

Stacy Stowe Story

I was 46 in the year 2020, the year of the Corona virus, and thought that I was going to get through the year as one of the lucky ones. Overall for our family, it had been a truly great year. We were already a homeschooled family, so the kids were not impacted by school closures. I only worked part-time and was not dependent on the income and my husband was able to telework from home, which we all loved, and he was getting a promotion in November. As you can see, the year 2020 was full of blessings for my family.

My family came in from out of town for my husband's promotion. I had just gotten out of the shower and was getting dressed when in the mirror I saw a big dent in my left side. Due to the location of the dent, I thought it was caused by the underwire in my bra. I stood in front of the mirror with my hand above my head flexing my pectoral muscles and moving my arm around to get a better look. Then I saw a small dimple in my left breast, two inches from the huge dent in my side. I decided to take a few pictures of the reflection in the mirror for reference.

I began googling, 'Dent in Breast'. The first thing that came up was, "It is not from your bra" and "get it checked". About that time my husband walked into the room, wherewith tremendous guilt I quietly showed him the pictures. You see this was HIS time and I didn't what to take the spotlight off him. He'd waited for more than 20 years for this promotion. I found myself telling him how sorry I was, and he simply insisted that I, at that very moment, get a mammogram scheduled. It had been two years since my last mammogram, so it was time anyways. On the phone, I explained that I have found two dents and was due for an exam, so she got me all set for an appointment the following week.

I went in for my appointment and the large dent was visible to the nurse, but the smaller dimple was undetected until I showed her the picture that I had taken. Then she located it on my breast herself. I was taken to the mammogram machine and then back to the exam room. The doctor came in and said that we needed to do a biopsy of a few suspicious locations and wanted to do them today. I called my very anxious husband and gave him the update. He chooses to leave work and join me at the doctor's office.

As he waited for me out in the waiting room, I was having an ultrasound-guided biopsy done on several locations in my left breast. I asked the doctor what his thoughts were, that I wanted the truth. He said, "I think this is going to come back from the lab positive for cancer." A few silent tears dripped down my cheeks. My first thought was of the man waiting for me in the waiting room. This was going to devastate him. The nurse started to tell me what to expect from cancer treatment. I committed to myself at that moment that I was going to be brave. Then I saw my husband sitting there when I came out. I started sobbing. I was too young, small-breasted, and had nursed four children. I was not supposed to get breast cancer.

As the doctor had suggested, the labs did come back as Cancer. I had an MRI and then I had to go back in to get several more biopsies done of the breast due to the MRI findings. The large dent in my side was from an enlarged lymph node and was free of cancer. The small dimple that would have gone unnoticed was caused by a small cancerous tumor. Turns out, two cancerous tumors were in my left breast, deep against my chest wall, and in one of the sentinel nodes. I had a lumpectomy scheduled for the first week in January. The margins did not come back clear. I had invasive ductal carcinoma, invasive ductal carcinoma in situ, lobular carcinoma, and microcalcifications.

The waiting for the next step was brutal. Waiting for the gene testing results, the Oncotype score, and for the plan of treatment. The waiting was the worst. Time stood still. It was decided that I would have a left breast mastectomy and that there was no need to take the right breast. I had another surgery for my mastectomy in February, surgery for my port in March, and then six rounds of chemotherapy, three weeks apart.

I started to lose my hair about two weeks after my first treatment. I sobbed. It was the first time I had cried since the day I saw my husband sitting in the waiting room. I was so embarrassed about not having hair. I didn't even want to go out to the mailbox. I decided to be brave, hold my head high and keep living, unashamed. It is humbling to realize that I had placed much of my identity into my hair. I choose to focus on joy instead.

I developed soars in my mouth, and a constant bad taste, that I still have. I gained weight from having low energy, food choices, and steroids that I took to keep me from losing weight. There were days that I took all my energy to walk up a flight of stairs, but I made myself do it anyways. The hot flashes I began having because the chemotherapy damaged my ovaries became debilitating, affecting my sleep and what I could wear. After my treatments were over, I had a few more surgeries to finish the reconstruction of my breast and my hair started to grow back.

Now, when people see me, they don't see cancer. They don't see the scars that were left behind by cancer that would have taken my life if it had not been detected early. They don't see that my fingers and toes are numb and that I experience pain in my feet when I walk because of the neuropathy. They don't see the fear I have of cancer returning to my right breast. When I feel fear creep in, I choose to stand tall and find my joy. I beat breast cancer.

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