

## Anne Zajic Story



I am a mother to three amazing little girls, Clara, and twins Julia and Katie. I am also wife to my wonderful husband Dean. I gave birth to my twins via cesarean section in November 2015. By December 2015, I had my six week follow up visit. My OBGYN did a Pap test at that visit and reported that it was normal.

By February 2016, I began experiencing some odd symptoms and I wondered if they had anything to do with the tubal ligation I'd had during my c-section. In May 2016, I found that I had a "never ending" period. I contacted my OBGYN, and she ordered a sonogram to rule out endometriosis and ovarian cysts. After the sonogram, I was informed that nothing was found. I continued to bleed, and experienced fevers, exhaustion, and terrible cramps. Some days, the cramps caused me to double over in pain. I continued to call my OBGYN to report my symptoms, and eventually she decided that the best course of action would be to schedule an endometrial ablation. It was scheduled for August 12, 2016.

On the day of the procedure, I remember waking from anesthesia to overhear the post-op nurses mention that the procedure wasn't completed. I asked why, and my OBGYN informed me that she couldn't do the ablation because I had cervical cancer. I remember feeling as though the room was spinning. My OBGYN set up a CT scan and referred me to a gynecological oncologist.

After my initial CT scan, I was told that the cancer was confined to my cervix and the tumor appeared to be about 4cm. By the time I met with my oncologist and had a PET scan, my tumor measured approximately 6 cm and they found some possible lymph node involvement. I worried that the tumor was growing rapidly, and I felt nothing short of terrified. I was staged as 1b2, and my oncologist informed me that a hysterectomy was not the best option in my case. My treatment consisted of six cycles of chemotherapy, twenty-nine rounds of external radiation to my pelvis, and five rounds of brachytherapy concurrent with the last few rounds of external radiation. Treatment was hard on my body, and brought on nausea, exhaustion, and radiation burns.

I have been cancer free since November 2016, though I continue to manage some long-term side effects of the treatment, including gastrointestinal problems, lower back and hip pain, and early menopause. In addition to physical side effects, I have experienced severe depression and anxiety which I continue to treat.

The stigma I felt because of my diagnosis has given me reason to become a patient advocate for spreading the awareness of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is often a result of a strain of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), and today it is a very preventable illness. The HPV vaccine prevents cervical cancer and several other HPV-related cancers. By increasing vaccination rates, cervical cancer can and will be eliminated and I won't have to fear that my daughters may someday experience this difficult disease.