

Suzanne Stomean

Around Thanksgiving of 2013 I noticed a small red area on the upper outer part of my right breast. It wasn't a lump or a knot; it did not itch, was not sore, and did not change in size or color. It was about a week before I decided to show it to my mom and ask what she thought, by this time I'm a little concerned that it hasn't gone away. I have always been faithful with self-breast exams and regular mammograms since I was 30. My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer at age 49, and here I am at the age of 48. I'm thinking to myself I just had a mammogram in March and nothing showed at all, so this is probably nothing. But I showed it to my mom and daughter who is 24; both thought I should go get it checked. So I made an appointment with my GYN Dr. Charles Evans, since he was the one that had ordered all my mammograms since I was 30 and got insurance to pay for them since my mom had a history of breast cancer.

My appointment was on 12/3/13. Dr. Evans examined me and said "Suzanne I really think it's just a skin irritation, but I know you, so let's go get an ultrasound and check it out." On 12/5/13 I had a mammogram and ultrasound both were done at the Breast Clinic. The ultrasound showed a place of concern. On 12/12/13 I was scheduled for a biopsy at the Breast Clinic. By this time the unknown is really starting to make me crazy. Appointment was made to return for results on Tuesday.

12/17/13 @ 8:00AM, the day started out as a very anxious one, but I had tremendous support from my family, friends and church that surrounded me. The first call I got was at 7:30AM from the Breast Clinic informing me that they needed to reschedule my appointment until 9:15AM because the results were not back yet, okay so my fear factor just went way up, then before I could leave for the 9:15AM appointment I get another call from the Breast Clinic this time it's not the scheduler calling but a nurse letting me know that my results are still not back and they are going to need me to come in around 11:00AM if that is okay, the nurse says that she isn't sure what the holdup was at the lab, and that she had just talked with the lab and they had told her that the slides were difficult to read and the doctor that was reading them now was waiting to have another doctor come in and also read them. But this was nothing to worry about. So once again we had an appointment chance now for 12:00PM, and you got it, I got another call from the nurse saying that the results still were not back, but this time if I would just stay near a phone she would get back to me as soon as the results were there and I could come over at that point. I didn't have to wait much longer she called me back about 45 minutes later and told me the results were there and to just come on over. During this whole time of waiting I had this calmness that really came over me and I think at that point I already knew. Upon arrival at the Breast Clinic my family and I were directed to a small room and the Oncology Nurse came in and spoke with us. She was very pleasant and apologized for the delay, but they just wanted to make sure.

She began to tell me there were "No active cancer cells" just atypical cells, and recommended a follow-up in a year.

Something about this was just did not sit right with me, so I asked her if she could schedule me with a second opinion at WFUBH, I would like to be seen by Dr. Howard-McNatt and I would like to have a copy of my pathology report.

My appointment with Dr. Howard-McNatt was December 24, 2013 and after seeing her I was scheduled for a lumpectomy on 01/02/14 this was a Thursday; results were due back on Friday 01/10/14

on follow up appointment. Everyone felt sure this was nothing to worry about, even after lumpectomy. Dr. Howard-McNatt said she would call if results came back sooner.

I can remember the day and time as if it was yesterday. It was Wednesday 01/08/14 @ 5:00PM my husband was standing in my office door telling me about his day when the phone rang and caller ID showed WFUP. When I answered Dr. Howard-McNatt said "Suzanne I'm so sorry it's breast cancer and we didn't get clean margins." All I really remember hearing on that call was breast cancer, more surgery, chemo as soon as possible. My world totally changed in a matter of seconds and I was numb, I always thought I was prepared since my mom had been diagnosed twice, but I really wasn't. But looking back in my journal I had written the night I got the results at the bottom of the page I had written "RESULTS ARE BACK – READY TO FIGHT FOR MY LIFE!! AND THE LIVES OF MY FAMILY!"

The next couple of weeks were crazy with testing and meetings with my team of doctors and getting the right plan in place for me.

And on 02/20/14 I went in for a right side mastectomy unilateral, Diep Flap (Deep Inf. Epigastric Perforator) Unilat, Port-A-Cath insertion, sentinel node mapping and biopsy surgery was 15 and ½ hours long and when I woke up I was in my room with my family around me. I was discharged on 02/26/14.

I started my chemo in April every other week on Fridays; since my cancer was Triple Negative I was given a cocktail of 3 chemo drugs. My oncologist Dr. Lawrence was fabulous with ordering premedication to help prevent what she could of the horrible side effects from the chemo drugs.

After each chemo treatment unfortunately I would end up in the hospital with 0 white counts of fevers of 102-104 for a week or so, I lost my hair after the first treatment on day 7 while I was in the hospital, I was determined to not let my hair define me. It was Easter weekend and I had asked my mom o go pick up some stuff for my daughter to make her Easter basket and put it out for me since I wasn't going to be home, although she was 24 she is still my baby ☺☺so while everyone was gone I asked the nurses aid to come in and help me shave my head, we went into the bathroom and she hugged me, told me how beautiful I was and then we did it and laughed. I was really okay with it. I was a natural blonde with straight hair, when my hair did come back it came back black and curly. I do love having the curls, not so much the black hair ☹☹

I finished my chemo treatment on June 13, 2014 and got to RING THE BELL at the cancer center at Baptist hospital, all of my family, friends, doctors, and nurses that took care of me through the entire process showed up to watch me ring the bell, because truth be told they almost lost me several times.

I am truly blessed to be here and alive today. And to be able to share my story with others to remind them to ALWAYS FOLLOW YOUR INSTINCTS AND GET A SECOND OPINION IF YOU NEED TO. Age doesn't matter, it can happen at any age.