

# My Motivated Moment: Jennifer

*This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Announcer] What was the moment in time when things changed for you? What motivated you to move forward or take action? Welcome to My Motivated Moment, a podcast featuring young women bravely facing a breast cancer diagnosis or risk of breast cancer, and the people in their lives who support them. In these live recordings, you'll hear all about the moment everything changed for them. And how their experiences inspired them to become empowered advocates for their own health.

This powerful moment comes from Jennifer, who was first diagnosed with breast cancer at 27. She had to learn to advocate for herself...to ask for what she wanted and needed from her health care providers. With the support of her family, she took her health and her future firmly into her own hands and never gave up. Let's listen to Jennifer's journey and how she brought her brave... more than once.

[Jennifer] For as long as I can remember, I've always been a goal setter. I've always looked far into the future and planned everything out, what I wanted to accomplish in life and all the things that I wanted to do. In the summer of 2009, we were living in California. I had just finished my first year of practicing law, and I had been married for just three months. One night, while I was changing for bed, I felt a painful lump in my left breast and immediately panicked. I have extensive family history of breast cancer and my mind just immediately sunk to the worst.

I called up my husband to come to our room, to feel it, to see if he could feel what I was feeling. And in typical Jay fashion, he was like, "No, you come downstairs." And I was like, "No, I need you to come here now." And he was like, "No, Jen, just come down here. Like what do you want?" And I didn't want to make a big scene because my younger sister was visiting. I didn't want her to panic. So eventually he came upstairs, and I told him, "I felt something hard and painful and I wanted him to see if he felt it too." Sure enough, he did and he tried to convince me to just calm down. You know, it was a late Friday night. There was nothing we can do about it over the weekend, and we should just wait until Monday morning.

So, as difficult as that was, we got through the weekend, and Monday morning I fiercely started calling all my doctors to see who could see me first. And my primary care physician was able to get me in. I went to their office and she confirmed that she felt a suspicious lump as well, and they immediately sent me over to the Breast Center at our local hospital for a mammogram and an ultrasound. I remember so clearly standing there, getting the mammogram done. For those of you that haven't had the pleasure of a mammogram, you stand in this room with a machine looking straight ahead, and it is just compressing your breast in all different directions for imaging purposes.

And as I was standing there awkwardly, the kind nurse looked at me and said, "Oh honey, has that been happening a lot?" And I was like, "Has what been happening a lot?" And she was like "The blood?" And I looked down, panicked, and sure enough there was blood coming out of the nipple of the breast being squished. And I thought, "Well, this is just not good" and the tears

started. And she was like, "No, no, no, no, no, like it's okay. That happens." And I was like, "I don't think that happens." But she could tell I was panicking. So we finished up the mammogram and then we did the ultrasound and then they said the doctor wanted to redo all the images. So I thought, "Well, this is not [a] good sign."

And we repeated all the imaging again and then they were like, "Get dressed. We want to talk to you in the other room." And at that point it was just like white noise. I had no idea what was going on. I just knew it wasn't good. And so I said like, "You need to go get my husband from the waiting room and have him come in so that somebody is focused on what you're about to say." So they told us that they were seeing something suspicious and they wanted to do a core needle biopsy to confirm what it was and that we were going to have to come back to do that.

So we did the biopsy, and in the meantime I just kept trucking along and I went to work. And we were scheduled to go back to the hospital on Friday for the results, and I left on my lunch break and I said to my secretary, "See you in a bit. I'll be right back." I thought I was coming back to work. And we went to the hospital and we were sitting and we're waiting and we're waiting. Eventually, they took my mom and I into the back room and we were still waiting for my husband to get there. And as we were waiting, unbeknownst to me, he was in the hall talking to the doctor. The doctor just swung the door open, kind of like looked up from the folder in his hand, and said, "So, it's cancer."

Again, just white noise. I couldn't process. I just...I know a lot of things were said and told to us, but I had no idea what was being said. Obviously, I didn't go back to work that day, and we spent the afternoon at the hospital getting more tests done. The whole process was just incredibly overwhelming, and it set off a whole series of doctors' appointments and additional tests. And we met with breast surgeons, and we met with plastic surgeons, and we met with oncologists, and we got recommendations from friends on who we should see. And we met with fertility specialists, and assembled a team, and in some way, shape, or form got ourselves together and decided we were going to be as aggressive as possible and do everything that we could because at the end of the day, I wanted to get back to the practice of law and I wanted to start my family and I just wanted my life to keep going.

