

Fighting The Fight For Life
By Joey White

You're never too young to do routine self-breast exams. It was during this exam that I found a small, marble size lump. The lump was very hard and practically in the middle of my chest above the sternum. What I thought was a small cyst was much more. On April 28, 2005, one week after turning 35, I was diagnosed with breast cancer -- Invasive Ductal Carcinoma. I was told I was Estrogen and Progesterone Positive (ER+/PR+), which is common for breast cancer. What wasn't common, was that I was HER2/neu+++ . This is an over-expression of the HER2 oncogene causing the cancer to be extremely aggressive. Nearly 20% of cancers are HER2 positive, but only 2% are ER+/PR+/HER2+++ . This started the journey.

I had major surgery a month later. They performed a partial mastectomy, and with a Sentinel Node Biopsy, removed 15 lymph nodes, 11 being positive. I tried to get back to my normal routine of running my Daycare and Preschool. I did as much possible research on my cancer as I could. I researched every type of treatment, both natural and conventional. The information was necessary, but exhausting. I found myself diving back into my career, I absolutely loved the children I worked with everyday and did not want to lose my role with them. I had spent the last 7 years building my Daycare and Preschool program, and was very happy with its success. The world came crashing down with a re-occurrence 4 months later. The breast cancer had come back and was causing me a lot of pain. I had to close the doors on my beloved career and face a much more serious path...my life.

It is now June 2006. I have endured 5 months of chemotherapy. Chemotherapy has not been an easy task. It takes a support system of family, friends, and faith to get through it. I am currently on biological therapy called Herceptin and on hormone therapy, which consists of the monthly shot Lupron, and daily dose of Femara. I also take a daily regiment of supplements to help with nutrition, and anti-cancer herbal supplements. I was told last week that the cancer activity had gone down approximately 60-65%. This is great news. The goal is to watch the activity of the cancer throughout the summer to see if the hormone therapy will be an effective treatment option, rather than just a preventative.

Cancer has not stopped me from living. I still have cancer and I am still here. I don't believe that there is a "silver bullet" cure, and I have wasted much positive energy trying to find one. I feel by treating my cancer from many different angles, I will be the most successful. Cancer is a daily fight. Fighting this disease can be exhausting, but there are rewards. I look around and see such a beautiful support system around me. Material possessions and a climbing career are not the most important thing for me. They don't bring true happiness. Look for the rewards in your life. Maybe they are in your flower garden, your nightly walk with your son or daughter, or your spouses smile. There are rewards, and for all of you fighting cancer, you can find them.