

Mary Alexander



My journey began on April 10, 2018 with a routine mammogram. This was not my first mammogram, but it had been a couple years since my last one. My mom, who was 75 at the time, was having some medical issues and one of the recommendations was to have a mammogram. Since I usually attend most of her medical appointments, I figured I would schedule one for myself as well since I will be there already.

Coincidentally, we were both recalled after the initial mammogram. So again, we went together. My mother was cleared after this appointment, but I was recalled again for a biopsy. At this point, I thought I was recalled because the technician did not get good enough pictures, it never once crossed my mind that this could turn out to be anything because I had no family history of cancer.

During my biopsy appointment, which I had two biopsies on my left breast, I remember sitting in the waiting area with the radiologist while the techs were getting the equipment ready for the second procedure. While making small talk with the physician, I remember asking him if I should be worried, because I was not worried at all. I had no family history, I just thought I was going through the motions. He reassured me that I should not worry, but

that I should not rule anything out.

It was April 30, 2018 around 11:00 when I received a phone call telling me that one of the biopsies came back positive. I had been diagnosed with grade 2 invasive ductal carcinoma, a hormone induced cancer. From this date, and for the next 6 weeks, it was a whirl-wind of appointments with my team of doctors, further tests, scans, x-rays, and genetic counseling leading up to June 14, 2018 when I went into surgery for a bilateral mastectomy. Prior to genetic testing, my plan was to have a lumpectomy and radiation. But the genetic testing found a gene mutation called Chek2 which can cause breast cancer, prostate cancer, or colon cancer. By opting to have a mastectomy, it reduced my odds of having a second breast cancer diagnosis to 1%.

I consider myself to be one of the lucky ones. My cancer was found early, I was healthy at the time enabling me to heal fairly quickly. After oncotype testing and meeting with my oncologist, it was decided that neither chemo nor radiation were necessary. Once I fully healed from the mastectomy, I was able to move forward with reconstructive surgery October 8, 2018. It truly seems like a lifetime ago, and is hard to believe that by the time of the 2020 Heart & Sole Cancer Walk I will have been 2 years cancer free!

I credit my support system for assisting me in being able to "cruise" through this process so eloquently. When I was over-come with emotion, my family was always there to assist and care for me. The love and support that was provided during this time was so over-whelming. It truly showed me what the sense of community and love meant. Friends near and far were supporting me in so many ways, and they are the ones that propelled me through. It is true that in times of need you really find out who your friends are and I could not have been more blessed to have their support.

I encourage everyone to get their yearly screenings. Do it for yourself, your family, and your friends. I am living proof that it can happen to anyone.