

I was 4 months pregnant with my son when my annual Pap smear was done in 2009. The results came back showing abnormal cells. (Every pap I have had performed prior to that had always come back normal). Of course being pregnant, no further testing could be done until after my son was born. January 7, 2010 I gave birth to my beautiful son, Landon Jay.

I had another pap about 5 months later and it came back normal. The next year I felt pretty healthy. Then I started to notice bleeding between periods and discomfort when I sat down. It was all intermittent and I just figured it was just my menses acting up, just part of being a woman. I got a letter in the mail stating my birth control was being recalled and sure enough about 4 packs of my birth control matched up with the numbers that were recalled. Meanwhile, the bleeding became more often and pain in my left lower abdomen began to be constant and still very uncomfortable to sit. I felt like I was sitting directly on my cervix. My doctor attributed it all to the recalled birth control and so I was started on a different brand. A Pap smear was done and results came back normal.

I returned to the doctor about 4 more times in the next few months after that with same complaints, but increasing and unable to have inner course due to severe pain and bleeding and the doc just kept switching my birth control. I dealt with it for 4 or 5 months after that and I knew something was wrong, this blood was not coming from my uterus, it was blood like if you sliced your arm open (bright red blood) and completely different than having a period.

I returned to the doctor probably 8 times in 2 months and was only examined 3 times out of those 8. I began to feel like an annoyance to them, I'm sure they rolled their eyes every time I called. After 3 visits to the ER secondary to hemorrhaging, and then telling me it was just my period, my doctor did another pap and that came back normal. The doctor decided I probably had fibroid tumors and wanted to do a D&C, but eventually I would need a hysterectomy, and if I wanted more children I should get pregnant in the next year. He said that if I bled during that pregnancy we knew it was coming from the fibroids. I allowed the doctor to do a D&C- I figured if anything could help I'm all for it, but also reminded him that it was not normal period blood and that I knew it wasn't come from the uterus.

Turns out he couldn't perform the D&C. It was unable to be completed because the instrument he used to hold my cervix open sliced right through my cervix like butter no matter where he attempted to grab it. He was unable to stop the bleeding during the procedure and tried 3 different attempts, and finally on the third attempt, the bleeding slowed down. He did not do a biopsy while I was under, and he didn't even think that it could possibly be cancer. He only explained I needed a hysterectomy within the next year.

I continued to suffer with constant pain and hemorrhaging for 4 months after that, and at one point he told me it was a yeast infection over the phone, and basically that it wasn't necessary to be examined again. I knew something was wrong, I knew I had cancer. I finally got a 2nd opinion and she did an internal ultrasound, and BOOM right on the screen was my tumor like a head of a cauliflower and plain as day. I had a CT, MRI and Petscan which confirmed. I had a biopsy came back positive for carcinoma of the cervix.

I began 8 weeks of radiation and chemotherapy at MUSC- five days a week of radiation and 1 day a week chemotherapy. No surgery was recommended, because if they did the hysterectomy, it would have left me with a huge fistula from my rectum to my vagina and I would be going "number 2" out of my vagina. That was my first doctor's plan?!

About 2 weeks into radiation my body stopped making blood, and I got severe radiation induced ulcerative proctitis (inflammation of the rectum). I was admitted into the hospital for 12 days and I had 4 blood transfusions and 2 platelet transfusions. They couldn't perform the internal radiation surgeries because my hemoglobin was 2 (normal is 12-15). My white blood cells dropped to almost zilch. Because of my severe proctitis reaction, and being burned from the inside out, they were afraid I had rectal cancer and did a biopsy and 2 other rectal surgeries that ruled out rectal cancer.

I was in so much pain, when I had a bowel movement I would scream until I lost my voice and saliva poured down my chin. I would bang my head against the wall while going to the bathroom. (You'd be surprised what you do and where your mind goes when you're in that much pain, I didn't even know I was doing it). They discussed options of epidural and colostomy bag to give me some relief. I was unable to urinate due to severe radiation induced cystitis of my urethra and bladder. I had to fill the hospital bath tub up a few inches with hot water, that's they only way my body would urinate. I didn't care as long as I went. I received about 6 steroid enemas per day to help with the proctitis. Finally, I was able to get my internal radiation with rods placed inside my vagina. I had to lay still for 48 hours straight for the first surgery, and 24 hours straight for the 2nd surgery a week later. I won't go into details behind those long hours of hell on earth.

Four months later, November 2014, I had a Petscan and I was in remission. I've had quite a few scares since then, and now I'm 3 years out from treatment and still "No evidence of disease". I can no longer eat meat or digest certain foods. I have bowel movements about 12 times a day, have had a few urethral and bladder procedures, and have to manually manipulate myself to go to the bathroom in any way, but I'll take it!!!! I'm cancer free! Every 3 months I have a follow up exams.

I also found out my last 3 paps from before I was diagnosed were read incorrectly by pathology services, and were in fact positive for cancer! No one listened to me and my paps were read wrong. I have a malpractice case going on 3 years now to teach them a lesson and hopefully be compensated, but mainly I just don't want them to let this happen to anyone else! Although I'm cancer free, I'm also broke (ohhhhh the medical bills). I'm delighted to help out others going through treatment and am proud to "Help the Hoo-Hahs"! All I can say is- ladies listen to your body and get 2nd or 3rd opinions! We know our bodies!

- Mary Beth