

In 2000, I discovered a small pea-sized lump in my right breast. I went to my regular check-up with the gynecologist, and she told me not to worry, that it was fibrocysts and I should avoid red meat and take vitamin e. They performed an ultra sound on the breast at my insistence, but told me that I was too young to have a mammogram as my breasts were dense and wouldn't show anything. I was 29 yrs. old.

A year later, I returned to the doctors, complaining this time of pain in that same breast. By this time the lump felt larger, it was more painful and it was mobile. I was told that those were not usual signs of cancer and not to worry, but I could come back in a month and have another ultra sound done.

I was extremely concerned as the lump protruded from my breast. The doctor referred me to a breast surgeon who told me I had fibroadenoma, which is a non cancerous tumor. She told me she would remove the lump due to it's size and I would be fine. A few weeks later, I had a lumpectomy performed, and the result of that removal proved to be three malignant tumors. Breast cancer affects each woman differently. I had invasive ductal carcinoma and was estrogen receptor positive.

They wanted me to have a masectomy. I decided on a tram flap (this is where they take muscle, fat and tissue from my abdomen and create a breast). It was a long surgery, but my decision was based on the fact that I was scared to have foreign substances in my body. (silicone or saline implants).

After the surgery, an oncologist told me they had removed the breast along with 21 lymph nodes. 20 were positive for cancer. She wanted me to begin treatment immediately after recovery from the surgery.

Upon my first visit, I had lumps in my neck region and they were very concerned. I started regular treatment of chemotherapy. I went for treatment every three weeks for about 4 months. I inquired as to how long I would need to be on chemo and the doctor's response was "indefinitely". That was not an option for me.

I was referred to another oncologist who was working on a clinical trial. This trial's protocol consisted of high doses of chemotherapy with stem cell support. That is where they retrieve your bone marrow, give you a high amount of chemo which kills off both bad and good cells, then they give you back your own bone marrow to help save you. They told me they would first need to see how I responded to the regular treatments to become a candidate.

During that time, I started to have severe pain in my spine. I was temporarily put off the regular chemo, and they performed radiation. The "cancer" had spread to my spinal region. This basically meant it was aggressive and I was also considered stage 4. Unfortunately, younger women are affected differently in that the cancer is usually more aggressive. There are fertility issues. I went into early menopause at the age of 30. I also cannot conceive children.

I had decided that I wanted to fight this aggressively and opted for the clinical trial. My tumors responded well once I was put back on the chemo and so I was now a candidate. I was eventually put on three different protocols of high dose chemo, and in and out of the hospital over the course of six months, remaining as an inpatient for approximately 3 weeks at a time. Chemotherapy is toxic and my body went through a lot of different stages. I had a blood transfusion along with the bone marrow transplant. I also had poor response in my kidneys.

My doctors seemed confident though, and I kept a positive outlook. I used visualization to help me heal, and I also had a lot of love and support from my family. I believe the mind is powerful, and that my positive mindset definitely attributed to my healing. After a year and a half of treatments, I was considered in remission. It has been eight years since my diagnosis, and I have had no reoccurrence. I continue to be tested regularly and I am on medication which helps to prevent bone loss(zometa) and also because I am estrogen receptor positive I was put on (femara) Aside from side effects of these medications, I am doing well and have resumed normal activities.