

In December of 2008 at the age of 43 it was recommended that I have an MRI and Digital Mammogram because a “cluster of cysts” was discovered and I had a high family history of breast cancer. My mom was a 27 year survivor and my sister is a 7 year survivor. This cluster proved to be my life saver. Had it not shown up, deeming further evaluation, my cancer could have gone undetected longer. My battle could have been far more serious. The cysts turned out to be nothing, but the MRI discovered two different spots and the digital mammogram found micro calcifications. All 3 areas in my right breast were biopsied (OUCH)! Two days later I got the call that changed my life forever. All 3 spots were positive for cancer.

I was now faced with a battle to survive for myself, my husband, and my 3 children. I knew I had to beat this demon for I still had much left to accomplish in my life. A positive attitude helped me through weeks of doctor’s appointments. After much soul searching I decided to stay in Erie for my treatments and surgery. On January 22, 2009 I had a mastectomy with immediate reconstruction via a TRAM flap procedure (silver lining—a tummy tuck!). Following the nine hour surgery I was ready to keep smiling and fighting this head on—I would not let cancer take me away from those I loved.

Once healed from surgery I had to face the next step—chemotherapy. 4 rounds of Taxotere, Carboplatin, and Herceptin were my “cocktail”. A chocolate martini would have been my choice! For 3 months I entered the cancer center weekly for treatments. Beside me through each one was my husband Mark; my rock, my strength, and my personal comedian. He proved to me that *laughter is the best medicine*. My children stood by me daily; supporting me, loving me, and letting me know they needed me. So many others walked this journey with me with their love, encouraging words, prayers and more. I never felt alone. I grew stronger from all those around me.

Now that Chemo is over, I face Herceptin treatments for several more months and some minor reconstruction surgery. But I feel LUCKY -- I am Strong, Healthy, and Alive. What I have learned; live for today—it is a gift—life can change in a heartbeat. I have been blessed in this journey by many new friends who are going down the same path. Even though we have been thrown into a “club” we did not ask to join, we are better and stronger for it.

My 3 favorite sayings:

1. LOVE LIFE—BE BRAVE (this was inscribed on the rings my daughters and I wear each day).
2. She BELIEVED she could; so she DID!
3. “I can be changed by what happens to me—I REFUSE to be reduced by it,”  
Maya Angelou.

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Featured in December of 2010