

I was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma just 3 weeks after my 46th birthday in early February, 2010. My treatment consisted of 8 rounds of chemotherapy, a right mastectomy and 28 rounds of radiation. I was not a candidate for immediate reconstruction, so I have opted not to pursue reconstructive surgery at this time. Maybe some day I will muster up the courage to undergo more surgery, but I know I am not ready yet and maybe never will be. I am very lucky to have my loving and supportive husband Dan, who has been there for me through this entire journey. The Linked By Pink Organization has also been a comfort to me over the years in many ways. From the emotional support to the financial support by way of their grant program, which has helped take away some of the burdens that accompany such a life altering experience. Even years later, they still continue to be a support system you can always count on and that is truly special.

It took me 3 years to believe I could enter back into the workforce. I have always been very passionate about the beauty industry, so when I saw Ulta Beauty was opening in Erie, I jumped at the chance to work there. I started out as a cashier and then was a prestige consultant helping guests with all of the professional brands of cosmetics and skincare. Working there inspired me to return to my roots as a cosmetologist so in July of 2015 I decided to go back to school to obtain my PA cosmetology license. It was very challenging to go to school full time while continuing to work. I never thought I would be strong enough to handle such a demanding schedule let alone excel at my studies. I graduated with honors at a 98 percent average which makes me so proud. I proved to myself I could still be that person! The one that doesn't let fear stop her from going after what she wants! And, who knew I could once again be capable of functioning in challenging situations!! Now, I'm enjoying my job even more as an Arch Expert for Benefit Cosmetics at the brow bar inside Ulta Beauty.

I genuinely thought my life was over and it was the scariest experience I've ever endured. That was 6 ½ years ago, and even though my life as I knew it is in fact over, I am learning to embrace the new life I have been given. I've dealt with many anxiety issues, as many breast cancer survivors do, and thought I may never be a functioning member of society ever again. Little by little I have noticed my new life evolving. I am living proof we can overcome this awful experience. I may have never pursued my passion again had I not been forced to face my mortality at such a young age. Don't get me wrong, I'm not glad it happened to me, but I'm grateful for the positive changes in my life as a result of being dealt a breast cancer diagnosis.

~Annmarie Stevenson
Fairview, PA