

Cancer...Such a small but terrifying word. Until that word is said to you, no one can understand the emotions and thoughts one experiences. I heard that word back in August of 2008. I was only 34 years old. I found a hard lump under my left armpit in the shower one day. Thinking it was nothing, I made a Dr. appt. to be safe. She immediately scheduled me for a mammogram and ultrasound, but told me she was sure it was not cancer. I went to the appt. by myself because I was sure it was nothing to worry about. I came out of that appt. with a suggestion of a surgeon and was told to make an appointment ASAP.

On my 35th birthday, September 17th, 2008, my surgeon informed that I did indeed have stage 2 breast cancer. My tumor was estrogen positive and I had the genetic testing done. Based on my results, I had a lumpectomy, 8 rounds of chemo and 36 radiation treatments. I was then put on Tamoxifen for 5 years and had a total hysterectomy in July of 2014.

Under no circumstances was I going to allow cancer to consume my life. I continued to work and spent time with family and friends. I tried to continue as normal of a life as I could.

I am so blessed to say that I have been in remission now for 8 years! When I look at my scars, burns, thin hair and drawn on eyebrows where I once had beautiful, thick brows, I remember every day of what cancer did to me. The effects last a lifetime and I am still adjusting to my 'new' normal. I also remind myself of what a strong person I am now because of this journey. I now know I can get through anything life throws at me. God knew I could handle this and become a better person because of it.

My family and friends were my rock through my journey. Without them, I would not have gotten through the many rough days. I am eternally grateful for them. Once I was in remission and life slowed down a little, I discovered I needed other women in my life who had experienced a similar situation. Others to talk to, cry with and relate to. My doctors had recommended Linked By Pink several times during my treatments. So, I went to a general meeting and was so happy I did. I decided not to wear my wig, knowing I would not be judged or looked at funny. It was such a welcoming experience. These women were no longer strangers to me. They were my sisters who listened to my story, concerns and answered so many questions. To this day, if I have an issue, I talk to them no matter how silly, gross or private it may be. I cannot stress how therapeutic and important it is to find a support group when going through something like a serious illness. My one regret was not joining the group sooner. I am so proud to be a part of a group that helps so many local women during the worst time in their life.

Fundraisers, meetings and scholarships are just a few of the ways LBP supports women and their families. These women are my life long friends and 'family' like no other. Having cancer is horrific. But, I am healthy, alive and cherish every day that I am cancer free. Thanks to my family, friends, doctors and LBP sisters, I am eternally blessed and I know I will never be alone.

To anyone going through this battle....fight, stay positive and lean on your loved ones. This too shall pass.

~Nicole Fornelli
Erie, PA