

I will never forget October 3, 2013. My husband Bill and I were celebrating our 26rd wedding anniversary with a quiet night at home. Little did I know my life would change that evening. With October being National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, I quickly noticed many Facebook posts on the subject. One post in particular caught my eye and I began to read it. I could identify with some of the things it was saying and at the same time I began to feel the side of my breast. I wasn't using the technique we all learn about ; you know the one, 3 fingers, circular motion, arm in the air, etc. I was just moving things around. I called out to my husband, "Oh my God, I think I found a lump". I remember it like it was yesterday. I couldn't believe what I was feeling. I have a family history of breast cancer but, nonetheless, I was still surprised.

That set off an early morning phone call to my OB/GYN office, with a whirlwind of testing and biopsy's and a diagnosis of the most common form of breast cancer, Invasive Ductal Adenocarcinoma. Although it was a stage I type of cancer, it was aggressive. I didn't know where to go or what to do. I never had anything seriously wrong with me my entire adult life. I suddenly had to research all kinds of things, from facilities to surgeons to procedures. And I had to learn the common language of cancer. The statistics I was learning were alarming as well. One in 8 women will be diagnosed but one in 5 in this section of PA, Ohio and NY. I also learned that through my genetic testing that my BRCA 1 and 2 were negative.

I chose to have a bi-lateral mastectomy with immediate reconstruction for many reasons. The most important one being that the MRI and needle biopsy showed a second area of concern but the lab results were inconclusive to cancer. I wanted to be sure of every decision I made because I didn't want to have any regrets. I needed a peace that passeth understanding in all my decisions. It is a personal journey. That has helped me with the one major issue I had through this process which is the dying of the skin (necrosis) from lack of blood and oxygen during surgery. This posed a challenge in my reconstruction process.

I did not need radiation. I did, however, have chemotherapy (Cytosan and Taxotere =CT) as a preventative measure because once my tumor was tested, my Oncotype score came back high for chance of reoccurrence. Since my tumor was estrogen fed, I am taking Tamoxifen.

I consider myself very blessed as I caught my cancer early. I credit my Facebook family and friends for that. I wasn't doing monthly self exams and my situation could have been much different had I not caught it. My husband and my two sons, along with my family, friends, and co-workers were instrumental to my recovery, support, and success. Along the way, I found Linked by Pink. A group that has been a true blessing to me. I realized that I don't have to walk this walk alone. There are others who are going through what I'm going through. We can learn from each other and support each other. We can share things that someone else may not understand until they've walked in our shoes. I am eternally grateful for each friendship I've made.

I am now an advocate for performing a monthly self-exam. You don't need a special technique; just do it. Know your breasts. The life you save may be your own. Breast cancer doesn't have to be a killer. Catch it early. I'm glad I did because I'm going to be a grandma in May, 2015. I have a lot to fight for! So do you.