

October 2024

Kim W.
Radiation Dermatitis Testimonial



October 19, 2023, at 8:26 am...the time that forever changed my life. That morning at 7 am, I went for my annual mammogram. Everything felt normal to me, so I thought I was nervous, as I always am, but I left feeling okay, just waiting for those results to show in my patient portal. Now, a little history: I missed my 2022 mammogram due to my dad's health decreasing quickly and having to put him in a memory care facility, which he quickly ended up in hospice and passed away in early 2023. It had been a stressful year, and I just forgot until I looked at my calendar and was like, crap, you missed your mammogram. That phone call at 8:26 am on October 19 was the Sherman Hospital Center for Breast Health scheduler. Nothing had even shown up in my portal, but she informed me the radiologist who read my scans wanted me to come in for a 3D mammogram and diagnostic ultrasound. There was something abnormal on my mammogram. She couldn't explain more, but I was now in panic mode and wished I could get in before November 2 for this appointment. After hanging up the phone, I called my husband and told him what was going on as I was sobbing at my desk at work as my head was spinning. At about 11 am that day, I got the notification that I had an update in my patient portal. I read the mammogram results and got too architectural distortion. I then made the mistake for the last time, and that was to start surfing the internet for what architectural distortion in a mammogram meant and went into complete panic mode. I reached out to the Sherman Hospital Center for Breast Health and spoke with Michelle, a nurse navigator. She was calming but knew I was still beyond nervous. She assured me I would be able to walk away with some answers from my appointment on November 2nd. In the next two weeks I went through many emotions. Why couldn't I feel this? Why me? What will my family do if this is terminal? How do I tell my kids? How do I tell my mom, who had just buried my dad nine months ago? Oh, and we had gifted our children an amazing vacation to Punta Cana, leaving December 28 as their graduation Christmas gift. My mind went to a very bad spot for a few days. After confiding in my dear friend and husband, we decided not to say anything to our kids and family until we better understood what was going on.

November 2, 2023...I am beyond nervous, but have kept myself busy with work and preparing for our family vacation in December. My husband and I sat nervously in the waiting area. I did the 3D mammogram, and the radiologist said to move forward with the diagnostic ultrasound. Following the ultrasound, they told me I could get dressed and sit in the waiting area, not with my husband, but with others having the same procedure as me. I finally met Michelle, the nurse navigator for the Breast Health Center. She came in and escorted me to a small office with a monitor, a couple of chairs, and lots of information on the wall about breast cancer. Michelle asked if someone was with me that she could bring back...at that moment, I knew that the mass they had seen had not gone away, and we were about to get bad news. My husband, Michelle, and the Doctor of Radiology all came together. He confirms its architectural

distortion, only about 8mm in size, but architectural distortion is 95% cancer. Michelle immediately hugs me through my tears and says We Got This! I will forever be grateful to her! She says I have the name of a wonderful surgeon can I make an appointment for you? I immediately said yes, as I needed my life and could not bear to wait very long. I have an appointment for a biopsy on November 15 and with Dr. Baer, an amazing surgeon, on November 22. Michelle said if you decide to go to the internet, please only go to the American Cancer Society website. It is the most real information! At this point, I also decided to turn off notifications to my portal as I wanted to speak with doctors who could explain what I was reading, as I didn't always understand everything!

At this point, I know we need to tell our kiddos, parents and I need to talk to my co-workers. We spoke with the kids together, with our son on the phone and my daughter sitting with us. We reassured them both that the doctor of radiology said it was small and we caught it early. I was nervous as my son was away at school, and I wanted to make sure he had someone to talk to as we were close. My daughter kept her stoic face and didn't say much. My mom was the toughest to talk to that day, but we kept it very lighthearted and reassured her it would be okay. Leaving her that day was tough as she had only herself, and I have been her rock since my dad passed away. The next conversation was with my staff. This had to be done as we are a mighty team of 8! Three days after my biopsy we have one of our biggest events of the year, An Almost Winter Day and Village Tree Lighting. As one who never took sick days and never asked them for help, this was tough as after the biopsy, I was coming back to work, but with restrictions that would make things tough in the area, I led for the special event. They all completely understood and were very supportive. They knew me better and made sure I had one of the adult volunteers with me at the event so I would not do more than I was supposed to. I had my first moment of crying over what if this is my last.... The Village Tree Lighting is always so special to me, and this year, we had added so much in decorations, and it looked so magical...yet I couldn't. I walked Santa from An Almost Winter Day, as I have done for 20 years, to the Tree Lighting and had to walk away. The tears were just streaming, and no one outside of the people I mentioned knew.

