

Wow where do I begin.... I had just gone through a major back surgery in Dec. of 2007 and got back to work in March of 2008, part time (4 hours a day). I felt so run down and the doctors all thought it was because of the surgery, then I started losing weight and had no appetite. By no appetite I mean I could hardly eat anything. So the love of my life Gary suggested that I get all the tests done that were due (or overdue) so he in fact saved my life. You see I get my annual mammograms in November every year but missed it in 2007 due to the back injury and surgery. Every year they have been normal. I have had to go back for extra views but was always told everything was OK.

So I contacted my family doctor for an order for a mammogram and had it done. That evening my family doctor called me and told me I needed to get more views done and she would like me to get them done the next day. Now like I mentioned before I have had to go back for more views but never got a call from the doctor about it, I usually just got a letter from the radiology place. So I go in the next day and have the "Spot Magnification" views done. I get all done and started to leave told the girls "see ya next year" and the radiologist came out and chased me down the hall and asked if he could do an ultrasound that he sees something and wants to make sure it's a cyst.

Now this whole time I am not worried, honestly never thought breast cancer. So I agreed to the Ultrasound and he asks if I can come back tomorrow, I agree. I return the next day, he does the ultrasound and as I am leaving again, he comes running after me and asks me to come back to the room. He proceeds to tell me what he saw is still there and is not cystic and recommends a biopsy as soon as I can get it done. I am still not concerned it's cancer.

After the radiologist made a phone call he gave me my films and told me to take them to the Breast Center and they would schedule everything. I show up with my films, the lady takes them and states that they will be contacting me within a few days as the doctors need time to look at the films to see if a biopsy is even warranted. I leave, (it takes me about 20 minutes to get home) as I am coming in the door the phone is ringing and it's the breast center so I am thinking I forgot to give them some information or something. The lady on the other end of the phone says the doctors looked at my films and she needed to schedule me for a biopsy. This was a Friday, they wanted to do the biopsy on the following Monday (May 19th).

So I made the appointment and still honestly thinking this was all nothing. As I think back now I must have just been in denial to myself as there were so many "red flags".

I had the biopsy done on May 19th and received a call from the radiologist the evening of May 20th that put my life on hold. I had breast cancer. I didn't really know much about breast cancer except women get it and I thought you had to have a family history, which turned out to be so false because I didn't have a family history.

My first thought was am I going to die? Will I see my grandkids grow up? Will I lose my hair? After the diagnosis everything is a blur. Appointment with the Breast Surgeon, Oncologist, Radiology Oncologist, Thoracic surgeon (to place a med port). At my referral appointment with the breast surgeon I found out I had 2 types of cancer IDC (Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma) and DCIS (Ductal Carcinoma In-Situ). ER+, HER-. Stage 1, so everything about it was good as a matter of fact they called it (an old lady cancer). However it was 2 cms. in size. I opted for a lumpectomy with Sentinel Node Biopsy. Surgery went well, there was no lymph node involvement and the margins were clear but because of the size of the tumor they felt Chemotherapy was warranted. After surgery I started with Chemo which by the way was 5 days after my 49th birthday, Happy Birthday to me. I did 4 rounds of Cytoxan/ Taxotere every 3 weeks. Right before my second round I shaved my head as I noticed some hair falling out. I had very thick, to the middle of my back, wavy red hair.

While my beautician is shaving my head and the hair is falling to the floor, the tears were rolling down my face, falling to my shirt. Talk about devastating. Then my eyebrows and lashes fell out, then the rest of the body hair...GONE just like that. So needless to say, there was a period of a few months that I felt like a freak and I was depressed. I did pretty well with the Chemo, only got sick once and they ordered stronger anti-nausea meds and that took care of that. After Chemo I started radiation. Radiation was a little rougher than the Chemo believe it or not.

I had to take two breaks due to my skin burning. I quit my job and was unemployed throughout treatment. Financially cancer treatment is devastating. There are organizations out there to help but I never actually got the

help until the end of my treatment. I was at the point I was even unable to buy groceries. So from the stress of the diagnosis and then the financial stress it's a wonder I came out of all of this so well. Financially I am not even close to being OK but I am working on it. So when you are diagnosed with breast cancer there is so much more to it than just a diagnosis of cancer. It affects so many aspects of your life.

I am very thankful throughout all of this, I had a very good man that took care of me. He went to every appointment (surgery, dr's appointments, chemo appointments). He learned everything about chemo and side effects to watch for, what food would be good for me to eat, made me special food if I wanted it. I had trouble with food tasting bad during Chemo, especially meat so he did everything he could to make foods taste good enough for me to get some nourishment. He gave up a year of his life to care for me. He tried to keep me laughing, because as you know laughter is the best medicine, but when I cried, he held me and cried with me.

I want to say to every woman out there. Do your self breast exams, get your mammograms done, go to your doctors regularly because you think it will never happen to you, well I am proof that is just not true.