

My story starts in October of 2015. I had just turned 40, was at the end of training to run my first marathon, and was getting my first mammogram. I was scared and uncomfortable but really, who wouldn't be getting their boobs squished? I left the office and didn't give much thought to the experience again, ran my marathon, and was going about life. Then I got a call to come back for another mammogram and an ultrasound. Everyone I told about this call back told me this was very normal, happens to everyone on their first baseline mammo...don't worry.

A week or so later, I had another mammogram, ultrasound, another mammogram, and no one was telling me anything. Finally, a doctor spoke to me. She told me that I had a cluster of cells and that they would need to biopsy. 50% of cases like this are nothing to worry about and 50% are cancer, but she was not really worried as she felt like this was nothing. Two days later I was in for the biopsy, and five days later I got the call. It was Tuesday, November 19th, first thing in the morning, I hadn't even put my kids on the bus yet. "Mrs. Moran, I am sorry...biopsy shows...you have DCIS. Ductal Carcinoma In Situ." I remember sitting in my bathroom, cold, scared, shaking and crying, asking what is it called again? Can you spell that? Cancer? What? A million things running through my head, but I wasn't comprehending any of it. I had cancer.

The next 7 days was a whirlwind of doctor appointments, blood work, another biopsy and what seemed like a lot of waiting. Now we are in the week of Thanksgiving, and taking a break from all the appointments felt almost wrong. My family was scheduled to travel and everyone told me to "go, relax, and enjoy yourself". Funny, how do you really relax and enjoy yourself while trying to make decisions, decisions about cancer?

My life changed that day I was diagnosed. I went from going for a run every day, trying to figure out where to fit my long run in, to running from doctor appointment to doctor appointment trying to figure out where to fit in the next one. Scheduling doctor appointments, appointments at the cancer center, nurse navigator, second opinions in Cleveland and Pittsburgh, surgery, chemo, radiation, genetic testing, and all these appointments were long; seemed never ending on top of the hustle and bustle of the upcoming holiday. There was so much information to sift through, and it all was so overwhelming.

I finally decided to have a bilateral mastectomy with reconstruction, against most of the doctors' recommendations. I was DCIS Stage 0, and most professionals told me I could go with a lumpectomy and radiation, and all would be well. My decision was based on my comfort level; knowing I would take my risk of this coming back as low as I could get it, also my history of watching firsthand what radiation can do to a body through my mother who fought uterine cancer for 10 years, and taking a good look at myself and finding in me what I would be comfortable with for the rest of my life.

My surgery was on January 20, 2016. I am almost one year out and just around the corner from finishing my reconstruction. At the beginning of this journey, I wasn't sure I would be able to make it emotionally. Today, I am confident that I will make it through. Part of that confidence comes from the group of women warriors I have the honor to be part of. Women who, through their struggles, treatments, surgeries, and stories, have given me more than I ever knew I needed. These are the women of Linked By Pink. I wish I would have found them at the very beginning of my journey, as the knowledge they collectively hold is far more than the doctors and professionals. The support they give freely is overwhelming in itself. They welcome all in with open arms even though each welcome is bittersweet, as it means one more woman has been diagnosed with breast cancer.

~Johanna Moran
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