

When cancer hit, Akanksha had faith in tech

Arpita.Misra@timesgroup.com

During her growing up years, Akanksha Bilani moved across seven countries, most of them in the Gulf region. She picked up five languages, swam in the oceans, spent weekends on a goat farm, and led her school team at the national level

INSPIRATION

in basketball. She went to 14 schools, and then to California for higher studies.

Akanksha, the daughter of a marine biologist, grew up plugging into different eco-systems. "A childhood like this meant I was never averse to change," she

says. But then, she missed having a BFF; at times, she even felt disconnected from her culture and heritage.

Akanksha, who's now the regional alliance head for Asia Pacific & Japan at Intel, says she would keenly observe her father analyse oceans. "He taught me maths and steered my interest towards science," she says. In 8th grade, when Akanksha started learning programming language C, she built a balance sheet application for her dad. That was when she realised how technology simplified life.

Marriage brought Akanksha, a half-Marwari and half-Italian, to India, and Mumbai became home. But life turned turbulent when in

"If you are skilled and ready to drive innovation that brings impactful transformation, put your seatbelt on and enjoy the ride!"

Akanksha Bilani | REGIONAL ALLIANCE HEAD, ASIA PACIFIC & JAPAN, INTEL

2007, the young mother was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a cancer of the lymphatic system. "I was 29 and on stage 4; there was a history of the illness in the family," she says.

But the



technologist had faith that advancements in medical science would see her through. "When my doctors explained the course of recovery, they never touched upon the possibility that I could die. It was all factual and directional. They made me comfortable and confident," says Akanksha, who has been cancer-free for close to nine years now.

When she was in remission, her doctors would send her research papers on similar case studies. "They'd invite me to deliver talks at hospitals and I'd use visuals, diagrams and data to show how the tumour shrunk with the right kind of treat-

ment. These are things you do not get without the application of technology," she says.

Prior to Intel, Akanksha was a market evangelist with Microsoft. She holds a double MBA from University of California, LA, and studied computer engineering at Boston University. She has been driving focused strategies to help build HPC (high performance computing), IoT and AI knowhow on Intel across the Apac region. Over the last 16 years, Akanksha has managed skilling programmes that have trained over 100,000 developers.

Technology played a pivotal part in pulling Akanksha back from the brink, and today she is proud to be one from this industry.