I had a bilateral mastectomy, followed by six rounds of chemotherapy and reconstructive surgery, and was ready to move on with my life. I went back to work full-time. I kept practicing law and was hoping that we could watch the five years pass on by and start our family and just move on. After about four years, we moved here to the East Coast in the Maryland area, and Jay and I started talking about—it would soon be time to start a family. Sorry (weeping). At about the four-and-a-half-year mark, as we realized we needed to talk to specialists and sort of figure out what we needed to do and what precautions we should take, given my history, I felt another lump on my chest.

It was a tiny little lump right near my collarbone and I was certain that it had not been there the day before. Again, I called Jay to feel it and he was calm as always, and said, "I'm sure it's nothing. Like you just had your blood work done recently. Everything came back fine, but if it'll make you feel better, just call the doctor. Like go get it checked out." So I called the doctor. They got me in immediately because when you are a cancer survivor and you say you have a

new lump, they take that seriously. And so I went in and the doctor felt this tiny little lump, and he was like, "I really think it's nothing. There's no way. Your blood work came back normal. We should just watch it for a couple of months." And I just looked him dead in the eye and I was like, "Or what?" And he was like, "What do you mean 'or what'?" I'm like, "Watch it OR we do what?" He was like, "No, like that's my recommendation." I was like, "That's nice, but I'm not leaving your office until you send me for a full-body scan because I'm not going to sleep for a few months while I'm touching this thing every day wondering if it's growing."

So after a little bit more pushback, he finally agreed and sent me in for a full scan. And as it would turn out, the lump that I felt was in fact a tumor and it had two little friends also in my chest wall. And despite the fact that I'd had a bilateral mastectomy and chemotherapy, we learned in that moment that there's still a one percent chance that this beast comes back and we had no idea. And I was floored. The white noise came back. I had no idea what was going on. The thought of having to put myself through that all over again was unbearable. To go through surgery and chemo and recovery the first time is hard, but you don't really know what you're facing. When you know what you have to face, to have to talk yourself into that again is almost impossible. And the thought of having to relinquish that control and the ability to do the things that I want to do in life was so difficult.

In that moment, I felt like I didn't trust my medical team. They didn't believe that that lump was probably cancer. They thought that everything was fine. I just doubted that they knew what was best for me, and I connected with the team at Sharsheret, which is an organization that provides support for Jewish breast cancer patients and their families, who had provided us with support during the first journey. And they directed me to a second opinion clinic up in Baltimore. And we had all of my records shipped up there, and the doctors met with us for hours reviewing everything, talking about my first course of treatment, what their recommendations would be the second time around, and we left there.

And I decided to take control of situation again and we came back and I fired everybody. I cleared out the entire staff and hired all new doctors, and basically said, "But my surgery is already set, so I'm going to need you to make this work on my schedule." So I had surgery again. I lost my implants. I had to go through about 50 rounds of radiation where I went every day Monday to Friday, went to radiation and then went to work, because that's what I do. I keep going. And then I had 16 rounds of chemotherapy.

And the operating theory was that the first round of chemotherapy just didn't do its job. So I had to have a tougher, longer course of treatment. And I'll never forget the first day that I had my first cocktail where the drug itself is literally so toxic, this drug that they're about to push into my body, that the nurse who brought it over was in basically a hazmat suit just to carry the bag of drugs to insert into my IV. And I went through 16 rounds of chemo and then at the end I was able to have reconstructive surgery again. Throughout all of it, I just kind of kept on moving forward. And when I was going through chemo, because I needed something new to focus on and some other goal to set in front of myself, I decided to sit for the Maryland bar exam. So I started studying and five weeks after I finished my treatment, I took the Maryland bar exam. And today I'm practicing law in Maryland and I have a wonderful family and friends who supported me through all this.

And what I've had to learn is that that security blanket of the mastectomy and the chemotherapy and the treatments—it's gone. I don't have that ending confidence that it's never going to come back. And so rather than planning what all my future goals are ahead, I've learned to treasure and value today and that I have the opportunity to be here and to have a job that I love and a family that supports me and to treasure each of those days. Thank you.

[Announcer] Jennifer is not only a survivor—she is also her own strongest advocate. Her fight against breast cancer required physical, mental, and emotional strength. And now, she and her husband are finally able to start the family they always wanted.

Having a breast cancer diagnosis at a young age comes with a host of unique challenges. We hope that stories like this will empower you to 'Bring Your Brave' by being an advocate for your health and sharing your story with other women. If you're a survivor or have one in your life with a story to share, join the conversation at [cdc.gov/bringyourbrave](http://cdc.gov/bringyourbrave) or [bringyourbrave.tumblr.com](http://bringyourbrave.tumblr.com).

This episode was brought to you by Bring Your Brave from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Take care of yourselves. And thanks for tuning in.

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