

# RESILIENT *like mom*

**September 8<sup>th</sup>, 1998.** A date my family will never forget. We all refer to this day as bitter-sweet. Sweet because on the surgical floor of Baptist Hospital, I was born. Bitter because immediately after, a surgical team went in and confirmed that my 27-year-old Mom was diagnosed with Breast Cancer for the first time. **The doctors say if she hadn't been pregnant, they probably wouldn't have found it in time.** She always said she got to give birth to her guardian angel because of that. But because it was in her bloodstream, they called her a "ticking time bomb." After a lumpectomy, radiation, and two different types of chemo, including the "red devil," they announced she was cancer free.

Growing up, I didn't know much about the cancer. She didn't talk about it much, even now I don't know a lot of the details. We attended many walks and any time we saw an event we could go to, we would try to attend. My Junior year of High School, I walked over to my dad's house like I always did, to wait for her to get off work (while divorced, they still remained friends). But this time, she was already there, waiting on me. I go inside and they both sit me down and tell me the news. She has been diagnosed a second time. She had more chemo and this time she got a double mastectomy. By the grace of God, she was once again told she was cancer free.

Three years later, my Sophomore year of college, I was getting ready for work when she once again came home early. She told me there was a chance it was back again. We had no confirmation, but the doctors were pretty sure. I was devastated, so I didn't go to work that day. Not long after that it was confirmed that she had **stage 4, Metastatic Breast Cancer.** It was now in her liver, bones, and the one that scared us the most, her brain. The doctors described it as a sponge with coffee grounds all in it. My mom was the oldest of six kids. In 2006 her youngest brother John passed away from brain cancer. That is why the brain scared us so much. We were told she would battle cancer for the rest of her life and would never be cancer free again. That being said, they told us she could still live to be very old. With her history, my reaction was, **"she'll beat it, she always does. She'll be okay, she has to be."**

After looking into her history, the doctors determined her best bet was clinical trials, but the first thing was the brain. She had radiation treatment until the cancer was small enough that they were comfortable to leave it. Then she started a trial. It really did help her and all of the spots were either shrinking or at least not progressing. She had regular scans to monitor the brain, and eventually she had to go back to the radiation. Because of the nature of a trial, once she started radiation, she could not go back to the trial because the results would be skewed. This really upset us, because it was working and now she can't have it.

Again, once the radiation was done she went on a new trial before having to go back for more radiation. This was a round and around battle for three years. **She never slowed down.** She still worked, if not on site remotely and at least half a day, she was doing the accounting for my church, and she was the Sunday school director. As time went on it was harder and harder for her to do those things. I slowly started taking on the church responsibilities when she couldn't.

She started to realize she wouldn't be here forever and started trying to prepare us for it. But we weren't having it. I was still convinced everything would be fine, and had plans for after graduation. I was going to get a job and buy a house and take her with me. I was going to take care of her into her 90s. I didn't care if I got married and had a family of my own, she was going to stay with me. She loved that idea. She knew it wasn't likely and would take a miracle.

She began finding she had mobility problems. It was hard to stand and walk. It started when she had trouble getting out of her car. It was low to the ground and it was hard on her. Then as she was walking up the stairs to work one day, her legs gave out and she fell. I started driving her to work in the morning when she felt like going and either Nana or I would pick her up after. Over time these problems got worse and worse. **We started taking trips to make memories.** Every weekend we went somewhere new. **She wanted me to have as many memories as possible.** I am beyond thankful for that.

But then one weekend she said we should rest and I totally agreed. The next weekend we would go see the superman statue. She loved superman. But things changed. June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2019, I got home and saw my dad's car in the driveway. I walk into her room and see her sitting on her bed, my dad is standing next to her and my Nana is at the foot of the bed. After a second or two, Nana starts crying. Immediately my stomach drops. She leaves the room as my mom reaches out for me. She then said the doctors say there isn't anything else they can do. She isn't eligible for anymore trials, and her body has all the radiation it can take. They estimate she has two months. I immediately fall to pieces. She wraps her arms around me and I will never forget the words that came out of her mouth - **"are you okay?"**

If that does not perfectly describe my Mom, Toni Poole, I have no clue what does. She is dying with cancer and she asks ME if I'M okay? She was always worried about us, the people she cared about, especially me. Never herself. But that is who she always was and she never changed for a minute. My parents consoled me and we tried to make the most of what time she had. I called work and they told me I could take all the time I needed and when I was ready to come back, I had my job. I became her fulltime caretaker with my Nana's help. Nana took care of the medical stuff, the doctors and she would take care of hospice when it was time.

After we called hospice, everything happened so fast. The original two months became one, then weeks, then days. Eventually they said she had 24 hours. On Tuesday, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019 she passed away surrounded by friends and family. In that moment, I felt something inside of me break, something I know will never heal. **I not only lost my Mom, but my best friend too.** We did everything together. My idea of a good night was to go home and watch movies with her. I would give anything for another night like that. I can honestly say there wasn't a part of me or my life that she didn't know about. People say they have never seen a closer mother daughter pair than us, and I have to say I agree.

Because of this being such a crucial part of my life, and it literally starting the day I was born, I feel like I was born to fight against this monster. **I refuse to sit and let it hurt another person, whether they be patient, family, friend, anyone.** It has done enough damage and now, I'm mad. We all are. This is why this fight is so important. We can't let it hurt anyone else. We just can't.

**Emily Poole**, Daughter of Breast Cancer Survivor and Fighter