

[TRACK 5: SURVIVOR STORIES: CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES]

Evelina, 64 years old

[Narrator]

The third cancer survivor we will hear from is Evelina. She is a 64-year-old woman from the Philippines.

[Evelina]

I had come to the United States to visit my brother and to stay for a while. I had not seen him for about 10 years. A couple of months before I was to return home, I started feeling tired all the time. My brother, who is a doctor, told me that I looked pale and drawn. He insisted that I get a checkup before going home to the Philippines. He made an appointment for me to see a doctor he knows.

[Evelina]

My physical exam showed a lump in my right breast. When the doctor asked me about it, I said, yes, I had felt that for about a year, but I thought it would go away. Of course, I did think that maybe it might be something that could get worse. The doctor suggested some more tests, including a biopsy. Well, the results showed that I had breast cancer. After some more tests, the doctor tells me that I need surgery, and maybe chemotherapy, too.

[Narrator]

Sometimes, taking Step 1 in problem-solving -- saying what the problem is -- is not so easy. Listen to how Evelina talks about her beliefs, what her brother, Manuel, thinks, and how her sister-in-law, Letty is really the one who helps take the first step in solving the problem.

[Evelina]

After my diagnosis, I wanted to go home to the Philippines and start faith healing, not this chemotherapy. Yes, I will have surgery, but, no, I won't even talk about the chemotherapy. You see, I am a devout Catholic, I attend mass every day. I get great comfort from spiritual support. I made a group of friends here who pray for my physical healing. During mass, the beautiful music and praying my rosary lift my spirits every day. I also have heard from my friends back home about faith healing. That is what I wanted, to go home and see a faith healer.

[Evelina]

But, Manuel was trained as a doctor in the Philippines. He doesn't even want to hear about my wish to return home. He wants me to be treated here, with surgery and chemotherapy. He is my older brother and I know he feels responsible for seeing that I get good treatment. But, the more he talks about the treatment here, the more I want to go home. It has been stressful around the house.

[Evelina]

I know Manuel wants the best for me, but he doesn't respect my wishes. I want to have more Filipino food, like rice and chicken porridge, and warm ginger-root tea from back home. They make me feel more comfortable. American food is just too different. I know, Manuel's children think this is a little strange. But, you know, I am afraid of what's happening to me, afraid to have chemotherapy. I worry that this chemotherapy will kill me. I told Manuel I would rather die from cancer than from the side effects of treatment. From what I know about chemotherapy, it sounds worse than dying. To me, I believe "bahala na," which means "what will be, will be." If it is my time to die, it should be

at home in the Philippines -- not here in the United States, and not from the chemotherapy.

[Evelina]

While Manuel and I are arguing about this for a couple of weeks, Letty, my sister-in-law, was listening the whole time. She didn't seem to take sides. She could understand what I was saying, but she also trusts Manuel's opinions. She talks to us both one day, and says that the real problem is that we are fighting with each other about what to do. Why don't we talk to other people and see if what they say can help us decide what to do. She had thought this out and said it so calmly that Manuel and I both knew she was right. Let's give it a chance.

[Narrator]

So, Letty helped start the problem-solving process by saying clearly what the problem is, and she got Manuel and Evelina to agree to take Step 2 and get the facts that are related to the problem.

[Evelina]

Letty asked me if I would like to have the parish priest come and talk with both Manuel and me. She also thought about asking a Filipina friend with cancer to talk with me about her own cancer. This woman is like me, and she is willing to help. We have the same spiritual beliefs. She also tells me about her own experiences with chemotherapy. She is very good to talk with, and I feel comfortable talking honestly with her. So, I ask her many questions about cancer, chemotherapy, faith healing, and hope -- questions I couldn't ask anyone else.

[Narrator]

Now, Step 3 -- creating a plan of action.

[Evelina]

Over the next few weeks, I realized that I was not going to die from my cancer soon. I started to feel less afraid of chemotherapy. I was ready to talk about the best treatments for me. I decided to have surgery, and maybe the chemotherapy. Then, I will return home after the treatment is done. For now, I have found a faith healer in the community. I will continue to attend Mass every day, and the Priest has agreed to see me regularly for spiritual counseling. These plans make me much happier.

[Narrator]

Manuel and Letty help Evelina with Step 4 -- carrying out the plan. They do so by helping her with her chemotherapy treatments, and helping her with her faith healer and special foods that she requires for her faith healing. They each help to prepare some of the traditional Pilipino dishes that Evelina had missed so much. That turned out to be helpful and fun for the entire family. They work well together in Step 5, which is checking the plan as they go along and adjusting it as needed. Though there are times of frustration for all of them, they learn to share their feelings and work together on the agreed upon plan. As the treatment progresses, all of them will need to re-evaluate and possibly change some of their plans and goals. Other problems may arise for which they will need to again look at these problem solving steps and work on a new plan or some additional steps in the process of Evelina's treatment.