

Hearing you have a cancer diagnosis once is scary enough, but hearing it again seven years later really makes you wonder if it's, ultimately, going to get the best of you. I was first diagnosed in February 2003 with Stage 0-DCIS. I had only been working at Edinboro University for 3 months when I got the news and, although it was shocking, the prognosis was good. We had "caught it early" and 8 months and four surgeries later (two lumpectomies that failed to produce "clean margins" followed by a full mastectomy and reconstruction) I was deemed "cancer free." That, so I thought, was the end of my own personal battle with cancer.

Fast forward to Thanksgiving 2009, I started to notice a pain in my left hip that I never had before. It was pretty intense, at first, then got better, but never quite went away. I treated it like every other ache and pain I've gotten over the years while enjoying sports and the great outdoors; with ice, stretching and ibuprofen. The holidays were in full swing and were a wonderful distraction! The pain came and went and was almost nonexistent for the 10 days I was off work between Christmas and New Year's. However, when I returned to work on January 4th, 2010; sitting at my desk, making the rounds in the building and walking multiple flights of stairs each time; was all it took for that little nagging pain to come back.

That was the last straw for me! I knew I was going to feel like a hypochondriac, but once you've had a cancer diagnosis, there's always this little voice inside your head that whispers, "What if?" So, listen to your body! I went to the doctor and, although we both agreed the problem was probably something orthopedic that could be resolved with some physical therapy, ice, rest and anti-inflammatory meds, he ordered an x-ray just to be on the safe side.

An abnormal x-ray led to an abnormal bone scan which finally led to a bone biopsy on Monday, February 1 that confirmed the worst. On Monday, February 8th we got the news. Six months into my new job at Gannon University and almost seven years to the day, my doctor called my husband Shane and I into his office and said he wished he had better news, but that I now had Stage IV breast cancer with bone metastasis in my left hip, sternum and thoracic spine.

Ironically enough, just a few days later, I would attend my first Pink Zone game at Gannon where I would first learn about Linked by Pink! Apparently, I hadn't been the only young woman diagnosed with breast cancer at an early age who found it difficult to relate to the support services being offered up until that time. Through my involvement with this awesome group of ladies; I have experienced the support, knowledge and understanding unique to my situation that I hadn't been able to find anywhere else.

Over these past few years, I have considered myself privileged to represent LBP, share my story and offer my support to others during such annual fundraisers as BreastFest, Relay for Life, Rivals 5K Run/Walk, bowling and softball tournaments, calendar shoots, Pink the Park and monthly social gatherings. They have been with me through multiple surgeries and Herceptin treatments every 3 weeks, interspersed with Zometa treatments as well every 3 or 9 weeks, for the last 6 years and counting and I wouldn't have it any other way.

~ Michelle Wagner
McKean, PA