



Interview Transcript: Kelly

Kelly has worked as a personal support worker, helping in elderly care but now is a certified fitter (of prosthetics and bras) for women who have had mastectomies and lumpectomies.

Type of Cancer: Hodgkin's Lymphoma, stage 2A and 17 years later she was diagnosed with breast cancer

Age at Diagnosis: 11 and 28

Treatment: For lymphoma she had a splenectomy and 36 treatments of radiation. For breast cancer she had Lumpectomy, 6 rounds of chemo, and two single mastectomies.

Date of Interview: March 2010

My name's Kelly Davidson; I'm 30 years old. At age 11 I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's disease and then at age 28 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I've gone through 36 radiation treatments, six treatments of chemotherapy, a lumpectomy, a splenectomy and two mastectomies. And I'm still here today.

Growing up with cancer

Being 11 I was kind of like, "oh, I'm sick and yeah, I get to miss school. I don't have to do homework or anything like that." So it never really came to me as, "oh my gosh I have cancer," because I didn't think of it that way. It was just, "I had a cold," was kind of what it felt like. And I think as I got older it really impacted me more because I felt that I'm different. Once I started to understand, you know, listening to my parents, what I had gone through, the tests and things like that... so I found it got harder as I got older, compared to when I was 11 and first found out about it. And you always have the whole — everyone holds it over your head, "oh, you've had cancer." You always have that title.

I sort of rebelled too, I think. I smoked and I drank, I mean all young people do but you know, I did it and then you always get the, "oh, well you've had cancer, are you sure you should be doing that?" So that was hard once I got older, once I recognized what I'd gone through, and you just kind of tend to rebel.

Breast cancer: The hardest part

I would have to say probably the mastectomies, because going in, it didn't really bother me, and I was just like, "ok, they have to get them removed, it's not an option, and if it's between my life and just having my breasts removed, obviously the answer is easy." That was hard, waking up, even the second one, even though I knew what to expect, looking down and seeing the bandages and feeling not that there.

With the first one, I'm not balanced and clothes were hard to wear and stuff like that. Unfortunately, society has made it out to be that that's part of being a woman, is having

voluptuous breasts and stuff like long hair, so you do feel like part of your femininity has gone. And especially being in a relationship, even though you know that person loves and cares about you no matter what, it's difficult because you don't wear your prosthesis or if you don't have reconstruction, you're flat, so you don't look at yourself the same way. And then on top of being on medication that — for myself, I'm on medication that puts me in menopause for five years, so hot flashes, and then, you don't have those same feelings that you do, like your emotions aren't the same.

So it's just all really overwhelming and it is hard at times, but my family just make is so much easier for me and my support and friends and my boyfriend, they don't look at me any different just because of that, and I've always said that they don't define who I am. I got a tattoo over my scar (which you can kind of see the top), and I'm going to get the other side done, so that was kind of my — instead of getting reconstruction, it was my badge of honour. It was like, you know what, I beat it and this is the proof that I have and I don't need my breasts and I don't need long hair to be identified as a woman. That's how I feel on the inside and that's what matters.

Support

No matter anything during your course of treatments or surgeries, it's all difficult to some degree because it's part of you that's being taken away, or you know that your life's not going to be the same, or your body's not going to look the same. But at the end of it all, if you can still be alive and still be here to enjoy what life has to offer, then all that other stuff will seem like a breeze at the end. It's difficult, I know, for some people, but if they can find humour or try and go out — support groups, find them, go out for them, they are the best thing that you will ever come across and you do need that. Especially if you don't have family support or friend support, but with those support groups you have people that get it, so that was one thing I never sought while I was going through treatment, I waited until the end, so that was something I wish I would have done more of.

Planning for the future

I think I was so angry at the fact that I was diagnosed a second time with cancer, that death and all that didn't really hit me until after everything. And I think that really made the difference about marriage and children and all that stuff too, is, you know, do I want to bring a family into the world where I don't know if I might be here in 10, 20, 30 years? Do I want to get married and make that commitment where I don't know what my future holds?

And I know everybody, whether you have a cancer diagnosis or not, you don't know what your future holds, but you always kind of have that cloud over your head where, you know, you go to the doctor and you've had a test and you're like, "is it going to be back or is it going to be something new?" You really try hard not to think about it because you don't want it to consume your life, you don't want cancer to be your whole world, but it is something, it is a reality that for the rest of my life I am going to have to think about it and it is something that's going to be there. But I just say to myself, "I don't need to dwell on it every day, it can be in the back of my mind," and be prepared for whatever does happen. But I can't think every day that this is what could happen or that it is going to happen.

Finding my strength

I don't think I knew myself that I was strong. My family always... they were always, "oh, she's been through it once so she can get through it again, she's strong," but I didn't really believe

that going through it at first. I'm like, "but I'm not strong." You know, I do have my moments where I just want to, like, punch a wall, you know. But after I was done everything, I've really also, on top of being stronger, I advocate a lot more for myself. I don't keep things in as much, I was a lot more introverted before, kept a lot of things in, now I'm out there. If I want to do something, I do it. If I want to say something to somebody I'll say it, I don't let it bother me, I just grab it and take hold and just do it. Just do it.