

It is wonderful to be able to read all your stories and to know others have walked and survived the path I have just traveled. Thank you so much for sharing your experience, strength and hope.

In early February '08, I was diagnosed with Stage 3, Invasive Ductal Carcinoma Breast Cancer, I was 39 years old. I found a lump while doing a self examination in November '07. Because I live out in the country it took some time to get all the tests that were needed to render the diagnoses. In the end it was the core biopsies that told the story.

I remember waiting in my surgeon's office for the results. It was the longest and scariest 15 minutes of my life. However, I knew, in my heart of hearts, back in November '07 that I had cancer. But since no one had actually said the words to me...Maybe I could hope and wish it away. No such luck.

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After my surgeon used my name and cancer in the same sentence, my life as I knew it changed. Every aspect of what I had come to know to be true and believed in had either come into question or changed completely. The next two weeks went by in a blur. I had so many decisions to make and my brain would not function...it could not process anything.

I had to call my mom and have that conversation you never want to have with your parents, " Mom, I have cancer and it's serious." We cried and she said what every little girl wants to hear when she is scared, "I'll be right there and we'll do this together." That phone call was the beginning of our journey together to kick cancer's ass. My mom left her home and partner in Washington and arrived at my front door 2 days later, prepared to put her life on hold to help me for as long as the journey took.

In February '08 I had what I was told to be a left breast mastectomy (more about that later) with sentinel lymph node dissection. The surgeon took a total of 12 lymph nodes, 8 of which contained cancer cells. The last 4 lymph nodes were completely clear. I awoke from the surgery with such a sense of relief, that the cancer was out of my body and could no longer continue to grow and harm me. Many wonderful people came to see me in the hospital to offer their support, prayers and love. I think I called on every single one of them over the course of the next year.

Two weeks after surgery, I was scheduled to start chemotherapy. One small glitch had to be dealt with first. I need to move out of the house I had been sharing with my partner. During this whole process I got to see my partner as person who's actions I could not live with. So the weekend before chemo my gang showed up to paint the new place and move me in.

On Monday Cheryl, my best friend, took me to my first chemo appt. I was schedule to receive 4 months of High Dose Dense ACT, every 2 weeks. I was scared. I remember when they wheeled in the IV pole that was strung with several bags of chemicals I could not pronounce, that it was real "I had cancer and I had to do this to save my life." Cheryl held my hand and was my strength while I cried over my new realization, She gave me one of the greatest gifts that day, she loved me unconditionally.

I had a very hard time with Chemo. I was almost immediately violently sick and lost 40 pounds off my already shrinking frame in the first 2 months. I had to go to the infusion center almost daily to receive IV hydration and anti-nausea medications in an effort to stay out of the hospital. I remember during one of my chemo treatments having to ask the nurse if it was "ok to puke with all these tubs in me". It seemed like I was either getting sick or lying on the bathroom floor recovering from being sick. I got shingles, carbuncles, chemo soars in my mouth, all of which delayed and hence prolonged my chemo treatment, I was hospitalized twice and if losing all my hair was not bad enough, I also lost all my toe nails. I must say that by the time I was done with chemo not only did I feel like the walking wounded, I looked like it too. I had to learn to be gentle with myself during and after chemo. I could not do what I used to be able to do and on some days all I could do was get up. My mom feed me as best she could and cared for me when I could not care for myself. And we made it threw chemo alive!

Radiation was just as hard for me. I had to commute for 1 ½ hours one way to get my treatment. The radiation

made me so tired. I experience 2nd and 3rd degree burns all over my left chest and back and I basically slept for 8 weeks. I was so frustrated with still being so sick at this point. I just wanted to be able to stay awake for more than a couple of hours and have a coherent conversation with the people I loved. Both were not possible for me. Again I needed to be gentle with myself and keep believing that one day, I would start to feel better.

After radiation, I went to Stanford to seek advice about my right breast and reconstruction surgery. At Stanford I met 2 wonderful doctors who told me several things. First the surgeon informed me that the surgeon who had performed my left mastectomy had left "a lot" of breast tissue behind. Not a good thing with the aggressive – estrogen positive, Stage 3 Invasive Ductal Carcinoma that was found in that breast. I was beside myself. This surgeon had left milk ducts and breast tissue behind. I wanted to scream and then ring his neck. So, with this new piece of information I scheduled surgery to complete the left mastectomy and perform a prophylactic right mastectomy.

Second, the plastics guy, let me know in no uncertain terms that he could not do any reconstruction to my left chest until my radiation burns had healed. I was looking at a 6 to 12 month wait. Sigh, I just wanted to be whole again but it was not in the cards I held at that time. So on December 3, 2008 the doctor removed my breasts without any reconstructive surgery. She removed over 1/2 a pound of breast tissue from my left breast. I was shocked and wanted to ring the first surgeon's neck again. The pathology reports for each breast came back clean!! Thank God !!! I was so relieved. The reports from my oncologist also came back clean. For now I was done. God, my mom, my doctors, my friends and loved one and myself had kicked cancer's ass!!! Now I could get on with the business of healing and rebuilding my life.

This February 2nd will be my one year anniversary. Over the past year I have started to come to terms with the many, many losses that have punctuated my life over the past year and I have begun to embrace the many, many lessons and insights this journey has given me. Never take today for granted...it just might be your last. Cherish everyone you love, and tell them that you love them daily. Smile if for no other reason than because you are alive. Be good to yourself and others, it heals the body, mind and the soul. Laugh a lot just for laughter's sake. Remember your loved ones and friends will save your ass when you just can't save yourself. You are so stronger than you can ever imagine.

Your back bone is composed of courage, honesty, compassion, determination, and faith. Start walking towards those impossible dreams (that you have held close to your heart) and before you know it you will have achieved some of them. Because I know, if you and God can kick some cancer ass than you can do anything. I know I can! May God bless each one of us as we stand tall and walk into the next phase of our lives as survivors!