November 21...The Doctor of Radiology calls me with my biopsy results... I am sorry, Mrs. Wascher, but the biopsy results came back positive for cancer. You have invasive ductal and lobular cells showing in the biopsy results. We can tell you it is probably stage one or early stage two, and that can't be confirmed until a biopsy of lymph nodes during surgery. It was a Nottingham Grade 2, which I was told is typical. It has the lowest growth rate, which is 5% - 10%, and is HER2 negative, which means it will respond to treatment! That was a lot to hear. Mind you, this is a workday. I take this phone call in my office, hang up and start crying. I try to call my husband and it goes straight to voicemail. I look out my office doors and can see on the camera monitor that the college student waiting to interview me about my job is waiting in the lobby. I find the only staff member in the office two days before Thanksgiving, and I just cry and lose it. I told him I had just received the dreaded phone call. He is not the staff member I would expect this from, and he jumps out of his chair and just hugs me. I pull myself back together, meet with the college student for the next hour, and share the joys my career has brought me for the past 31 years. After that I begin the process of letting people know in that small circle I talked about earlier. I was not ready for more than that to know. That night felt like I was again put into the nesting process like I was about to give birth. Preparing my house and my job to be out for who knows how long. My lists started that night of what needed to get done! I went to bed exhausted and slept soundly as I knew the diagnosis and the results from the biopsy were as positive as they could be.

November 22.... I met with Dr. Baer, Nurse Navigator Kim, and a couple of other nurses. I immediately felt a sense of welcome when they took my husband and me back to the exam room, and I knew I had the right person, no need for a second opinion! The Nurse Navigator sat down and explained everything to us. What were our next steps, and what I needed to be prepared for with Dr. Baer? My head was spinning; thank goodness my husband was with me to take notes. I had a few questions, but importantly, I scheduled surgery ASAP. We have a vacation that we leave for on December 28, and I cannot disappoint our children. She assured me she would work her magic and make that happen! She said Dr. Baer is the most respected doctor, and when she says jump, people say how high and what can I do for you, Dr. Baer. After meeting with us for over 45 minutes, Dr. Baer came in, and I figured this would be quick, and we would be on our way to celebrate the Thanksgiving holiday. To my surprise, Dr. Baer spent over an hour with me explaining everything, from genetic testing, surgery procedure, recovery time, type of surgery, and treatment plan, if everything went according to plan. She was thorough yet considerate and able to make me feel comfortable to move forward. However, I always seem to leave these appointments now with more unanswered questions from tests they need to do prior to surgery. So, I did the genetic bloodwork to confirm did I carried the BRACA gene or one of seventy other genes. This was very scary for me as I didn't want to pass this awful thing called cancer onto my children. It would also determine if they did a mastectomy or lumpectomy. The results would take about two weeks to come back. I also needed to do an MRI to ensure the cancer was not on my right side too. So, I left my appointment knowing Kim was going to get my surgery scheduled, and while we were there, she scheduled my MRI for the day after Thanksgiving. Kim is another angel I will never forget.

November 24.... It's MRI day! Dr. Baer and her staff attempted to explain to me the MRI procedure, but I was in no way ready for the mental and emotional toll it would take on me. The staff was a little grumpy when I arrived as it was the day after Thanksgiving and no one wants to work that day, but here they were to do an MRI to check for possible breast cancer on the right side and confirm what was on the left side. When I get in the MRI room, I start to panic a bit as this looks nothing like I thought it would, and I am starting to get scared for the first time. They asked me what kind of music I would like to listen to during the MRI. I said 80's rock or country. Well, I go to get on the table and put on the headphones, and it is country music. As the table I am on slides into the MRI machine, and I am face down looking at the bottom of the MRI tube, the last song I listened to with my Dad in hospice right before he died comes on. I immediately press the button for them to stop as I have just truly experienced something I didn't expect, and I need a minute. They came in and asked if I was okay. I explained, and the one tech came over and hugged me and said he's here with you to protect you. You Got This! I cried for the next 45 minutes, the entire procedure, staring face down at the bottom of the MRI tube, just knowing I had to be okay because my dad was with me.

