

Susan G. Komen for the Cure, El Paso Affiliate

Survivor Spotlight: Elizabeth Zaborowski

Diagnosed in 2008 with Stage I Breast Cancer, now 45-year-old Elizabeth Zaborowski worried about how she would deliver the news to her two children. She did not want them to worry about her. Upon her diagnosis, her priorities immediately shifted, and she began to realize what is truly important while minimizing trivial things. Reflecting today on those moments, Elizabeth recalls that the physical pain of her diagnosis and subsequent radiation treatment and surgeries did not compare to the agony she felt in telling her children. However, she found the strength to tell them with a thankful attitude to God that He gave her the cancer because she knew she was a strong person.

Elizabeth began receiving mammograms at the age of 40 and had no family history of the disease. Having felt a lump in her breast, she visited her doctor to confirm the news. The lump was confirmed through an ultrasound, which was recommended due to her dense breast tissue. She was also tested for the BRCA-2 gene and tested positive. With this news, Elizabeth opted for a comprehensive treatment regimen, consisting of a lumpectomy, hysterectomy oophorectomy, bilateral mastectomy, radiation, and reconstructive surgery. She took what she considers a doctorate level crash course in breast cancer, aiming to be as knowledgeable and informed as possible in order to make the decisions that would be best for her. This remains one of her strongest pieces of advice to other women facing breast cancer-- to be as well-informed and self-educated about the disease as possible.

The outpouring of support from family, friends, and coworkers made Elizabeth feel very blessed as she went through her treatments. A speech language pathologist, she recounts the prayers and support her coworkers showed as she went through countless surgeries and appointments over a period of four years. Having the support of her family and coworkers made her experience easier to bear and gave her much comfort. She was also very fortunate to have her husband attend every single appointment with her. Elizabeth had daily radiation appointments at a certain time and got to know the other women scheduled during her visits. She recalls the friendly atmosphere of the techs at the treatment center, as well as the strength she shared with the other women with whom she got to know as they all went through treatments.

Her advice to women currently facing breast cancer is to know that there is hope for surviving with a good quality of life. Keep hope that you can make it through and keep those you love close to you. Look to others for support and know that if they can get through it that you can too. Lastly, she emphasizes that knowledge is power and that learning as much as possible about the disease helps to empower people with information and knowledge at the point at which they feel the most powerless.

Elizabeth's story is one of inspiration and hope. She continues to see her doctor every six months, but breast cancer is no longer the first thing she thinks of when she wakes up. Her cancer is no longer driving the train in her daily life. 2012 brings with it a sense of control for Elizabeth. This is her first year since 2008 to feel "normal" and to have life resume as it was. She is back to work and now cancer free. She plans to participate in next month's 20th Anniversary Komen El Paso Race for the Cure and will be there walking as a survivor, surrounded by her loving and supportive friends and family.