

One day in May of 2003, when I was 35 years old, I had a feeling in my left breast that I could only compare to an internal bruise. I didn't feel a lump, nor did I have a family history of the disease. But I couldn't help but ask my husband if he thought I had breast cancer.

He thought I was nuts. But I phoned my OB/GYN and asked for some advice and was promptly told that a baseline mammogram would give me peace of mind since I was at an age when they were deemed perfectly appropriate.

That baseline mammogram identified an abnormality in the tissue of my right breast; so though the bruised feeling in my left breast disappeared, the cancer in my right breast was detected, early, thanks to the discomfort I felt.

I was treated with a partial mastectomy and radiation therapy and since it was non-invasive breast cancer we were dealing with, I was considered cancer-free within six months of my diagnosis. However, a follow up mammogram in 2006 uncovered another abnormality. That abnormality turned out to be cancer ... and this time around the cancer was invasive.

I opted for a double mastectomy so that I could further reduce my risk of recurrence; I also opted for immediate TRAM flap reconstruction, a surgery that utilized my own abdominal muscles and fat to recreate breasts out of my own tissue.

I was in the operating room for over 9 hours and left there with mesh in my abdomen and an inability to move around easily -- it took weeks to fully recover from that very debilitating surgery. And just when I was getting back on my feet, my mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. That meant I was at high risk for ovarian cancer myself, and my ovaries had to come out, pronto.

Before the year was out, I was back in the operating room. Doctors went back through the mesh in my abdomen to remove my ovaries, my uterus and my cervix. I finished out the year feeling like a woman dismantled ... but started 2007 feeling like a woman rebuilt.

Today I am cancer free and dedicate myself to raising breast cancer awareness. I launched a weblog at <http://www.pinkribbonreview.com> in 2008 after a few other attempts to find my internet voice -- and work daily to get the word out that early detection saves lives, that funds are being raised daily to further our breast cancer research and programming and that organizations out there are doing their part to raise money and awareness for the cause.