We celebrated Thanksgiving with my sister-in-law's family! She has been a true rock for me through all of this. I don't know what I would do without her. She greeted me with some comfy slippers; she knew I was a slipper fan and wanted me to always be comfortable for the next few weeks. We also celebrated our Friendsgiving with our neighbors that Sunday. My one neighbor sent me a text saying Bri and I seemed quiet, and everything was okay. I knew I had to share with the group of about 10 homes what was going on. I knew we might need their help in the upcoming weeks, and there are always holiday parties that I might not be able to make

because of surgery. There were many tears publicly with me, but their heartfelt messages were beyond loving and caring. We knew it was the holidays and didn't want to burden people with asking for help. So, they did the next best thing and got us a bunch of food gift cards we could use. The next thing I know, my high school football moms put together a meal plan for us for the week after surgery! I was so overwhelmed with the blessings we were receiving.

November 28...The amazing Nurse Navigator Kim calls me with my surgery date. December 11. That way, I could go back to work probably on December 18 and leave on my much-needed family vacation on December 28! She also had the great news that there were no visible signs of cancer on my right side. Usually, tumors at least double in size after they are poked from a biopsy because they get angry. Mine had only grown to 1.5cm, which was great news! I now only needed to pass a chest X-ray and stay healthy for the next few weeks. Kim was so positive on the phone that I finally walked into my Board Meeting that night, knowing some answers.

The next few weeks again felt like nesting as we prepared for the holidays, vacation, and surgery. I worked longer hours at work to try and keep myself two weeks ahead at work. We were at the start of budget season, and I didn't want to get behind by being off work. I had worked out with Kim that Dr. Baer would let me come back to work on December 14 if I was not taking any pain medication, and I felt up to just sitting at my desk. I was also preparing myself to celebrate my dad's first birthday since he had passed. The day before surgery, we celebrated that morning at my dad's grave with a shot of beer, candy cigarettes, and a few kind words. The three things he craved and asked for most in the last year of his life. My husband and I went home that day to get things ready for the week, and while I was doing dishes, the cardinal was sitting on our neighbor's fence just staring at me...probably Dad telling me it would be okay.

December 11...The morning went really slow as I just wanted time to fly so I could start the eviction process of the mass growing in me. I arrived at the hospital, and all the staff greeted me like they knew me forever and prepped me for the first part of the day. I was wheeled into nuclear medicine, thinking they were just going to do a scan to find the clip that had been left in during the biopsy to find the tumor for surgery. I was once again surprised that I was facing injections in a very unwanted location of nuclear fluid to travel to my lymph nodes. That was beyond painful and so uncomfortable. I felt completely violated and wanted to just cry. I get back to the room about 1 ½ hours later, and they are ready to prep me for surgery. Mind you, I have not had surgery since a D&C fifteen years ago. So, the staff were super considerate of me and took that into account when giving me medication. Just prior to surgery, Dr. Baer comes in with a big smile on her face, saying the BRACA test finally came back, and it was negative! Boom! Another unknown finally answered. Now was time to wheel me into surgery to evict this awfulness and take out lymph nodes and biopsy them in hopes of continuing with just a lumpectomy, not a mastectomy. Two hours later, I woke up in recovery slowly and started to cry that I just wanted to go home. They brought my husband back to sit with me, and I was fortunate to learn from him the nuclear dye got to two levels of lymph nodes, and they came back clean. Dr. Baer only had to remove 2 cm of breast tissue, and I could go home to begin the surgical healing process. I never once had to take pain medication as they used so much numbing solution. I was ready to physically heal, but the thoughts immediately crept in of it's gone now, but when will it return! This is a thought I live with daily still almost one year later!

