



Pat B.

It was May 5, 2004, the day after my daughter's 18th birthday, when I went to see my midwife for my yearly checkup. I had noticed a lump in my breast a couple weeks before then, but I wasn't overly concerned about it. It was in the same place and felt exactly like a lump I'd had during my pregnancy with the daughter whose birthday I had just celebrated. That time the lump had disappeared spontaneously before the birth. I thought "Oh, it's that thing again." Well, a mammogram, ultrasound, and needle biopsy revealed "that thing" to be cancerous. The lump I felt was an area of invasive ductal carcinoma combined with ductal carcinoma in situ (DCIS). What I couldn't feel from the outside was a much larger area of scattered DCIS that surrounded the tumor.

One week after my diagnosis, I walked into the Brown Bag Lunch at the Breast Cancer Coalition. I found an incredible group of survivors, in every sense of the word. I got a feeling for what it means to fight this battle, and I began to feel up to it. If they could do it, I could do it, too.

The wide extent of the DCIS made it clear that a mastectomy was my best surgical option, so at the age of 48, 6 weeks after my diagnosis, I lost my breast to cancer. Among the most cherished memories of my life are the ones of nursing my five children, so I felt the loss deeply. But deeper still was my love for my husband and children, and the desire to be here with them overshadowed my grief at losing a part of my body. With their love and support, I was able to cope. As time went on, they helped me through receiving the news that one lymph node was positive, and through four months of chemotherapy. I finished chemo in January of 2005, and now I'm taking tamoxifen.

I'm a Stay-at-home Mom, and have homeschooled four of my five children while they were young. Currently, my youngest child, who is eleven, is still schooled at home, while his older brothers, ages 14 and 15, are in high school. My daughters are 24 and 20, and are living in Nevada and Buffalo, respectively. My home is truly where my heart is. Having faced cancer has made me realize how precious the seemingly small gifts of heart, home, and health can be. I have grown from this experience, and have been privileged to share my experiences with others facing a similar journey through my involvement with BCCR. I can never give back as much as they've given to me.