

Living With Hope

I was 23 years old when I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

My mother taught me to do BSEs (breast self exams), when I was 13 years old. It was all part of her talk about the "birds-and-the-bees-and-BSE". My Mom's mother had had several breast lumps removed over the years and my Mom had some cysts removed too. She wanted to make sure if there was ever a change in my breast that I would go to the Doctor to get it checked out. I knew I'd never notice a change if I don't know what 'normal' felt like, so I did my BSE faithfully, every month. I had no idea that it would save my life.

I remember the day I found a lump.

I felt it over and over again, just to be certain that it was really there. The first thing I did was tell my Mom. She told me that I had to go and see a doctor. I was at college, so I went to a walk-in-clinic. I was so grateful to see a female doctor. She told me that the lump was just a hormonal change in my body. She said to wait for two months. If the lump was still there after two months, and I was concerned, then I should go and see my family doctor.

I waited two months, and all the while that small pea shaped lump was still there. I prayed that it would turn out to be nothing to worry about. After two months, my Mom was concerned and encouraged me to go to my family doctor and request to see a specialist. I made an appointment with the specialist, even though my family doctor told me it was nothing.

The specialist was convinced that lumps were due to over consumption of caffeine. As a typical college student I drank a lot of coffee, coke and tea. Like everyone else, I was trying staying up late studying and trying to keep up with my busy schedule. When the doctor said that all I needed to do was cut out caffeine, I believed him. I tried to cut out caffeine for a awhile, but it made no difference to the lump so I accepted it as being 'normal' for me and went back to drinking caffeinated products. Two years passed. When I found a second lump in the same breast I thought it was because of the caffeine again, so I did all I could do to cut it out. Every month I continued to do my breast self-examination and every month I noticed that the second lump was getting bigger. Before long the second lump was causing me so much discomfort that I decided to go to the doctor. The doctor told me that it wasn't anything to worry about. He was certain that it was a benign mass called a fibro adenoma. I told him that it was definitely getting bigger, so he told me to come back in three months. We couldn't help but notice that the lump was growing.

It had tripled in size and was now the size of an egg. An ultra sound was ordered and an appointment was made with a surgeon. At this point everyone was still telling me I had nothing to worry about.

I'd never had surgery before and the idea of needles didn't excite me, but the surgeon decided that it would be in my best interest to have the lump removed. He was concerned that the lump was growing, but he didn't think it was cancer. I had the procedure two days after my best friends wedding. I wouldn't have the surgery done before the wedding because I didn't want it to interfere and I was convinced that there was no rush.

Four days later I got a call requesting that I come in that day to see the doctor. I'd never had surgery before, so I thought it was routine procedure to have post-op check-up. As soon as I arrived, I knew there was nothing routine about this appointment. The receptionist ushered me right in and the doctor was waiting for me. On the examination bed there were papers labeled "breast cancer", "mastectomy" and "breast reconstruction". I sat down. My doctors' first words were, "I am so sorry." The lump that they had removed from my breast was in fact an rare aggressive and malignant form of breast cancer. I think we were both in shock. He ended the appointment by asking if he could pray for me. I said "Yes, please." Right there in his office he prayed for me. Driving away that day I said a simple prayer, "Lord, whether in my life or in my death, I just want you to use me." He has.

I don't know how I would have gotten through this time without a personal relationship with God. He is my strength when I am tired and I take comfort knowing that He knows what is going on, even when my situation doesn't make any sense to me at all. I am currently a six year survivor of breast cancer. Life has continued and I look forward to what's in store for the years ahead.

Take a look at your life. How would you describe it? Contented? Rushed? Exciting? Stressful? Moving forward? Holding back? For many of us it's all of the above at times. There are things we dream of doing one day; there are things we wish we could forget. In the Bible, it says that Jesus came to make all things new. What would your life look like if you could start over with a clean slate?

Credit – Feather Janz