FAYLA PHOTOGRAPHY PRESENTS

THROUGH HER LENS

BREAST CANCER SURVIVOR EDITION

STILL BECOMING

DAY 29
OCTOBER 2026

FULL CIRCLE

Years caring for patients could not prepare her to become one.

"Today's strength is not about proving how much I can endure."

– CENYELLIA GOODWILL

THE MOMENTS
BETWEEN

Cenyellia Goodwill

She spent years caring for others. Then it was her turn.

For years, Cenyellia stood beside patients preparing for surgery. As an operating room nurse, she knew how to recognize fear, answer questions and make sure the person on the other side of the table was cared for.

That instinct extended beyond the operating room. Cenyellia was accustomed to taking care of people. There was always another patient, another assignment, another responsibility or something her children needed. She was outgoing and available, often the person asking, "Hey, I'm here. What do you need? How can I help?"

What she did not often do was let people very far into her own personal life.

Then, while on assignment in Boston, Cenyellia received a breast cancer diagnosis.

She called her two sisters first and told them what was happening. Then she asked them to call their children and share the news. Her sisters declined, gently but firmly reminding Cenyellia that it was her story to tell.

So she sent a message to the family group chat.

"Call a sibling to call a sibling. We're meeting at 7 p.m. Central Time."

When the family gathered by phone, Cenyellia told them what was happening and that she would be having a bilateral mastectomy. Her niece, known for making people laugh, tried to lighten the moment.

"Auntie, girl, you can get you some new girls and we'll put some Daisy Dukes on."

The humor was familiar, but her niece later told Cenyellia that something about her aunt was not. She could hear it in her voice. This was not the same joking auntie she knew. Cenyellia was trying to be strong for everyone listening.

Her daughter and son were on the call too. Afterward, her daughter asked her to call them back. When Cenyellia did, both of her children were crying.

"I'm fine. I'm not dead. I'm not going anywhere."

Even after delivering news that frightened her, Cenyellia found herself doing what came naturally: reassuring the people she loved.

Her sisters helped steady the family. Her oldest sister, a pastor, became what Cenyellia calls her prayer warrior.

"Baby, I will pray you through any and everything."

Her husband responded in a way Cenyellia did not expect. He is quiet, she says, and not someone who often expresses fear or emotion aloud. This time, he did.

"We need you. I need you not to give up. This family needs you, and I can't make it without you. Fight to the bitter end."

For Cenyellia, hearing him say "we need you" mattered. The woman who had spent years being needed was beginning to understand how deeply her life was connected to the people around her.

As appointments and procedures began coming together, another part of the journey unfolded.

Cenyellia started recognizing the names and faces of the people who would care for her.

The woman from the breast center coordinating her care was Rosemary, someone Cenyellia had worked with in the operating room. The surgeon assigned to her was a physician she had worked for. The first assist had been one of her former bosses. The plastic surgeon was someone she knew from breast reconstruction cases.

"It felt like God had strategically placed people throughout my life long before I knew I was going to need them."

The connections were especially meaningful because Cenyellia understood what happened on the other side of the operating room doors. She had worked as a first assistant in general surgery, including mastectomy cases followed by breast reconstruction.

Now she would enter that room differently.

"I went from standing beside the operating room table to lying on that same table."

Knowing the medical language did not remove the fear. Understanding the procedures did not make becoming the

> *"I felt proud of myself for letting somebody else take care of me."*
>
> — CENYELLIA GOODWILL

patient easier. Cenyellia still found herself asking the question knowledge could not answer.

"Why, God? Why me?"

But she also began recognizing that people had been positioned around her long before she knew she would need them.

One of the first people Cenyellia thought to call after her diagnosis was Natasha Goode. Cenyellia had seen on social media that Natasha was going through breast cancer and had already been praying for her. By the time Cenyellia received her own diagnosis, Natasha was several weeks beyond surgery.

They compared notes. Natasha answered questions and offered practical reassurance as Cenyellia began walking a road Natasha already knew.

"Natasha showed up for me, and I don't even think she knows how much she showed up for me or how much I looked to her for hope."

There were others.

A nurse Cenyellia had worked with years earlier was also a breast cancer survivor. Long before Cenyellia's diagnosis, the nurse had invited her to participate on the medical team for a breast cancer walk. After Cenyellia's surgery, that same woman came to her home and offered to change her bandages every day.

Doctors, nurses and church members showed up. Friends of her parents and sisters reached out. People Cenyellia had not spoken with in years found their way back into her life.

The woman accustomed to caring for everyone else became the one being cared for.

That was not easy.

"I felt proud of myself for letting somebody else take care of me."

Before cancer, Cenyellia believed strength meant carrying everything and everybody without allowing herself to fall apart. After surgery, that definition could no longer hold.

There were days she did not feel like getting up. Her spirit was low, unfamiliar territory for the energetic go-getter. She had to allow herself to cry without interpreting the tears as defeat. She had to let people pray for her, sit with her, listen to her and see parts of her life she once would have kept private.

"I've learned I don't have to be strong every moment because God's strength is made perfect in weakness."

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>
> — CENYELLIA GOODWILL

"Today's strength is not about proving how much I can endure. It's about recognizing how much grace has carried me."

The physical changes brought another lesson.

After the double mastectomy, Cenyellia had to learn how to see herself again. There were days when she questioned her femininity and had to remind herself that her worth and beauty had never depended on one part of her body.

"We say beauty is on the inside, but when you go through this journey, you really understand what that means."

She began seeing beauty differently, not only in herself but in the people around her. Beauty became visible in the person willing to cry with her, the friend who answered the phone, the nurse who changed a bandage and the family member who simply wanted to know if she was really okay.

"I have scars, and other people have scars. Those scars don't define us. We are still beautiful on the inside, and that radiates outward."

Cancer also changed Cenyellia's relationship with time.

Before, life was often about what needed to happen next. Work. Assignments. Patients. Family responsibilities. The pace rarely stopped.

Now she notices what she calls the moments in between.

She celebrates birthdays, makes memories, and spends time with her family. Turning 55 was not simply another birthday. It became a celebration of being here and an opportunity to thank God for the years she has been given.

"I no longer want to be so busy making a living that I forget to live."

That perspective shapes what Cenyellia wants other women to understand. Let people show up. Let someone check on you. Let somebody pray for you. Allow people to help without translating that help into weakness.

She speaks especially plainly

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about the pressure women can carry to remain strong for everyone else.

"As women, and definitely as Black women, sometimes we go through life being so strong for everybody else that we forget we don't have to be strong all the time."

Three years into survivorship, Cenyellia does not describe herself as finished or fully arrived. She chooses two words.

Still becoming.

Cancer changed her life, but it did not become the sum of it. She is still a mother, wife, sister, daughter, nurse and woman of faith. She is still learning, healing and growing, even through the parts of the journey she may never completely understand.

"Cancer changed my life, but it didn't end my story."

Cenyellia believes there is still more of that story ahead.

"Your scars are part of your story, but they are not the entire story. Breast cancer was a chapter. Trials and tribulations are not final. They are chapters in a story that is still being written."

THROUGH HER LENS • DAY 29 OF 31

Interview, Story, and Photography by
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UP NEXT • DAY 30

EVELYN JONES
"You've got this. You are stronger than you know."

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