

In 1998, after being treated for what I was told was just an "infection," I was diagnosed at the age of 31 with a rare vulva cancer, which had invaded one lymph node in my pelvic area. Following radical surgery, I was given radiation to the area and told that I would not be able to have any more children. Since vulva cancer is not responsive to chemotherapy, I was not given that option. The radiation treatment forced my body into pre-menopause. Just at 5 years out from being free from the vulva cancer, I discovered a knot in my left armpit. My fear was that the knot was an indication that the vulva cancer had returned.

My oncologist sent me for a mammogram but due to my age and the density of the breast, the mammogram was clear. They then did an ultrasound under the arm but did not do an ultrasound of the breast, and once again I was told I had an "infection" and was put on antibiotics. After a month, several knots appeared in the breast. I underwent a lymphectomy to remove lymph nodes and a lumpectomy to remove the tumors — one of which was five centimeters — from my left breast. Nine lymph nodes and the tumors tested positive, and I was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma. I then underwent a mastectomy. At that time, I had a tumor marker of around 172. I received the normal protocol of radiation and chemotherapy. When it was discovered that the breast cancer had metastasized into my bones, the chemotherapy was stopped, and my new oncologist decided to begin a bone strengthener and an anti-hormone treatment. Twice I was treated for "infection," but instead I had advanced cancer both times.

I can say today that after a diagnosis of advanced vulva cancer and stage four breast cancer, and being told I could only hope for partial or complete remission, I am free from cancer — not in remission. Today my bones are scarred but free from disease, and my medical report states that I have new bone growth. The tumor marker that was 172 is now around 15. I was told that normal (someone who had never had cancer) would be at 30. My final pathology report states, "healing and response to therapy." God is faithful.

December 5th of 2008, another chapter began and I had to return to treatment BUT I ask you not to judge the book by the chapter I am in...I know in whom I have believed and once again He will give me beauty for ashes.

I am married, mother of one, and a soon to be a three - time survivor of two stage 4 cancers. I am a cancer advocate and delegate with the Lance Armstrong Foundation and the local Livestrong Army Leader(Livestrong Army Upstate SC) which is a grassroots organization of The Lance Armstrong Foundation. I served as Entertainment Chair for the 2004 Relay for Life, a committee member for the South Carolina Cancer Alliance's First Survivorship Conference 2008 and a current member, former volunteer with the Anderson Cancer Association. I also served as a Track Leader for The Lance Armstrong Foundation at the 2008 Livestrong Summit. Now, I am currently working to establish a breast cancer survivor dragon boat program in the Upstate, which is an active support group and has been proven to reduce the risk of reoccurrence and lower the risk of Lymphodema.