

# Raven Patten

April 2014, it's a Saturday and I'm taking a shower, getting ready to start my day. I decide to do a self-check while I'm in there. I noticed a slight difference between one breast and the other. I called out for my husband and when he came into the bathroom I asked him to double check. He said he felt it to and that I should have it looked at. When I got out of the shower I started thinking that I was too young to have cancer. It was probably just a cyst. I thought I'd just watch it for a couple of weeks and see if it changed.

May 2014, we are on an ATV trip with my entire family and I casually make mention of the knot I felt while doing the self-exam. My mom and sister ask me when I am having it checked out. I tell them that I'll make an appointment. The next week my husband comes home from work and tells me about a co-workers friend who was just diagnosed with stage 4 breast cancer. She's only a couple of years older than me with young children. That was it. I decided to go see my general doctor and let her feel it to see what she thought it might be. I see her the next day and she refers me to an imaging center for a mammogram and an ultrasound. Two days later the doctor at the imaging center comes in the room to look at what the technician is seeing. He tells me he wants me to go for a biopsy as soon as possible. He didn't like what he saw.

I met with a surgeon the very next day. He assured me it was probably just a fibroid cyst and that I shouldn't worry. He sent me to Mary Ellen Locher for the biopsy. Two days later I sat in my surgeon's office again with my mom and husband, he came in, sat down and looked like he was going to cry. He explained to me that I did indeed have cancer. He said, I just didn't think that this was how this was going to turn out. I never would have imagined you being so young would have cancer. Invasive Ductal Carcinoma, not what we wanted to hear. My mom and husband started to cry. I turned around and told them they needed to hold it together. That I was going to be ok. From there it was a whirl wind of appointments and tests, MRI, bone scan, x-rays, genetic testing, CT scan, etc. I met with my surgeon, the plastic surgeon, and my oncologist. I felt very comfortable with the team of doctors that I had chosen. I learned that my cancer was estrogen receptive so that meant that I would have to have a hysterectomy as well.

I had already decided that I was going to have a bilateral mastectomy. I have had two paternal aunts and a great aunt that have had breast cancer. I wanted the best odds that it wouldn't come back! Two weeks before my surgery date my genetic testing came back positive, it was a huge blow to me and my family. I felt like I just couldn't catch a break! The only positive thing from the genetic testing coming back positive was that all my female relatives could use my genetic mutation to test against. It also meant that my children have a much higher percent of potentially having cancer as well.

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014 – surgery day, a day that I had been anticipating for a month. That day is a blur to me. So much going on but I wasn't really "there". It almost felt as if I was stuck in a bad dream and I would wake up at any moment and life would be normal again. That was not the case! While at home recovering after surgery I spoke with my surgeons P.A. who told me that the cancer had spread to the sentinel node. Out of the 15 lymph nodes they removed 5 were cancerous. I was staged at 3C. We were hoping that it wouldn't be that advanced, that the removal of the tumor would be enough but unfortunately not. I would have to go through chemo and radiation. Once I met with my oncologist she

informed me that my tumor had been sent off for further testing and that it was also classified as HER2 positive. A more aggressive type of breast cancer. The blows just kept coming. My oncologist explained the types of chemo that I would need, what the side effects of each one were and what my percentages were. If I decided to take the chemo I would have a significantly greater percentage of surviving. I wanted to survive! I have a family, young children, and a wonderful husband. Of course I want to survive, there wasn't another option. I have to be here for my children and my husband. I'll be one year cancer free June 18<sup>th</sup>. I hope to celebrate that anniversary every year, for many, many more years!

If telling my story helps one person start doing self-checks I'll feel as though my cancer journey was worthwhile. Early detection does save lives, especially in aggressive cancers like mine! I was only 35 when diagnosed, cancer does not discriminate against age, race or gender. Please take the time, once a month to check your breasts.