

At age 39, I was diagnosed with invasive lobular carcinoma, ER/PR-, HER2+. While on vacation in May, 2013, I noticed my breast felt swollen. Luckily, I had a doctor's appointment coming up. He recommended a mammogram, but everyone told me not to worry – cancer doesn't grow that fast. I also didn't realize they could read mammograms immediately, so I went to my appointment by myself. Needless to say, when I heard it was probably cancer (and the biopsy confirmed it), I was devastated. I did all the right things in my life – healthy diet, healthy weight, nursed my kids, etc. – how could I have cancer? I have two kids I'm homeschooling, and I want to be here for them to grow up! Everyone always asked if I told my kids about my diagnosis. Of course I told them! Besides, it was kind of hard to hide all the doctor's appointments in the first few weeks.

Because of the size of the tumor, I needed chemotherapy first. I had a port put in a week after diagnosis and started six cycles of TCH chemo a month later, at the end of July. After the first cycle, chemo wasn't too bad. Everything tasted like metal because of the carboplatin except salty things like chips and cup-of-soup. My mom came down every Wednesday after a chemo treatment so I could lay on the couch for the nausea that would hit about 1pm. After chemo came a modified radical mastectomy scheduled for the beginning of December so my husband could be off from teaching during my recovery. I decided to do reconstruction, so an expander was put in at the same time. In hindsight, that was not a good choice. The expander was a constant source of discomfort, and then I developed cellulitis a week before my exchange surgery. After all my cancer treatment was over, I had to spend a week in the hospital on antibiotics and ultimately had the expander removed to clear the infection. That was disheartening, to say the least. However, surgery results from the mastectomy came back as pathological remission. The pathologist was unable to find any evidence of the cancer because of the effectiveness of the chemo. Even so, I was scheduled for 33 radiation treatments two months after my mastectomy – just in case. Turns out, you can get an allergic reaction to the radiation. I developed hives in a neat square within the radiation lines. Eventually I graduated to regular Herceptin treatments, and even those stopped after a year.

I attended my first Linked by Pink meeting before I even started treatment. It was such a relief to be surrounded by women who experienced my situation directly. They could answer my questions of "What did it feel like..." or "What did you do when...". Even after treatment was over and successful, they understand the underlying fear of reoccurrence. Now, I can be one of the women answering questions for women just starting the process. Linked by Pink has been an important source of support throughout the entire journey, and I know my mental health improved because of the fellowship found within this group of women.

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