

National Cancer Survivors Day

Sunday, June 2nd, 2019

A Survivor's Story - Katelyn McClain

I am a 28-year-old fiancé and mother to a 3-year-old daughter. I can also say that I am now a breast cancer survivor. I never imagined that an annual Gynecologist exam would forever change my life. It was November 30th, 2019 and I was going to cancel my appointment due to a looming snow storm, but I went anyway and thank goodness I did - it saved my life. As I lay back during my appointment, I was happily expressing my desire to get off the birth control pill and conceive my second child. As we spoke, I watched my doctors face switch from smiling to complete utter terror as she completed my left breast exam. She questioned if I had felt the lump in my left breast. I had felt it however, I thought it was apart of my new anatomy following the birth of my daughter. I was not sure how long it had been there, but I felt it a few months prior to scheduling my exam. I was immediately taken off my birth control pill. One ultrasound, mammogram, and biopsy later and it was confirmed - I was officially diagnosed with Ductal Carcinoma In Situ. I was 27 years old upon diagnosis. I was healthy; was young; how could this happen to me?

A week later, I met with Dr. Diego at Magee Women's Hospital who became my surgical oncologist. Dr. Diego explained very empathetically that she was unsure if my DCIS was invasive or not due to the large size of my tumor. The biopsy results showed some cancer cells lingering very close to the outer layer of my milk duct. The only conclusive response was that I absolutely had to have a skin-sparing mastectomy. The surgery would determine if my cancer was invasive/non-invasive and any further treatment plan. I was devastated - nothing prepares you for a loss of your body part. My fiancé, Reggie, was very supportive and helped mentally prepare me to remain positive. Thankfully, I was given the option to have both breasts removed due the unknown of what would come following surgery. There was no guarantee whether I would need radiation or chemo. The next two months were very stressful as I anticipated my surgery and



result. I reached out to several support groups and received thousands of prayers.

In December, I had a genetic test ran which determined that my cancer had zero genetic ties or explanation. The doctor stated that "lifestyle choices" and "environmental factors" were to blame but informed me that the birth control pill, if taken for over fifteen years, could result in breast cancer. As time went on - I couldn't help but think that the birth control pill is to blame. My cancer grew rapidly from the estrogen in the birth control pill, but I will never know if it also placed it in my body.



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Exactly two months to the day of my diagnosis - I underwent a bilateral mastectomy. I had several lymph nodes removed and tested – none of which were positive. I was also extremely fortunate to have clear margins. The words “cancer free” came out of my surgical oncologists’ mouth – I could not believe it. I was so incredibly happy and felt so blessed by all the prayers I had received. My dad was ecstatic and called every person on his phone list to let them know the good news. I was also blessed to go through my first two surgeries without any infections or physical abnormalities. I am due on June 6th, 2019 for the final surgery in my reconstruction plan.

After all that I’ve been through, people always ask me how I stay so positive. The response is simple – I have a daughter who needs me to be there for her, a fiancé and family who love me and co-workers who support me. I know that there is always a risk of recurrence with breast cancer, but my risk is small compared to others. I find strength by focusing on all the good in my life which truly uplifts my spirit. I am not a victim of cancer – I am a survivor and I will continue to make each day of my life meaningful. I hope sharing my story will save the lives of other women but encouraging them to avoid taking harmful unnecessary medications and to complete regular breast exams.



Katelyn,

Thank you for choosing to share your survivor story. Your positive outlook and strength has an everlasting impact.

Love,

Your AUCP Family

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