

Cancer's Effect

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My life had been consistently perfect up until October 5th 2017. That was the day when my life turned completely upside down. She came home earlier than expected, and my dad went missing. They were outside and they sat in our car discussing her doctor's appointment which she had just returned from. I knew something was wrong in that moment because my dad looked crushed, and I saw her crying. He helped my mother, who was drenched in her own tears, walk up the stairs to our house and he told us to sit down at the kitchen table. They suddenly broke the news to us. On October 5th, 2017, the doctors identified that Denise Lewko, my mother, had acquired stage 2B breast cancer.

When she discovered the lump in her breast, I believed it was nothing. I truly believed that if something were to go wrong then it would have already. As soon as I heard the word cancer my mind immediately traveled to the thought of death. I was overwhelmed and I did not know how to feel. I did not understand anything about cancer at that time, and I especially did not understand the amount of power it had over our lives. Shortly after diagnosis, I began going through the stages of shock and grief. After spending nine days in complete shock, we got another phone call from the doctor. Stage 2B turned into stage 4. It had spread everywhere. The cancer was now located in the following: both breasts, lymphatic system, ribs, T 11, and pelvis.

I am unable to fully put into words everything that I felt. I felt so limited and joyless, and I felt like my life was at an end. I was completely unaware of the effects that cancer would have on my family and my mental health. It took about a month or so for my mental health to plummet, and eventually I fell into a fairly deep depression. It was extremely difficult to wake up in the morning, to eat, and to even go to school.

I started off my junior year attending Inglemoor high school. It was a new school for me, previously I attended Lake Washington high school. It was hard enough to leave all my friends at my old school and make new ones, but being about a month in and getting this news just threw everything out of place. I ended up leaving school for the rest of the semester, and took on the role of being my mom's primary caretaker at home. We spent several hundred hours in the hospital running more tests and eventually we came up with a plan to try and save her, and we decided to do chemo first, then surgery, and lastly radiation.

We began chemotherapy October 24th, 2017. The doctors decided to jump right in and give her one of the strongest chemo treatments they had. It was a long three months of chemo and during that time I felt like I did not even have a mom. She was constantly tired so I could never really talk to her, and she ended up catching a minor cold towards the end of treatment. She was unable to get out of her bed for ten days because she was so weak and tired from the cold and the

treatment combined. We received the end test results after her chemotherapy treatment was completed, and we found out it did not do much at all. Nothing grew during this time but at the same time nothing progressed and got better. It was extremely frustrating and I felt like we just wasted time.

Next, we had surgery, which took place February 27th, 2018. She had a double partial mastectomy and lymph-nods removed. They took ten lymph-nods out of her armpit area and 8 of them had cancer. Altogether they removed four huge masses. Recovery was tough, but she made it through. She put everything that she had into her recovery and into staying healthy and germ free. She had an excellent post op recovery, and she has been doing well ever since. We did tests and discovered that all the cancer was gone except for in her bones. It felt like the biggest blessing. All of the lost hope came back.

Radiation began April 9th, 2018, she went in, and she killed it. She did not have any of the serious burns or rashes that radiation normally gives you, and surprisingly her body reacted very well. I drove her down to the hospital every day, and the last day of radiation was one of the best days of my life. We shed tears of joy because it was finally all over... or so we thought. The final tests that we did end of August, revealed that there were no new cancer areas, but her bones had not healed. Since that day my heart has been broken. They made the difficult decision to discontinue treatment and they put her on a medication called Ibrance. It is supposed to keep the cancer from returning.

This is where we are right now. We are stuck in this deep, dark, and endless hole, and we are clueless about what could possibly happen. We have had great supporters who are constantly sending thoughts and prayers throughout this journey and I will be forever thankful for that. Family, friends, and even strangers have been the ones that have given us this strength. But personally, as of today, almost each and every one of those supporters have disappeared from my life, and the past 11 months I have been going through this alone.