



Steppin' out for Lesley

Life was coming along wonderfully for our family of six. We were stationed in Japan for two years, with my husband, Thomas, a U.S. Marine. We were enjoying the country and customs, and thriving wonderfully.

In February of 2008, we were surprised to find that we were pregnant again. Although not in the “plans” that we had made, we knew what a blessing a child can be, and looked forward with excitement.

In May of 2008, I found a lump in my breast. I immediately went to my OB/GYN and he had a hard time even locating it. He wasn't sure it was “anything” and in fact attributed it to my pregnancy and changes in my breast being brought about due to the baby. He suggested that I get it checked out as soon as we returned to the states, since we were already in the process of moving back that July.

By July of 2008, my right breast was visibly larger than my left and tender to the touch, almost painful if too much pressure was applied. We checked in at our new duty station in Camp Pedleton, CA, and immediately requested an appointment with the doctor. When I was seen, a nurse was really worried and made a referral for me to be seen by a civilian doctor because the wait would be too long to be seen by one of the military doctors on base. An ultrasound was ordered, and they discovered that I had a large cyst in my breast. They were not worried about this cyst, and assured me that very often a cyst is “nothing” to be worried about.

My son, Joaquin Alberto, was born on September 29, 2008. He was healthy and happy and everything I had prayed for. We were thrilled and started to settle down in a routine with our new family of seven. I still had this cyst, which had been drained several times but kept coming back. My doctor scheduled an MRI to make sure it was still “nothing.”

In October of 2008, I had an MRI performed. They said they saw some dense tissue toward the wall of the cyst. They would have to biopsy it, and then remove the cyst since it was refilling every time they drained it. I had a biopsy in mid-October and on October 28, 2008, I was told that I had Infiltrating Ductal Carcinoma in my right breast. I was also told that it was known as Triple Negative Breast Cancer, because it is not driven by either the hormones (er/pr) nor by the HER-2 protein. Unfortunately, this means I have the most aggressive cancer, because there are no other treatments for it except for chemo, surgery, and radiation.

I started my chemotherapy treatments before my surgery, in the hopes to see that the chemo was working on my particular cancer, and so that they could surgically remove it better. I received three chemo drugs, every three weeks from November 2008 until February 2009. In March, I had bilateral mastectomies; since I wanted to be sure I didn't have to go down this road again.

As I recovered from surgery, I was gearing up for radiation, which I received from April to May—35 treatments total, to the affected area—where my right breast had been. Although tiring, the worst part was the drive every day, and missing out on time with the kids.

In July, I met with my oncologist and was determined to receive more chemo. Due to the aggressiveness of my breast cancer, she agreed to give me a few more treatments. She decided to send me for some routine scans to have a baseline, but during these scans, it was discovered that the breast cancer had metastasized to my spine.

In August of 2009, I received an intense radiation treatment, known as Cyberknife. It essentially removed the lesion on my spine with hundreds of radiation beams over the course of three one-hour treatments. I am set to receive a new chemotherapy combination starting mid August and have already received a bone-strengthening drug, which will help control the spread in my bones.