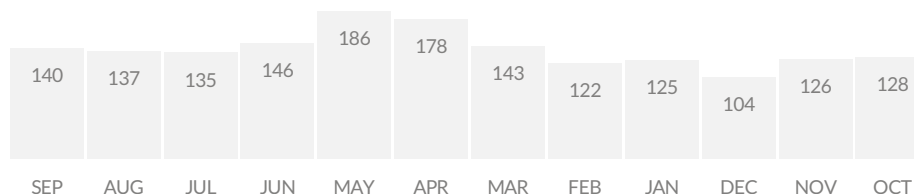
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