

It was a Sunday morning in April 2004, and I was watching TV with my oldest son. In the show a young girl found a lump and had a breast biopsy done. He looked at me and said, "Mom have you ever had to go through anything like that?" My response was, "no I'm lucky." You see, I was a 38 year old mother of three boys, married to my high school sweetheart, working in a profession I loved, with the best family and friends anyone could ask for. Why shouldn't I think I was lucky? What I didn't know until later was just how much that one question would forever change my life.

While getting ready for bed that night, I thought back to that question. Though I never did self breast exams, relying solely on my annual doctor visit, I decided to check myself. Imagine the look on my face when under my right arm, along the side of my breast was a large marble sized lump. I could not believe what I was feeling. How could this be possible? I was just at the doctor in January. I called my doctor in the morning and was able to get in that day. I had my first mammogram that Friday.

They called me a few days later to say I needed another mammogram and a sonogram. It took three very long weeks to get an appointment. I had them done on a Monday. The doctor's office called on Thursday and said I was scheduled with the surgeon for the next week. Five minutes later the surgeon's office called to say she wanted to see me first thing the next morning. I think my heart sank, but I was going to stay positive. I saw the surgeon Friday morning, had a biopsy on Tuesday, and on Friday May 28th I was diagnosed with stage 2B breast cancer.

I felt I needed to research my options. With surgery on the following Tuesday, I chose to have a lumpectomy with axillary node dissection. Three weeks after my lumpectomy, a biopsy of the left breast revealed cancer there also. They were two separate types of cancer.

As much as I felt I needed to keep my breasts to feel like a woman, I knew I needed to be alive for my family even more. My chosen course of treatment was 8 rounds of intense chemotherapy, bilateral mastectomy with expander placement, breast reconstruction with implants, complete hysterectomy, 2nd breast reconstruction with new implants, 6 months of tamoxifen and 5 years of arimidex. No radiation was recommended.

It has been five years since my diagnosis and I can not stress how important a self breast exam is. If I had waited till my next annual exam, my outcome could have been much different. If this story helps just one person, then I have done my job as a survivor.

As for my son, I may have given birth to him, but he gave me life.

Sandy Camery

Young Breast Cancer Survivor and "Linked By Pink" Partner
Erie, Pennsylvania

Featured in June of 2010