

My grandmothers had a few things in common although they never met. Both were named Mary, both of their husbands were named Joseph, and both passed from breast cancer. My maternal grandmother was only 39 years old. I began getting mammograms at 28, as recommended, 10 years earlier than when my grandmother was diagnosed. At my mammogram when I was 38, I remember crying. I knew I was doing well, but at that specific age, I just kept thinking of my grandmother. A year passed, I had started a new job, had my mammogram scheduled, but my insurance cards had not arrived by my appointment. Thinking I would save myself the headache of going without cards, I cancelled with plans to reschedule. I had always been good about keeping up with my scans. Life got busy and months passed.

On a morning in October 2012, as I was just waking up and adjusted my night gown near my chest, I felt a lump on my left breast. My heart froze and remembered my missed appointment. I just knew the news wasn't going to be good. Calls to the doctor's office that morning led to an appointment, leading to mammo/ sonogram, biopsies, and the news on November 15, 2012 confirming it was cancer. At the time, I was 40 years old, married, and our daughter, Sarah, was 5.

The next few weeks were a blur. The doctor who gave me the news explained my ER, PR, and Her 2 receptors were all negative and told me it was stage 2. As he gave each receptor status as negative, I kept thinking negative is good in medical terms. He advised me not to consult with "Dr. Google" but of course, I didn't heed his warning. Our next step was to the book store to gather as much information as possible on cancer and treatments. Then once I arrived home, on to the computer. I learned my cancer was Triple Negative, one of the more aggressive types of breast cancers. At the time of my sonogram, the radiologist tried to ease my concern of missing my mammogram. He told me it was fast growing and reviewed my past mammograms and they showed nothing, and it more than likely would not have been on my scheduled mammogram. I kept thinking how aggressive it was.

More testing followed, MRIs, PET, second opinion in Cleveland, and more biopsies. Genetic testing was negative. A treatment plan was developed of chemotherapy, surgery, then radiation. After treatment started, I knew I needed to find support of women that understood what my days and nights were like. I placed a call to RCC and was given the information for Linked by Pink.

I don't know how I could have navigated this journey without Linked by Pink. I went to my first meeting after my second treatment. I had already lost my hair and was wearing one of my wigs. Through LBP I have met and made the best of friends. The support from the group is amazing. To talk with women who totally understand – that the fatigue from chemo is like no other, best food to help through treatments, the emotional roller coaster and worry, adjusting to life after treatments, chemo brain, and so many other topics and concerns, helped me through my days. The bond with my Linked by Pink sisters is like no other and it was instant. When one of the members asked if my hair was curly before I had treatment, it surprised me when I realized I didn't know her prior to treatments and had been wearing my wigs or scarves since my first meeting. The bond with LBP ladies is so strong it feels as though I have known them for a life time.

May marks my two year anniversary from surgery. I will be celebrating my 2nd birthday on May 13th. I am truly blessed with love and support from family, friends, LBP sisters- who know just when to reach out and send encouragement, co-workers, and people I have never met sending notes of hope and checking to see how I am doing. As difficult as these years have been, I have learned a lot about life, and it has forced me to take a hard look at mine. I have made many life changes and although it's a path I wouldn't have wished for or chosen, I couldn't be happier where this journey has taken me. Health, family, and friends are the true wealth in life.