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Celebrating the Lives of 'Crowned Jewels'

Photo essay honors African-American women impacted by breast cancer

BY MINDY COOPER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

As one of the most diagnosed forms of cancer known to individuals throughout the country, breast cancer, which knows no boundaries, affects millions of women, men and families every day.

In honor of Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Concordia University in northeast Portland has dedicated itself to bring education and awareness of the disease to the community. This month, the college features the exhibit "Crowned Jewels," a pictorial essay of Northwest African-American women whose lives have been impacted by breast cancer.

Located throughout the first and third floors of the new George R. White Library, the display, created by Reba Allmon in 2006, has images of 18 Northwest women wearing their finest hats.

"When you go through chemotherapy or radiation, you generally lose your hair," said Lynnette M. Jackson, one of survivors pictured within the exhibit. "The hats are part of the crowns."

Jackson, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003 at the age of 46, has undergone a mastectomy, chemotherapy and several reconstructive surgeries.

Although there was no history of breast cancer within her family, Jackson said she remembers the day she found out something might be wrong when her nurse practitioner, at her annual gynecological checkup, noticed her areola looked pronounced.

After she immediately arranged for a mammogram and biopsy, medical professionals soon diagnosed her with breast cancer. "I was in shock," she said.



PHOTOS BY MINDY COOPER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Linda Church (left) and Lynnette M. Jackson bring recognition to a photo essay honoring Northwest African-American women impacted by breast cancer. The October exhibit is on the first and third floors of the new George R. White Library on Concordia University's northeast Portland campus.

Eight-years later and after many stages of both recovery and discovery, however, Jackson said, "she is truly grateful and thankful for the encounter."

"I've been blessed with a new appreciation for life," she said.

Jackson said she is excited to be a part of the exhibit and one of the African-American ladies highlighted to be a crowned jewel. "Just being

asked acknowledges the importance in connecting a variety of women," she said.

According to Jackson, the heightened awareness about breast cancer is important.

"As African Americans, we have a tendency to not seek preventative health maintenance," she said. "So my thing is, it is okay to want to know to be prepared, be aware and equipped with the knowledge ultimately to

take care of yourself and be well."

She said when she first heard of her illness, she realized a person can either retreat or speak out. "I chose to speak out to men and women, and not just African Americans, but everyone."

This week a reception event of the art

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Author Sends Message of Hope

Survivor writes on power to rescue yourself

BY MINDY COOPER
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As economic insecurity and hopelessness spread like wildfire throughout the country, one Portland resident sends a message of hope with his new book False Images, which follows the authors' journey of self-discovery and awareness during times of hardship.

Leon McCoy, who has lived in Portland for 17-years, said he is a

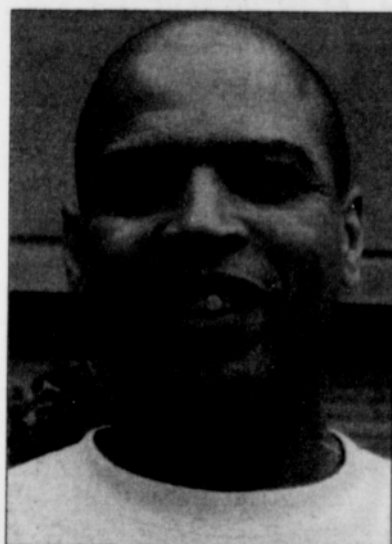
survivor of incarceration, drug addiction, sexual molestation, poverty and violent crime.

After years, however, of feeling powerless to change, he said he remembers the moment when he realized he possessed his own power to rescue himself.

"There is always hope," said McCoy. "No matter what a person is experiencing or where they are in life—there is always hope."

Although the creation of his book, False Images, which was released last month, wasn't something he had always planned to achieve, he said the words began to pour out of him very suddenly one night while he sat on his couch, where he decided to turn within himself for a truth that could reconcile the issues he was facing.

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Leon McCoy

