

I really didn't want to turn 30. To make matters worse I found myself lying on a table in a doctor's office getting a breast biopsy on my 30th birthday. Two days later I got the call. The words "It is breast cancer" will forever echo in my brain.

My name is Melissa and I have stage 3C triple negative breast cancer, but it does not have me. I am young, healthy, and have no family history of breast cancer. I was blindsided by this disease. Cancer has taken my hair and my breasts. It has not taken my spirit!

I found the lump myself the night before I went in for a routine exam. After much poking, prodding, and testing I had my first chemotherapy treatment. Fourteen days later my hair began falling out, first in strands then in clumps. By the end of the week I couldn't take it anymore. A good friend shaved it off for me. I spent the weekend crying and feeling sorry for myself. My boyfriend told me I was still beautiful. My daughter told me I was handsome. That was all the reassurance I needed. That following Monday I pulled it together, tied on my pink bandana, and began fighting like a girl.

After my second chemotherapy treatment, I had a test done that showed my tumors were not responding. On June 11, 2009 I had a bilateral mastectomy with immediate reconstructive surgery. Although the cancer was only in my left breast, I was not taking chances. Shortly after surgery I began feeling sick. I started running a fever and feeling very run down. Something was not right. I had an infection and had to have my tissue expanders removed. The news was heartbreaking but it had to be done.

Shortly after having the expanders removed I was back on my feet and back into chemotherapy. My side effects to the drugs have been minimal. I am able to work through treatments and live my life as normally as possible. I will finish chemotherapy at the end of October, which ironically is breast cancer awareness month. My next steps will include radiation and reconstructive surgery.

My biggest fear is leaving my little girl without her mommy, but my doctors are my miracle workers. I have faith that God is leading them. They are brilliant, kind, and understanding. The nurses at the Regional Cancer Center have taken such good care of me. My family gives me amazing support and through them I find strength. My friends keep me laughing and in that laughter I find hope. In my little girl's beautiful smile I find a vicious determination that only a parent could know. I am overcome with emotion and gratitude for the people in my life. I am truly blessed. Cancer has taught me life is short and to relish every minute of it. I will look at every colorful fall leaf and sparkling winter snowflake with a new knowledge of life and beauty. I can't wait to turn 31!

Melissa Frownfelter

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