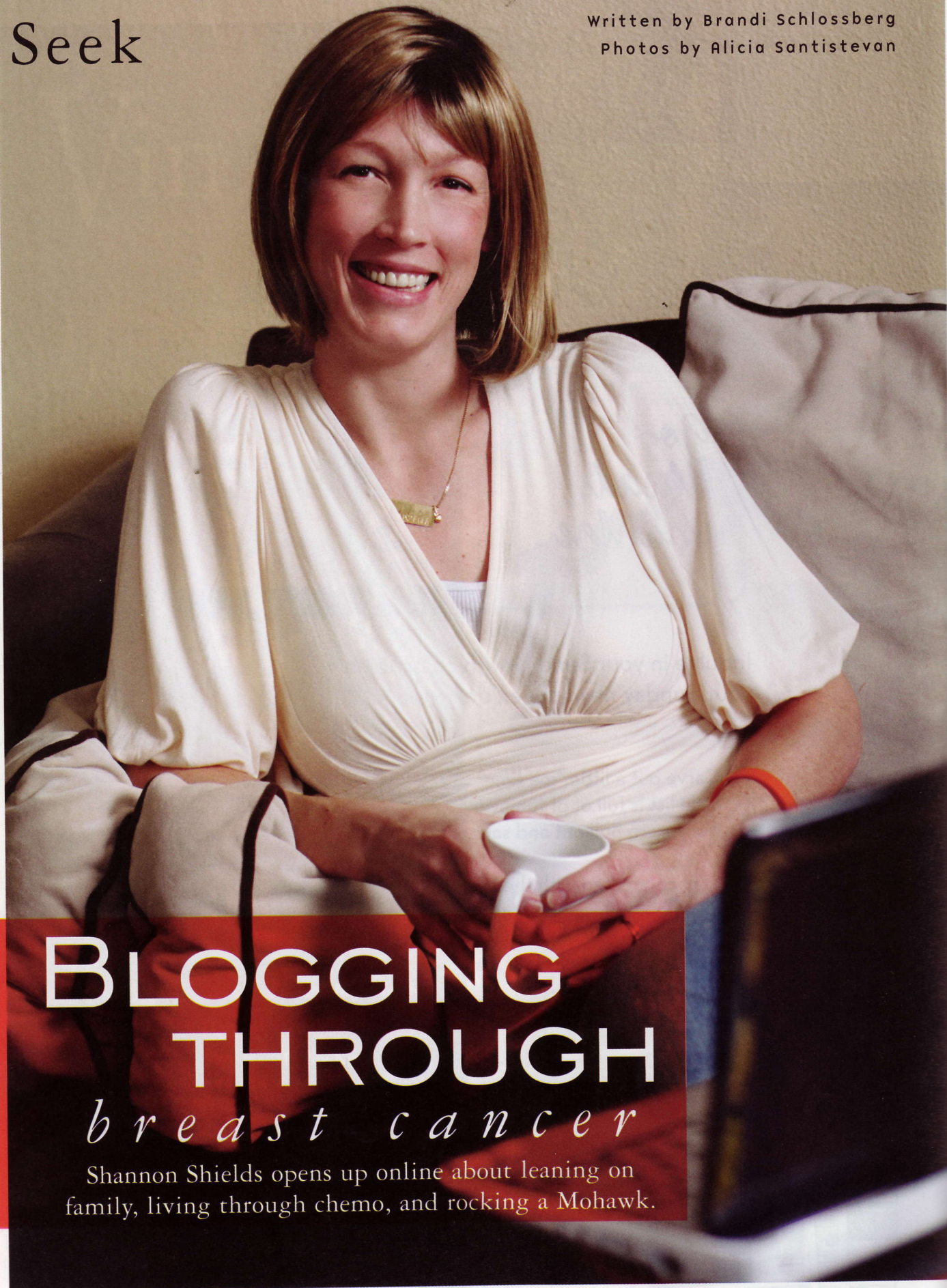


Seek

Written by Brandi Schlossberg
Photos by Alicia Santistevan



BLOGGING THROUGH *breast cancer*

Shannon Shields opens up online about leaning on family, living through chemo, and rocking a Mohawk.

B LOGGING CAN'T CURE CANCER, but for Shannon Shields it does play a big role in easing the isolation and anxiety that often accompany this disease. Diagnosed with breast cancer in September 2009, the Truckee Meadows resident began her blog, *A Journey of Hope*, to document the experience.

