

November 20, 2015, I had a routine mammogram, my first since being released from the care of my breast surgeon after having a biopsy done 4 years previously that had been negative. On December 2, I received a phone call that I needed to have another biopsy based on my mammogram. I hung up the phone and cried! I knew instinctively that I wasn't going to escape unscathed this time. The biopsy was done on December 17, and because of them not wanting to impart bad news to me on Christmas Eve, I got my call at 8:21 AM on Monday, December 28! I was diagnosed with Ductal Carcinoma In Situ. I then got a call that I had an appointment with my breast surgeon on December 30th (in 2 days), and with a plastic surgeon on January 4th! My head was spinning. This wasn't happening to me... How was I going to tell my husband, Martin, and my children, Heidi, Christian (wife Natalie), BreAnne (husband Dan), and Kaitlin? I had one granddaughter and my grandson was due to be born in just a few weeks! All I could think about was my mom... she had breast cancer, then had a mastectomy, and yet she died of cancer when I was just 18! Was I going to end up like her!??

I went to my appointments, and they set me up to meet with the awesome nurse navigator but that meeting wasn't happening until January 19th! I had decided to have a bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction because of family history. My surgery was scheduled for January 26th but until then I was scared, felt completely alone, and was driving myself crazy through looking up everything on the internet!!! Then I called my neighbor, Anita Klein, who took the time to tell me about her experience and let me know about this group called Linked By Pink, and she shared their contact info with me. I contacted Linked By Pink immediately after we hung up and was soon in touch with Norma Zimmer, and Becky Maxson. I made arrangements to meet with the two and Amy Schwab. As I walked into the meeting, I was embraced with warm, comforting hugs and had every question answered. For the first time, I felt a little bit of calmness. These amazing women, who give so much time to help others and provide this haven for all of these women who are going through this, are to be commended and admired! I thank Norma and the others who founded Linked By Pink not only for the comfort and security, but also for the generous gift bags that are so appreciated when newly diagnosed ladies are at their lowest point. The gift cards to restaurants provide meals when you just aren't feeling up to the task. Plus, Linked By Pink provides medical scholarships for those in need! Linked By Pink is a local charity that helps our hometown community in the very best way possible. I'm happy to say that this month I'm now a 9-month survivor because of early detection!

With this being October, if you haven't already, please go get your mammogram and urge your loved ones to do the same!

~ Debbie Zapolski
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