

I had always been fairly meticulous about doing self-breast exams; so, when I noticed a seemingly new “lump” in July of 2015, at the age of 25, I made an appointment with my doctor’s office to get a sonogram done. I remember feeling out of place in the waiting room because I was by far the youngest woman there; also, the technician half-jokingly asked why I was even there because I was so young. I was told nothing suspicious was seen via the sonogram, and that what I was feeling was most likely just my dense breast tissue. I wasn’t completely convinced because it felt different than the rest of my dense tissue, but I figured I would trust in their expertise.

Shortly after hearing that the “lump” was nothing, we conceived our son. During pregnancy and breast feeding, I honestly didn’t do self-breast exams. It wasn’t until July 2018 (two years after our son was born and then having four miscarriages after him) that I did one and noticed the “lump” that I previously felt was even bigger and more prominent than what I had remembered – it again just didn’t seem right to me. I called into my doctor’s office and they had me come in for an exam. They assured me it was most likely nothing, but my symptoms warranted a sonogram.

This time I was sent to Saint Vincent’s Women’s Center for imaging. I thought it was just going to be a quick and easy sonogram; so, I brought my son in the stroller with me. The sonogram was quick, but due to findings, it warranted more imaging and a biopsy. We ended up being there for a couple hours. I truly can’t express my gratitude enough to the staff at Saint Vincent’s Women’s Center – they were genuinely caring, kind, and helpful – not only towards me, but also towards my toddler!

The next day, I took the call that changed my life as I knew it – I was officially diagnosed with breast cancer at the age of 28. Not exactly the early birthday present that I was hoping for; but thankfully, I already had a vacation planned that weekend with my family that ended up helping me digest the news.

After vacation, I was scheduled for more appointments and imaging. My MRI showed the initially detected (via sonogram and mammogram) invasive ductal carcinoma as almost 3 cm large; however, it also was able to show a significant amount of ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS) covering a good portion of my right breast that the sonogram and mammogram couldn’t show. With the additional images from the MRI detecting the significant amount of DCIS, that made my course of action change from a lumpectomy and radiation to a mastectomy. Also, due to a mass in my left breast that would require a close watch, and a personal wish for symmetry, I opted for a double mastectomy. After some paperwork/insurance delays due to a potential “pre-existing condition” (aka my 2015 “lump”), I was finally scheduled for my surgery in mid-September.

I was told about Linked By Pink, and I was thankfully able to go to my first meeting last September right before my surgery. The ladies were so welcoming and helpful – they not only gave me tips for surgery/recovery, but they also gave me hope! It was reassuring seeing faces and hearing stories of survival after diagnosis. This past year has been a whirlwind of appointments, surgeries, and screenings, and these ladies have been an encouragement through it all. I am extremely grateful for the support they have given my family and me this past year!

I’d be lying if I said there wasn’t a brief time when I had wished my cancer could have just been caught with further imaging back in 2015. I could have then potentially avoided mastectomies and lymphedema (Due to one of my sentinel lymph nodes being positive for macro metastasis, a total of 16 lymph nodes were removed from my right side.); however, my son would not have been born if it was found back then. It may be hard to see sometimes, but God’s plan, purpose, and timing are always perfect! I may not know what God has in store for my life, but I do know I can rest assured His plan is always the best! I am especially grateful for the people He has put in my life to help me along through this journey: My husband, son, family, friends, doctors, nurses, hospital staff, and the ladies (and supporters) of LBP!

~Alyssa McClelland
Erie, PA