

I was diagnosed in May of 2014 with stage 3 triple negative breast cancer. Not only was I shocked, I also felt so alone. I would ask myself why me? I felt then that dying would be easier than the pain and suffering that I may have to endure. The worrying that I would go through, the stress of not knowing whether or not my life would be spared by this relentless disease. I prayed a lot because I knew that I would not be able to do this alone. I have suffered enough already in my lifetime. I could not possibly have to suffer through this too. On top of all the feelings of despair and emotional roller coasters, I was loaded with doctor appointments, procedures and endless mammograms. I am still, even today, bogged down with the faces of physicians. I have had pet scans, ultrasounds, surgeries to remove lymph nodes, a lumpectomy, surgeries to drain my breast and to install a port. Triple negative breast cancer is aggressive and so the treatment I would need would have to be just as aggressive.

My discovery of breast cancer made me question myself. I discovered a lump in my breast early February of 2014 and disregarded it as scar tissue from a previous injury. I was 45 years old and had never had a mammogram even though I kept regular doctor appointments. During a yearly gynecology exam my doctor noticed the same lump and instead of her listening to me say it was scar tissue she had me get it checked out and I was diagnosed in May of 2014 with breast cancer.

I have no idea how long I actually had this ailment. I would often question myself about the "what ifs." What if I had gotten it checked earlier; but the reality is that the "what ifs" won't change what has taken place. All I can do is tell my story in order to help others; because before this experience I had no true understanding of breast cancer or any other cancer. All I knew is that my elders told me that cancer killed people and if you got it you would die. Everyone that I knew with cancer seemed not to survive. Imagine my devastation when I was diagnosed. I now have a deeper respect for a disease that respects no one. I want to help those who are not aware understand some things. You can have cancer but you can also not allow cancer to have you. Take charge of your life. Love your body. Take time to know yourself and love yourself. I know now that I can survive. I was scared in the beginning and I still fear a little now, but I am not alone. I have come to know some wonderful people in a world that many of us are not familiar with. Within this new culture I am now a part of, I have learned to value the friendships of these strangers that have now become a part of my family. I value life and understand that I am not just going to die. It is ok to seek treatment, it is ok to take help from others...I DO NOT HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE.

I started my chemo July 23 and finished in November of 2014. My radiation started in January of 2015 and after 33 treatments, multiple burns, lymphedema and pain. In April I was considered a survivor. I may not be out of the woods yet and I know that there may be some more stumbling blocks but I refuse to fall and stay there. With God as my strength and my loved ones as my encouragement, I will continue to fight. I am grateful for the gratitude that has been bestowed upon me from others. I am grateful for my family and the time I have to spend with my children and grandchildren. God has saved me for a reason. I may have daily pain and really low days but I am here to say that I have been made stronger. If I can leave you with something important to take away with today, it would be to not shut people out when hard times arise. Find the good in the bad, and know that your trials make you who you are. You are wonderfully made in the eyes of our most high. Pay attention to yourself. Never be too busy to

make sure that you treat yourself right. Love yourself and know that cancer does not define who you are.

Linked By Pink and Norma have been wonderful to me. Norma was the first person I contacted when I moved back to Erie. She walked me thru everything. I was able to receive grants to help with gas, bra's and pay rent. When I met these ladies, I met family. Thank you for everything, Ladies. I am grateful.