

Women in their 20's and 30's generally do not consider themselves at risk for breast cancer; however, I am proof that breast cancer can strike at any age. I was diagnosed with a high risk and aggressive form of breast cancer (borderline stage 3, HER2+, Invasive Ductal Carcinoma) on March 24, 2009 – at 30 years old. Because of my age and lack of apparent risk factors, I went misdiagnosed for almost a year, resulting in my cancer being very aggressive by the time it was finally diagnosed.

It started in July 2008, when I found what I described as a ripple in my right breast. I had recently gotten breast implants and my surgeon assured me it was common to feel changes following this type of surgery. Since the ripple (which was actually two tumors in close proximity) showed up suddenly after surgery, I didn't think twice about his reassuring words.

About 8 months later, in February 2009, another lump appeared suddenly under my arm. I showed both areas to my gynecologist, and he too assured me they were nothing to worry about. I became pregnant a few weeks earlier and was told the ripple was probably indeed the implant, and the other was likely a cyst from the pregnancy. Two weeks later, I miscarried. The lumps did not go away. I asked about them again and was told a third time not to worry – they may take some time to go away as the hormones leave my system. After years of fertility issues, I was more wrapped up emotionally in the miscarriage than I was worrying about the lumps; although, I think the nagging concern was still in the back of my head.

On March 10, 2009, I heard Dr. Oz talking about medical mistakes on Oprah. He mentioned a case where they switched two women's mammogram scans – one had breast cancer and the other did not. These two women went about their lives – one started chemo and had surgery to remove her healthy breasts, and the other went about her life while the cancer grew inside her. This story was my wake-up call to insist on a mammogram.

I scheduled the mammogram for March 17, 2009 and was told that day it looked like cancer. They immediately performed over a dozen needle biopsies. I anxiously awaited the pathology results and received the call with the confirmed diagnosis on March 24, 2009, the day before my 31st birthday. After many more scans and tests, they could clearly see four large tumors – two in my breast and two in my lymph nodes.

I was told I had a 40% chance of "disease free survival" and needed to start on chemotherapy immediately – there was no time to prepare and no time to recover from having surgery first. The doctors' primary goal was to prevent it from spreading anywhere else.

I started on three different kinds of high dose chemotherapy on April 1, 2009, lost my hair about two weeks later and continued receiving chemotherapy and/or intravenous hormone therapy until I reached a year out from diagnosis. This amounted to about 66 hours sitting in the infusion room over the course of 52 weeks, a humbling experience at every visit. Immediately following chemotherapy, I had surgery to remove the remaining cancer and then underwent 7 weeks of daily radiation treatments.

Thanks to my just-in-time diagnosis and an aggressive treatment plan, I am now in remission, 3 years out. After an almost complete response to chemo and following surgery, my prognosis significantly improved (from 40% to a 90% chance of "disease free survival"). My husband and I decided to adopt a baby and brought our sweet little boy home only 3 weeks after signing up with the adoption agency. It immediately became evident - all of the years of fertility issues, the cancer diagnosis, grueling treatments, even the type of cancer I had and the time spent misdiagnosed.....it all led me to where I am today, "Aidan's Mom", it was all meant to be.

Unfortunately, not all stories end this happily though, and my own could change at any time. I hope by sharing my story, you will be encouraged to provide support to the American Cancer Society's "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" this year - we need to find a CURE, and in the meantime, support those in need battling the disease right now. Thank you for taking the time to read my story.