



Amy S.

On April 11th, 2016, I received the phone call I had been waiting for all weekend: the results of my breast biopsy. “I’m so sorry to tell you, it’s cancer....” I was 26 years old.

I was mourning the death of my beloved grandmother while celebrating my acceptance to my top three Masters programs just one week before. Adding cancer to the mix felt like a cruel joke. I had one foot in the door of an exciting new life in a new city, pursuing my passion (opera- grandma was so proud!) and in one 3 minute phone call, that door was slammed shut. Bolted and barricaded.

In the weeks following my diagnosis, my mom and I took our first trip to BCCR to meet with Holly Anderson. We were oncologist-shopping and looking for guidance. I was petulant, petrified, and pissed in our first meeting; Holly embraced me where I was. This is her way, (and I would soon learn is also the way of the entire BCCR).

I had a mastectomy, and despite my oncologists strong urging toward both chemotherapy and hormone therapy, I chose the chemo-less route. I focused intensely on nutrition and physical fitness- eating only plants, running 5 miles a day, and several other forms of complementary therapy, in addition to hormonal therapy.

At the time of my original diagnosis, a CT scan had shown a tiny 2mm speck on my left lung, which was too small to characterize then. It seems very relevant today. Six months later when a rash on my mastectomy scar prompted further testing, innumerable 2mm specks were found on both lungs. I do believe I was in fact metastatic at the time of my original diagnosis. So cheers to nearly 3 years of living with MBC!

My official metastatic diagnosis thrust me into the throes of chemotherapy. I went, kicking and screaming (literally- ask any staff present at Pluta Cancer). Thank God for Ativan, medical marijuana, and especially moms!

And although I struggled through chemo infusions, I found solace in the rhythm of treatment, gently nestled in a cocoon surrounded by loving and supportive nurses. When infusions ended and I started other active treatment for metastatic disease, I had too much time to sort through the rubble of the last 5 months of my life. How does one accept a terminal diagnosis while their peers begin careers, begin families, begin the stuff of life? My mental health declined greatly (hospital visits, outpatient programs, medication, and lots of therapy followed).

Managing my mental health and wellness has become inextricably linked with managing my physical health. The support groups at the BCCR have been instrumental in helping me regain my sense of self at various points in these last 2 and a half years. I’m so grateful to my loving boyfriend, Mom, Dad, and countless family and friends who have stood close by me, and weathered each and every storm with me. I am thankful to my oncologist, Dr. Michelle Shayne, for being my healing co-pilot. And I am eternally grateful for the boundless love, compassion, validation, and support I find within the walls of the Breast Cancer Coalition.