

At the young age of only 28 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I was then a full-time single mother of two children, attending Gannon University full-time in the elementary education program, and I was also working part-time. I had a lot on my plate; at least I thought I did until on April 1, 2003, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I, of course panicked. I was mixed with all of the emotions from fear, anger, confusion, betrayal of my own body, fear for my children, uncertainty, and eventually hope and encouragement. I underwent a lumpectomy, four rounds of A/C chemotherapy, radiation, a partial hysterectomy, genetic testing, and eventually last year, I went through breast reconstruction. Life was once again returning to "normal". Then unfortunately, life is not what we plan, I found out on November 29th, 2007, that my cancer had returned. This time it was a new tumor in the same breast. Once again, I felt all of the emotions but now with everything I have already been through, I was much more upset and scared. I felt it was not fair to me or to my children but, where does it state that life is fair. I would ask myself why me? Then, I was asked, "why not me?"

Since being diagnosed this time I have underwent a bi-lateral mastectomy on January 17th, 2008 with the start of immediate reconstruction. I have had a few complications but I am doing better now. I began my chemotherapy treatments soon after my surgery, which included Taxotere and Carboplatin. Recently, I finished these big treatments but along with my chemo treatments, I began Herceptin treatments which will last until March of 2009. I also plan on finishing my reconstruction process in a few months.

While undergoing my surgeries and treatments this time, I began to ask myself how I could help make a difference in the fight against breast cancer. With the help of Ann Marie Cronk, the social worker at the RCC, I began looking for woman who might feel the same way. Woman who have been in my shoes and felt the same things I have, hence, Linked By Pink was formed.

"What lies before us and what lies behind us, are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Heather Stempka
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