

EMS Cares: Spotlight Courtney Parker



AS A HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER AND GYMNASTICS COACH, MY LIFE WAS CENTERED ON MENTORING YOUTH. IN APRIL 2017, DURING A STATE CHAMPIONSHIP, I FOUND A LUMP IN MY BREAST, INITIALLY DISMISSING IT AS MASTITIS FROM BREASTFEEDING. AFTER ANTIBIOTICS FAILED, I SOUGHT MEDICAL ADVICE, BUT WAS TOLD IT WAS LIKELY BREASTFEEDING-RELATED AND ADVISED TO FOLLOW UP IN TWO MONTHS.

BY JULY, THE LUMP HAD GROWN SIGNIFICANTLY. TESTS REVEALED A HER2+ TUMOR IN MY LEFT BREAST AND A TRIPLE-NEGATIVE TUMOR IN MY RIGHT. I HOPED A LUMPECTOMY WOULD ALLOW ME TO CONTINUE BREASTFEEDING MY 13-MONTH-OLD, BUT THE DIAGNOSIS DEMANDED A FAR MORE INTENSE JOURNEY.

I ENDURED 18 ROUNDS OF CHEMOTHERAPY, A DOUBLE MASTECTOMY IN JANUARY 2018, AND A SEPTIC SHOCK HOSPITALIZATION THAT DELAYED RADIATION. AFTER 28 RADIATION TREATMENTS, I FACED ONGOING COMPLICATIONS, INCLUDING RECONSTRUCTION ISSUES AND LINGERING CHEMO SIDE EFFECTS. IN JUNE 2020, MY BRCA1 STATUS LED TO A FULL HYSTERECTOMY. EVEN MINOR SYMPTOMS NOW TRIGGER FEARS OF RECURRENCE.

DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES, I FOUND PURPOSE IN SHARING MY STORY. I'VE CONNECTED WITH AYA GROUPS, ONCOLOGISTS, AND SURVIVORS TO OFFER SUPPORT AND RAISE AWARENESS. IN 2018, I FOUNDED THE STAGE 3 SCHOLARSHIP FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS IMPACTED BY CANCER, AWARDING OVER \$8,000 TO DATE.

THROUGH ADVOCACY AND STORYTELLING, I AIM TO INSPIRE HOPE AND REMIND OTHERS THAT EVEN IN HARDSHIP, WE CAN CREATE MEANINGFUL CHANGE.

