Leigh Ann Venable

In late summer 2014 I discovered a lump in my right breast. I had received a clear mammogram report the previous February but felt strongly that I needed to follow-up with my physician. He recommended a diagnostic biopsy which came back positive for cancer.

The cancer was small, about 1 cm, so we all felt very good about how early we caught it and felt that a lumpectomy, followed by radiation and medication would suffice. My course of treatment changed as we discovered that my cancer was Triple Negative. As a result of that, and my age, 50 at the time, I was a candidate for genetic mutation testing.

I knew that my father's mother had died of breast cancer when she was 36 but there was no other "pockets" of breast cancer in the family that I knew of. But in truth, due to her death so early, we were not all that connected with that side of the family. The genetic testing came back positive for BRCA 1. My treatment options moved from a little surgery to lots of chemotherapy to be followed by preventative surgeries. More concerning than all the treatment that I was facing was the thought that my two beautiful daughters may have inherited the gene, as well as my nieces. We have strong women in my family, they all agreed to be tested. I'm so proud of them. One of my daughters is positive and is doing all the right things to protect herself moving forward. She is a wonder!

The other part of my story is that following chemotherapy for breast cancer, I decided to have a double mastectomy and hysterectomy as a preventative. The pathology on my ovaries and fallopian tubes showed the very beginning of Primary Peritoneal/Ovarian Cancer. It was cellular, very small. Breast cancer literally saved my life and that of my child – I'm convinced.

Eighteen rounds of chemotherapy, eight surgeries and two ports later, my scans are clean and I am feeling great. It has been a very long almost two years but I met some remarkable people during the process, learned what strength looks like from those journeying with me and discovered that joy can be gratefully found in any situation.

Oh…did I mention that my beautiful granddaughter was born two days after my initial diagnosis. What a remarkable gift!

As to why I would like to be involved, I am very passionate about early detection, knowing your own body well enough to know when something is not right and understanding what options exist if something is wrong. I believe strongly that women who have gone through treatment can offer a unique source of strength and reassurance to those who may be facing it. I know this because I experienced this. I would very much like to give back to a community that helped me so very much.

My story, along with two other stories is featured in the following video:
https://www.facebook.com/highpointregionalhealthfoundation/videos