

Write it Down... I Will Survive

By Ann Cipperly

With a new baby, Kristeen Knight was enjoying life, as she was dreaming of plans with her son and family. At 31 years of age, Kristeen had not thought about health issues or having to cope with cancer.

When she began having pain in her left breast, she wasn't concerned at first since she was still breastfeeding her son. After a bloody nipple discharge, Kristeen knew she had to see a doctor. She never felt a lump, and the doctor thought it was mastitis, a common condition for nursing mothers' treated with antibiotics.

She finished the antibiotics but was still having pain. When she returned to the doctor, he ordered a mammogram that came back "suspicious" and sent her to a surgeon.

Kristeen began to worry when the surgeon wanted her to have a biopsy. Not having health insurance caused more concern, as she wondered how she and her husband would afford to pay for it and treatment, if needed.

She told Colleen Alsobrook, RN, breast health navigator, at East Alabama Medical Center, that she needed a biopsy, but didn't have the funds to pay for it. "She said not to worry about it," remembers Kristeen, "that we will figure out how to pay for it later. You won't believe how much that calmed me down."



Kristeen Knight

Surgery revealed stage 3B cancer. After a double mastectomy, Kristeen started chemotherapy and then radiation treatments for 40 straight days. Her husband was a huge support. After working the night shift, he would sit with her while she had chemo.

When Kristeen learned the cancer was estrogen-positive, she sadly decided to have a complete hysterectomy. She had always wanted to have three children, but she had a strong desire to do whatever it took to live to be with her son and her husband.

She became a part of Mind/Body/Wellness, a support group at the EAMC Cancer Center. She is also an advocate for Living Beyond Breast Cancer.

One of the activities in the support group was writing a letter to the cancer. In the letter, Kristeen poured her heart out, saying, "You destroyed so much during your visit. You took all of my future babies with you. You took my self-esteem, optimism and health."

Near the end of the letter she added, "I want to thank you for making me realize my own self worth. I never truly utilized my gifts and talents. Now I know what I am supposed to use my life for. My life is to help anyone who is in need. I am to be the voice for those without words. I am going to tell everyone of your visit and destruction."

Last fall at the EAMC Foundation's Wine, Women and Shoes, Kristeen had the chance to go on stage as a cancer survivor and in appreciation for the Breast Health Fund that had assisted her in receiving a mammogram and biopsy.

"It was awesome and inspiring," says Kristeen, "because they are helping women, and I have always wanted to help others."

"I love the East Alabama Medical Center," adds Kristeen. "They saved my life." ■