

Mary Cole-Wolfe

On November 22, 2012, I found a hard lump in my right breast while taking a shower. As soon as the holiday weekend was over, I called my Gynecologist and scheduled an appointment for the next day. They felt the lump as well and stated that it was about 2cm in size. I was scheduled for an ultrasound and mammogram the following day. The ultrasound and mammogram showed a mass in my right breast and the lymph nodes around the mass were enlarged.

I was referred to a surgeon, Dr. Valle, and an appointment for a biopsy was scheduled for December 3, 2012. While doing the biopsy, Dr. Valle measured the mass via ultrasound and it had grown to 4cm. The next day, I received the call that would change everything. The pathology report showed that the mass was malignant. At 30 years old, I was facing the biggest fight of my life. I was diagnosed with Stage IIIA invasive ductal carcinoma. By the end of the week, I had scheduled an appointment with Dr. McCravey, my oncologist, where we discussed my treatment plan.

When he completed the exam, he stated that the mass was now 5 cm. He explained all of the side effects of chemotherapy and that it might cause me to go through menopause early. At that point, I was told that I could either take hormones for two weeks and have my eggs harvested or take the risk that I would not be able to have children. After weighing all of the options, I realized that if my tumor had already grown by 3 cm, how much bigger would it become in 2 weeks? I did not want to take the chance that the mass would grow and possibly metastasized to other areas of my body.

On December 13th, I had a port-a-cath implanted and received my first chemo treatment. I was given a cocktail of Adriamycin and cytoxin, which was called the "Red Devil". The next day, I returned to the oncologist's office for an injection of Neulasta, a medication that would stimulate my bone marrow to produce more blood cells. After 14 days, my hair began to come out. I thought that I was prepared for it to happen, but it was still a traumatic event. My older brother shaved my head for me a few days later.

Before my 3rd treatment I saw the oncologist for another exam where I informed him that I was having a difficult time feeling the mass now. After an extensive exam, he stated that he couldn't believe it, but my mass had decreased in size and he had a difficult time feeling it as well. After four dose dense treatments of the chemo cocktail, I had a brief break before I began the second round of treatments. My second chemo cocktail was dose dense taxotere. With this medication, I had to take an extra dose of steroids before receiving it because I had an allergic reaction to it during the first treatment. During this round of chemo, I had different reactions than the first round. After the third treatment, my hands looked like I had horrible sunburn and were swollen. It was very difficult for anything to touch my hands and even difficult for me to grip objects. I had my final chemo treatment on March 26, 2013, almost 5 months after my diagnosis.

On April 5th, I met with Dr. Valle to discuss my surgical options. At 31 years old, I knew that I wanted to cut my chances of recurrence down as much as possible. I opted to have a bilateral mastectomy with tissue expanders to be put in place during the same procedure. My surgery was scheduled for April 29th. I went into the hospital that day

knowing that I was doing the right thing for me. My plastic surgeon, Dr. Kennedy, placed the tissue expanders in after Dr. Valle had finished his portion of the procedure. After healing from my procedure, I was ready to start radiation. I was very fortunate that I did not have a lot of side effects from the radiation, only minor skin irritation.

On August 9th, Dr. McCravey told me that I was now classified as no evidence of disease! I am ready to begin my reconstruction process. I hope to have my reconstruction surgery scheduled soon and look forward to having my body look like it used to before this journey.