

{LOCAL SUCCESS} ————— *pamela landry*

Part of the horror of breast cancer is that it often strikes women at an early age. Women in their 30s and 40s, who otherwise feel perfectly healthy and are vibrant, active members of society, suddenly get a diagnosis that tells them they have a potentially fatal disease. In 2008, this is what happened to Northshore resident Pamela Landry.

In the summer of 2007, Landry, now 46 years old, went in for her yearly mammogram. Everything seemed normal. However, shortly after this, her breast began to hurt and change shape. So, she went to the doctor's office for an ultrasound. Still, everything came up normal and she was told to return in six months. Finally, the next ultrasound detected what was a slow growing tumor, one that had been there for years.

So why was it undetected? Landry had very dense breast tissue and mammograms often have trouble detecting tumors through dense breast tissue. Ultrasound is the doctor-preferred method for detecting breast cancer in such women. And Landry did not have a family history of the disease, either. Her great grandmother had it, but that is not close enough of a relation to count as having a "family history" of breast cancer.

At first, Landry was taken aback. "Fear grips you right away," Landry said. She thought of a neighbor who had recently been diagnosed with stage four stomach cancer and was receiving intensive chemotherapy. The combination of the cancer and the chemo was eating Landry's neighbor up and Landry feared she would face a similar fate.

Eventually, faith kicked in for Landry. "I knew I'd have to go through some surgery and some chemo, but I'd come out on the other end," she said. However, just because she had faith did not make it an easy experience. The initial barrage



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of information she received from doctors was overwhelming. "There's so much information, you don't know where to begin. It's hard to process," Landry said.

Landry had a bilateral mastectomy (both of her breasts were removed) and immediate breast reconstruction. After this, she underwent four cycles of chemo - one every twenty days. The experience surprised her. She expected to be nauseated, but never felt that way. She received an anti-nausea drug via IV before the treatments and it worked. One aspect of the treatment that was


difficult was a shot meant to boost her white blood cell count. "I experienced bone pain the day after like I'd never experienced before," Landry said.

In addition to this, Landry lost her hair. But her family (her husband Peter and sons Joshua and Stephen) helped her get through it. When she first appeared in front of her family wearing a red bandana on her head, her son Stephen quipped, "You look like a gangster, Mom." And when she would go on errands to the store, other women who were cancer survivors would approach her and offer her words of encouragement and support.

When asked what advice she would give to women facing a similar diagnosis, Landry urges a positive attitude and thorough research. "Don't be afraid to ask questions," Landry said. Take notes during visits with the doctor. Often, a patient might be so nervous or frazzled during the doctor's appointment that a question may not occur to her until after the appointment is over. If this happens, don't be afraid to call the doctor and ask the question. Also, use the Internet and read any books available about fighting breast cancer.

Exercise is important, too. While you should not overexert yourself while undergoing chemo, Landry says it is important to do things that make you feel normal. Walk a couple of miles a day. Be active and get outside. And above all else, fight to maintain a positive attitude.

"Do not think of having breast cancer as a death sentence. Think of it as a roller coaster ride. You'll have highs and lows, good days and bad days. Take each stage of your treatment one stage at a time and don't forget to breathe," Landry said.




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