

My story. The thought still brings tears.

#### Aug 9, 2005

Time for my mammogram. Since they found abnormalities during that appointment, they wanted a sonogram. During that sonogram, I saw a lady standing in the room (off to the side). When they were done, that lady spoke by saying, "Hi. My name is Rose York, Breast Health Care Navigator." She handed me her card and said, "If you need anything or have any questions, call me." I was sent to meet the surgeon the following day. While I was there, Rose York showed up and told me that she will also be with me during surgery and to help me through all this. I never knew how precious those words were until...

#### Aug. 15th

I had three lumps removed from my right breast for biopsy. It seemed simple, but scary. I was to have the results by August 22nd. Since my family already had plans to go to Colorado for my sister's 25th Wedding Anniversary party before all this began, I chose to keep those plans to keep my mind off the results (no sense in setting and dwelling on the unknown). The results were on my mind continuously during the trip. I am sure the results were on everyone else's mind, as well. My twin sister wanted to talk about it and I told her to let's wait until after the weekend. Thinking back on it now, I wished we would have talked about it.

#### Aug. 22

My biggest fear - Breast Cancer! The doctor was straight to the point and stern about saying, he wanted to do surgery in the morning at 5:30am, if that was good for me. I choked and swallowed - swallowed big. Then, I replied, "No, I can't. I have to tell work (Golden Corral), my parents, kids, sisters." I guess you could say that I was babbling. The Doctor touched my arm to calm me and asked if one week would be better. But, he said that it was important to do it right away. I started crying and saying, "I am sorry. I'm trying not to cry." Rose was not there - no one was there. I was scared. The nurse came in and consoled me while making my next appointment. I got home and cried more while I told my husband, whose mother is a breast cancer survivor since 2000. Then, his sister had it in 2002 - again in 2004. Now, I have to tell him that I have breast cancer. Since then, his sister passed with breast cancer in Oct., '07. I called my parents. My father said that he sure wished we would have discussed that possibility while we were in Colorado but we just didn't. I think that really bothered him and my mom. Then my kids; telling them was harder than I thought. I could feel their hearts ripping, mine as well. In their voices, I could hear fear for their mother. I told them not to worry that I would be okay. Knowing that my heart and soul is full of fear, too. Next, I told two of my sisters, Carol and Billie Jean. With surprise, they were so calm. As it turned out, that calmness was something I didn't know I needed, but did. They said that we will get through this and if I needed anything, to just call. They each said to please let them know how they could help - that was great. Last, my twin sister. She was scared. She couldn't stand the thought of me going through this. She and I decided to be strong until we knew more with the next surgery. (Something Carol sent an email to me of a saying by my father, "You can't borrow sorrow from tomorrow." Meaning: Why worry today about something happening tomorrow? Because if it doesn't happen, you have worried in vain. If it does happen, you have to worry twice.)

#### Aug 30

Day of surgery. Rose was there. They removed my right breast (Radical Mastectomy) and 14 lymph nodes, Same day surgery, but it was the next day when I woke up enough to go home. With two days left before pathology report comes in, fear comes again. The waiting for the unknown is almost to much to bare, but I stay strong for my family. My parents are with me, thank GOD for that. Results: Metastatic Carcinoma and 6 lymph nodes were affected with cancer. After 6 long weeks of recovery and 3 more stays in the hospital, with complications and illnesses from medications (C-Dif), it was time to meet the oncologist at St John's. They put me on a protocol list which is a new combination of drugs and possibly a new cure down the road. I agreed to try the B38 Schema. So maybe, I could be part of saving someone else in the future. In the end result they saved me. Chemo for 6 months, 6 weeks of radiation and neulastia shots every few weeks to boost my red blood cells, which gives you the worst flu like symptoms. I'm now a survivor. It was long and it was scary, but worth it. I've learned a lot.

In the Meanwhile, Golden Corral held a car wash with the help from Union Transfer, my husband's employer, and my community. Six hours of their time and they raised money for me. The money was for me to use when needed, so I would not worry during the months to come. It was their contribution and prayers that showed me that I made it. I made it to being a somebody. I always thought I was a nobody - someone just out there working and trying to make it in society. As I was telling my father about the car wash and how excited I was at the fact that it was televised, he said, "Irene, you have always been a somebody. I just wished you didn't have to get sick to see that."

Enough about my story,

The reason I am writing this is to say one of the most important things to me. That is, if you are ever in my shoes or in a pair that size, keep your family and friends close. You will need them closer in times to come. Keep your employer informed. Knowing that your job will be there takes away another stress point. This gives you a chance to strive and focus on the future.

Now, you do your self-breast check and consult your doctor of any differences you may have.

Most of all, I thank my sister, Ilene, for pushing me to telling my story. I didn't think I could or wanted to do it, but I am glad I did.

Thank you for reading.  
Irene Gautney  
Survivor