

When I was 18 and in my freshman year in college I found a lump in my neck. I went to health services and ended up in the emergency room on a few occasions with stomach pain and was tested for pregnancy and treated for mono and then just told it must be a virus. 6 months later I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. I still remember standing in the kitchen and getting the call. All I could think of was that I was going to lose my hair. I was 18, what can I say. I went through tests and found out I was stage 3. I was told the treatment was very successful but intensive. That was putting it mildly. I was so sick that the doctor had to give me meds to knock me out for 2-3 days after treatment because I was so sick. That would result in temporary amnesia and I walked around the house not remembering anything after 2-3 days. I had 3 months of chemo and then on to radiation. That was a piece of cake. I was cancer free and back in college! Pretty much figured that having cancer once was enough, but I was wrong.

12 years later, in 2004, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I had a PET/CAT scan for my Hodgkins follow up and that was how the cancer was detected. Strangely enough, it was the high doses of radiation I had received 12 years prior that they believe caused my breast cancer. That was tough to reconcile in my head for a while but then I realized 12 years ago I didn't have any choice if I wanted to live! I went for a mammogram and nothing showed. I went for an ultrasound and they finally, after much prodding, found the spot and did an immediate biopsy. I remember lying on the cold table and the tool they used for the biopsy made this terrible noise. My husband (at the time) had to leave the room. I remember the doctor commenting that it didn't look right. I knew I had cancer again, I didn't need to wait for the results.

I wanted the cancer out of my body immediately and three days after diagnosis I had both breasts removed. I was told I only had to have the left one removed but why risk it? Besides, who wants to be lopsided? I had wonderful doctors who were able to perform a skin sparing surgery which allowed me to have expander implants put in immediately. Still, the shock of the first time I took off the bandages will never be forgotten. Who was I and what had happened to me? I don't remember much about the surgery and right after except it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. Afterwards the drains were a total pain and uncomfortable but recovery just took some time and otherwise wasn't terribly bad. I spent many hours in bed crying during all of this. In bed because I couldn't let my kids see me break down. I was honestly terrified I may not make it for my daughters. I could not imagine not seeing them grow up. And my one wish was that when I made it through I wanted to take them to Disneyworld. I have two young daughters who were 5 and 3 at the time and thinking they could get this scared the heck out of me. I had genetic testing done and I don't carry the gene yet strangely enough my mother also had breast cancer in her 30's and is alive today!

So the expanders were in and I went in for my weekly fills. Once I was ready to go we had the implants switched out and actually I was pretty pleased with the results. I'd take my old saggy boobs back any day but these aren't so bad! Then I went in for a follow up appointment where I heard my doctor say that now we could start the chemo. Chemo? Nope, I'm not doing that again...when did she ever mention chemo? Lo and behold I had blocked that part of it out in all the commotion of having cancer. I broke down, I did not want to lose my hair again, I did not want to be sick, I couldn't be sick...I have children! But then reality set in and yes, of course I will do chemo. Do whatever I need to kick cancer's butt!

So after my second treatment my hair started falling out in clumps. I came out of the shower one day, told my two daughters to go get the scissors and said go for it, cut mommy's hair. They got a real kick out of it and remember it today still. But then we had to shave it and I kept my smile on for my kids but once I got in the shower and felt my head and saw myself in the mirror I cried for half an hour.

Chemo was a bear. I wasn't vomiting sick like before, but the bone pain I had was unbearable. It was like the most terrible achy flu I'd ever had. And I was virtually alone. By now all of my friends had kind of stopped bringing food and calling to check on me. And my marriage was falling apart. My husband was "working long hours" to escape having to deal with it and my kids were at the grandparents on the Fridays I had treatment. I was alone driving myself to appointments and on the couch watching movies. But I was alive and fighting. I knew I had to hang in there.

I was diagnosed in 2004 and it's now almost 2010. I turn 37 in three days and I'm excited to be here! I've since been divorced and am pretty much raising my two daughters, now 10 and 8, on my own. Having cancer does have its positives...yes, I did say that. I am stronger and have an appreciation for life that I never would have if I wasn't dealt these cards in life. I'm scared for the future, cancer has shaken my sense of security, but I'm ready to live and take on whatever comes my way! Oh, and I did take my kids to Disneyworld, just last year!