December 28...we have survived Christmas! The first Christmas without my dad, but know he was and continues to be with me as I heal. When I visited Dr. Baer that day, she told me I was healing tremendously and to keep up the work. She released me to travel, but no submersion in the pool until January 2. I could totally do that! She also said there is one more test I am waiting on the results for: your Onyka score. The likelihood of the cancer returning with or without chemo. What?!?! I thought we were headed to radiation. Okay, so I'll wait until we get that score, and I can move forward. The amazing Kim, however, had complete faith and scheduled me with a radiation oncologist for January 10. I also learned upon our return from vacation and a visit to Dr. Baer on January 9 that my Onyka type had come back in the range of rate of return and would not benefit from chemotherapy, so it was on to radiation! I was done waiting for the test results!

It was time to make me look like a glow-worm to make eviction permanent! At about the same time, my daughter's pitching coach, who is like family, told my husband and daughter at one of her lessons that her husband, Mike, would like the opportunity to talk to me about Silverlon. Mike is a Regional Sales Manager for Bravida Medical, which manufactures and sells Silverlon throughout the world. It's a product they had developed and were doing research on with cancer patients all over the country. It was already being used on burn victims from the military. I had to say I had seen some of the burn reactions from radiation, and I was frightened by how my skin might look. In addition to the other side effects of radiation, I was not looking forward to this. So, when Mike called, I was like, YES, I am in! I immediately gave him my radiation oncologist's name and contact information. Mike called me a few days later, and luck would have it, he met with Dr. Smith before I did and explained the Silverlon product and what I needed to do with it. I got to my first appointment with Dr. Smith's team and completely knew these are my people, and let's get to getting me glowing to keep cancer from coming back. There were a few trial radiations and a couple of visits before the real thing started. Dr. Smith's team explained to me how to use the Silverlon dressing. I was like, okay, what really is this going to do? As the weeks went on, and I would see one of Dr. Smith's nurses and Dr. Smith each Friday, they were completely blown away by how well my skin did with treatment. I was diligent with wearing the Silverlon all day, every day except when I slept, showered and during radiation therapy. I used that along with the cream recommended by Dr. Smith. But time and again, they would tell me the creams only help a little; this has to be something to do with the Silverlon. The worst I experienced was now what felt like a permanent tan line on the area they were radiating. I was waiting for the shoe to drop, but just like that, I was experiencing radiation with no issues!

I met my oncologist on January 23. I started the 60-month process of taking Tamoxifen on February 16, 2024. That has not been fun, but it is better than anything else. I have experienced some side effects of radiation but never a skin burn, and I give all that credit to the Silverlon! As soon as I went for that appointment on February 16, 2024, I felt a sense of emptiness! The people encouraging me daily, including Mike from Bravida, were now gone, as they were no longer needed in this part of my journey, and I would see my oncologist quarterly and not see anyone else until October 2024.

Words cannot express my gratitude to everyone at Bravida and the Silverlon product for Radiation Dermatitis! From my original conversation with Mike Waldron to the marketing staff, you have treated me with dignity and grace! I can always count on a friendly email or phone

conversation. When you go for your annual mammogram and don't feel anything, you don't expect to get that callback. Then, when you get not great biopsy results of cancer, the reality sinks in. However, I could not have asked for a better team from radiology, surgeon, radiation oncologist, oncologist, and the Bravida Team to be upfront, honest, caring, and supportive along the journey! Has the journey been easy...no, there have been physical, mental, and emotional challenges, but without this amazing team, I would not have been able to get to this point. I carry two questions in my head daily...Is everything okay? When will the cancer return? But right now, I do my best to take things by the moment, the hour, and the day. When I first got my diagnosis, we had booked that amazing vacation to celebrate our kids' graduations from high school and college in 2024. My son never got to walk the stage for his high school graduation in spring 2020 due to COVID-19. I always wondered what is going to make college graduation a challenge and high school graduation a challenge for my daughter. Well...my second goal since diagnosis was making sure I was at their graduations on May 4 and May 25, and that was achieved through successful radiation and now daily hormones. I have also heard the excitement in my son's voice as he landed his first big-boy job after college graduation. Days after my diagnosis, I watched as my daughter signed her NCAA Letter of Intent to play college softball and attend an amazing school to study nursing. I have seen her off to college! Now my next goal will be to watch her take the pitching mound in her first college game! None of this is possible without You...Bravida Medical is part of my team!