“When I was first diagnosed, I was devastated,” Shields says. “I didn’t want to talk to even my closest of friends — I felt alone, angry, and scared.”

Loved ones were calling for updates and to offer their support, but the 31-year-old mother and wife still was struggling with her diagnosis. Her closest family members handled the phone calls and e-mails until Shields felt ready to reach out on her own.

“I wanted them to see I was still the goofy, happy smart-ass they had grown to know and love.”

“At first, the blog was all about relaying information, but it turned into a way for me to connect with people,” she says. “I wanted them to see I was still the goofy, happy smart-ass they had grown to know and love.”

Shields’ sturdy sense of humor is weaved into every blog entry, remaining intact despite a bilateral mastectomy and round after round of chemotherapy. In a December entry, she writes a list of *Weird Things That Happen During Chemotherapy*, such as losing hair — nose hair included — and gaining a “supersonic sense of smell.”

“I can tell if [the dog] pooped in another room a mile away! Out of all the radioactive powers I could receive, super smelling was not on the top of my list,” she writes. “Why couldn’t I have gotten super vision or the ability to read minds, see through walls, predict the future? No, I get super smelling.” ➤

Shine on

Diagnosed with breast cancer at age 31, Shields (left) started *A Journey of Hope* in an effort to help and connect with others.

Seek



Strength in numbers

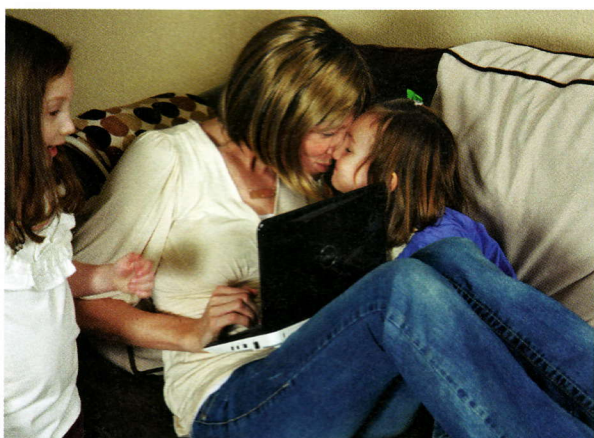
Team Shields sticks together, braving breast cancer one day at a time. Here, Shields and her mother, Marion Frances, share a hug.

As far as Shields is concerned, “if cancer wasn’t life-threatening, it would be kind of funny.”

“Of course, it’s not something to make light of,” she says, “but really, the side effects are just so ridiculous that sometimes, you just have to laugh.”

Along with her signature sense of humor, Shields’ photography skills are displayed in the blog as well. When she decides it’s time to shave her head, because the hair is beginning to clump and fall out, blog followers get to see and read about this transition.

The photos show Shields going from a full head of hair to a rock-and-roll Mohawk to a completely shaved head. She’s smiling through it all and surrounded by family, including husband Ryan and daughters Cali, age 4, and Ella, age 2.



Girl power

Shields cherishes the time she spends with daughters Cali, age 4, and Ella, age 2. "I really want and need to be here for them," Shields writes in her blog.

“It gives people a window into my family that I am proud to have anybody see.”

— *Marion Frances*

"It felt kind of good to do this ... liberating ... cold as hell, too!" she writes. "I was also very proud that Cali and Ella reacted like it was no big deal and liked how it turned out."

A Journey of Hope offers a close look at a young family fighting breast cancer. The blog's blend of humor and honesty seems to invite readers to walk with "Team Shields" on the path toward recovery.

"It gives people a window into my family that I am proud to have anybody see," says Marion Frances, Shields' mother. "My work colleagues have been following it faithfully and have been so supportive — I would never be able to relay this personal journey to them the way Shannon can."

Shields says feedback on her blog, typically in the form of reader comments, is the most rewarding and helpful part of the process.

"Once I started getting such positive feedback from loved ones and, more surprisingly, others going through this, I knew I wanted to keep it up," Shields says. "I hope women who get diagnosed may come across my blog and realize it's not the end of the world — that they can get through this."

Find Shannon Shields' blog, *A Journey of Hope*, online at <http://shannonshields.wordpress.com>. ■