

## Heather Dillon

I have always made a habit of checking for lumps, especially since I have had several fluid cysts. In October of 2015 I remember checking since it was BC Awareness month, but it wasn't until only a month later that I happened to stumble across a lump – and of all times in my sleep. I sleep with my arms up a lot, and somehow I happened to run my hand over a lump – I immediately woke up. I remember thinking that I would not freak out, I've had cysts before, and I was about to start my period so I would just watch it and see if it changes any. I remembered my OB telling me that hormones can cause changes with your breasts. The following week I scheduled an appointment with my OB because I had not had my yearly check – I figured I would bring this up while there. The appointment was set for January 12<sup>th</sup> – go figure waiting until November to schedule this (probably with everyone else who puts it off) it takes a little while to get in. I watched it, felt it regularly, and kept telling myself it's probably nothing, but in the two months I monitored it didn't really change. My OB was unsure, kind of leaning towards it being nothing because it wasn't the typical hard lump. She referred me to the Breast Clinic just to be checked – better safe than sorry! From that day on, time has not slowed down. I had a mammogram and biopsy that week, followed by my diagnosis on January 26<sup>th</sup>. My first diagnosis was DCIS, Stage 0. This was great news! I had two options – lumpectomy with radiation or a double mastectomy. I have always told myself if I was put in this situation I would maximize my chances of reducing re-occurrence – and I did, I chose to have a double mastectomy which occurred in March – and had expanders implanted to prep for reconstruction in the future. The week of my surgery, I received even worse news, my cancer had spread to my lymph nodes. Immediately that changed my diagnosis to Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, Stage 2. This changed everything. Radiation and chemotherapy were now an absolute. I also would undergo another surgery the next week to remove additional breast tissue to obtain clear margins and be sure that everything was surgically removed. Fast forward to August 2016, I have just finished 33 total treatments of radiation, which followed 4 treatments of chemotherapy. I did lose all of my hair, it's finally starting to grow back. My body has been through a lot over the past few months, but I am so thankful that I have succeeded in concurring this journey. While it's not quite over – my 3<sup>rd</sup> surgery is scheduled in September to have my ovaries removed (estrogen positive breast cancer), and my reconstruction will happen later this year as well. Through all of this, my faith has remained strong, my friends and family have been a huge support system, and I couldn't be more blessed to have experienced such a life changing event. No one wants to go through this, however it has shown me the unbelievable amount of love and caring that still exists in people, even strangers reaching out, people I have never met. There is always HOPE – I am 33, diagnosed with Breast Cancer at 32, and my hope is that every woman is made aware that cancer has no restrictions. 1 in 8 will be diagnosed, age, looks, good health, it all doesn't matter. It's scary – but knowing it can happen and being smart with what you are putting in and on your body will make a difference. Early detection is key!