

## What being diagnosed with breast cancer has taught me

It was 8 years ago on November 24 that was the day after my birthday. My doctor's office told me I had stage 2 breast cancer, and I said to myself "happy birthday to me". I was not in a very good place leading up to my diagnosis, but that all changed, and my outlook on life seemed to change.

I decided to have a double mastectomy without reconstruction, due to insurance issues. At the time I was debating having breast reconstruction surgery, and I have since decided against it. I had 6.5 chemotherapy treatments, 28 radiation treatments, and lost all of my hair. Modesty is definitely a quality that I do not possess, so I sported a bald head, usually with a ball cap and no wig.

I found Linked By Pink before my first treatment, and I was not very active at first. I honestly didn't make a real connection with any of the members, or so I thought at the time, and I was getting to know them, but not closely. I went to most of my treatments alone, and they are extremely lonely when you go alone. It was one of the loneliest times of my life sitting there all alone. I am a private person and didn't let anyone know I was going alone. I needed to reach out. I highly encourage anyone who knows someone going through treatments to make yourselves available for support. Linked By Pink is so much more than a support group though and as time went on I realized I was not the only one going through this. I was not alone. I've stayed involved with LBP because I want to help others who are going through this. I want to pay it forward.

I have had times in my life since my diagnosis that I have reached out to others in need, and I try to tell myself life is too short. Recently I have been reaching out by way of text messages, phone calls, and meeting for coffee, just to let those near and dear to my heart that I love and appreciate them. The responses have been well received, and you just never know who needs to hear the words.

I try not to worry about recurrence, but when health issues arise, I would be lying if I said I didn't worry just a little. I just take on the attitude that "it's all in God's hands". I have taken care of myself in the last few years better than I ever have before, and yet issues still arise. So with that being said, treat others the way you would like to be treated, and remember to be live like it's your last day, love freely, and laugh often...

~Alice Francis  
Erie, PA