

Tuesday, October 9, 2007 was the day that changed my life. As I was getting ready for the day, I adjusted my bra strap. I felt a hard lump about the size of a pea. As I looked in the mirror, I could, in certain positions, even see it. I called my ob-gyn and scheduled an appointment to have them check it.

I went in to see my gynecologist on Thursday and she thought it felt odd enough that I should have a biopsy done. They scheduled me to have a mammogram and ultrasound done about an hour later. The lesion was seen on the ultrasound. All they could tell me at that time was that it was not a cyst, it was a solid mass. Nothing was seen on the mammogram.

I had convinced myself it was a harmless fibroid. I had been having mammograms done since the age of 35. In fact I had just had one done in July that came back just fine. I have no family history of breast cancer. I was in good physical shape. I exercised. I ate healthy. I was young.

I found out on October 22, 2007 that I did indeed have breast cancer. I was diagnosed with invasive ductal carcinoma. I also found out that with breast cancer, my young age was a negative. Breast cancer tends to be more aggressive in younger women.

The doctors that I saw were amazed that I found this lump on my own as it was small and a few of them had problems feeling it even when I showed them where it was. I ended up having a lumpectomy in November. Thankfully the entire tumor was removed and there had been no spread to lymph nodes or other areas of my body. My oncologist pretty much made it clear that because of my age, the grade and size of the tumor I needed to do the chemo. I already knew that since I had opted to have a lumpectomy instead of a mastectomy I would need to do about 6 weeks of radiation. I just finished all of my treatments in May. I am confident that I have done all I can to beat this thing.

When you hear the word “cancer”, you automatically think it is a death sentence. I knew with three teenage sons, I was not ready for that. I was so lucky to have a good support system with my family and friends. My husband was my rock. I was overwhelmed with the cards, phone calls and emails of support that I received; some from people I didn’t even know very well, or hadn’t heard from in quite a while. I got so much strength and positive energy from the prayers and well wishes of others.

I feel so, so blessed to have found this lump when I did. I had never been one to do self breast exams and it was sheer luck that I felt it that morning. If it hadn’t been found until the next year and my next mammogram who knows if it would have spread by that point. My outcome could have been so much different. Early detection was key.

Norma Zimmer
Young Breast Cancer Survivor and “Linked By Pink” Partner
McKean, Pennsylvania

Featured in October of 2009

