
BRCA JOURNAL: CHAPTER FOUR

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(Chapter 4 of 5. Read part 5 [here](#))

Three years ago, I received the results of my BRCA test and found out that I have the breast cancer gene known as BRCA2, which leaves me with a high risk of breast and ovarian cancer. Though I had suspected I had a higher risk because of my family history, the test confirmed it. Since then, I have met with numerous doctors and have learned about the different types of screenings and preventative options available.

Last year I had a prophylactic hysterectomy to prevent ovarian cancer from ever developing and made the decision to have a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy to protect me from my risk of breast cancer. I have stuck with my decision and am scheduled to go in for surgery next week. I am certain that it is the right decision for me, but I am not looking forward to the surgery or the recovery process.

I made the decision to have the surgery months ago, but I am nervous. I try to stay busy so I don't think about it too much. I am not sure that I am prepared to see the results when I wake up from surgery. I am scared. A wise man (my husband) told me, "Nothing is going to prepare you for seeing yourself the first time after surgery. So know it's going to be tough but that you will get used to it and get past it." With his support, I know that I will.

While I have also received an enormous amount of support from friends and family, I have been amazed by the generosity of several women, some whom I had never even met before. These women opened up to me about their experiences with mastectomies – and on several occasions opened up their shirts to share their results. Holly, Laura, Michele, Christina, GERALYN, Lauren, Melissa, Lindsey, Alyssa and Patsy, by sharing your stories, each one of you made the process easier for me. Thank you all. I will pay it forward, I promise.

I found two organizations to be valuable partners in my journey. Bright Pink, www.brightpink.org, a wonderful organization that supports women at high risk of breast and ovarian cancer, was a huge help. Its founder, Lindsey Avner, spoke to me about her experience and introduced me to a woman my age who had recently had the surgery. The tips and reassurance I received from them helped me plan and made the

process endurable. I also found the message board at FORCE, www.facingourrisk.org ,to be a tremendous resource.

So, with one week left until D-Day, I am stocking up on groceries, freezing meals, organizing the pantry, making up the guest bedroom, typing out the kids' schedules, lining up babysitters, getting an oil change, taking the kids for haircuts, cleaning the house, getting my hair cut and colored, indulging in massages, looking forward to a night away with my husband, getting my nails done, working out daily, stretching, buying button-down pajamas, drinking lots of water and trying to remember to breathe... I am healthy, after all, and just doing what I can to stay that way.

I originally agreed to write these journals because it was suggested that I might help someone who is going through a similar experience. In fact, when I first tested positive for the BRCA2 gene, I found another personal story in the *New York Times*, ["Cancer Free at 33, but Weighing a Mastectomy,"](#) to be insightful. I was comforted by the fact that someone else had walked a similar path and had felt many of the emotions that I was feeling. It validated the experience for me. However, I hope that in the process of sharing my experience, I have not scared anyone away from being tested for the breast cancer gene.

The decisions that I have made are right for me and my family, but there are other options. Cancer can be survivable if it is caught early. The American Cancer Society has recommended that women at high risk of breast cancer begin annual mammograms earlier and have an MRI once a year. A simple blood test and ultrasound can help catch ovarian cancer. Insurance companies usually cover the costs of those tests for BRCA patients. So you can protect yourself without surgery. Knowledge is power.

Michelle McBride lives in Chicago with her husband and three children. Michelle has helped make SU2C a reality and been instrumental in aligning SU2C with MLB. She sits on the boards of two cancer research foundations: Little Heroes and the Noreen Fraser Foundation. Michelle dedicates this piece to her husband and three kids.