

My name is Patty Hammer. In 2010 I was a mother of two children, wife and volunteer to many committees. I was diagnosed with Breast Cancer at the age of 50.

Like all of us, there is a day in life we will always remember. My day is May 27th, 2010. It began like any other day; normal and ordinary - until later that day, at my yearly OBGYN checkup, when my doctor found a lump. I was shocked to hear she had found something. I can still remember the feeling of adrenaline, the sound of my heart beating heavy, and the way my doctor said "how long has this been there?" I had not been doing my monthly breast exams, like we all should be doing. I had been dealing with another medical issue for months and was side tracked. So this was not expected. It was not long before a biopsy confirmed I did have Invasive Ductal Carcinoma (stage 2) with 2 lymph nodes lighting up on my PET scan.

I remember asking how long it would take to get through this. I answered, "I can do this," thinking that it will only be a year, and then everything will be back to normal. "I can do this." Even through the feelings of anger and confusion, I was so thankful it was me and not anyone else in my family, because I knew in my heart I could, and would, do whatever they needed me to do. If you know me, you know I am a rule follower.

My treatment plan was to first start Chemotherapy in hopes to try to shrink the tumor, and then perform surgery to do a lumpectomy, breast reduction, and a lymph node dissection. Followed up with 36 treatments of radiation. All of my treatments were done here in Erie, Pa. I had such good care and I really liked my doctor's.

My family was my rock; they kept me centered and focused. For that I am eternally grateful. Early in my treatment plan I found a breast cancer support group called Linked By Pink. There I met a wonderful group of women that I now call my friends and sisters. It is very helpful having a group of women to ask questions and lean upon that have gone through similar situations. This June, marks 5 years that I have been cancer free!

My sister and I have volunteered to help Linked by Pink for the last couple of years by putting the gift bags together. These are bags that LBP gives to women who are newly diagnosed. This is such a nice way to give back to this organization that helped me in so many ways.

In regards to how I really handled having cancer, I was not honest and did everything I could to keep my family from hurting. I recommend being honest to your family and close caregivers. I kept all my fears and pain to myself in hopes they would not be sad. Now that I am finished with my treatments, I can look back on those years and see what I would have done differently. In life we do what we have to do when faced with obstacles. Real life experiences teach us to be strong. Love does soften those blows we don't see coming, so be honest to the people who care about you, so they can try to understand what you are going through. The lesson I learned from having cancer, is feel what you feel when it is happening. You need to be in the moment, be happy or sad, just be honest and it will help you work through this so much easier. Stay focused. Stay strong. Find a support group that fits you, and always remember 'Every day is a gift.'