

LESLIE HAYWOOD

I was a stay-at-home mom to two beautiful daughters ages one and three when a dinner party changed the trajectory of my life. My husband served me the wrong piece of chicken off the grill and that night I started sketching prototypes for my gift idea and grilling innovation known as Grill Charms.™ A few months after that very spicy light bulb moment and right in the middle of all that is involved with starting a company, raising two children and building a grilling gadget empire, my life would change again with a simple yet also very complicated call. "It's cancer" my doctor said. My first introduction to Breast Cancer happened at the tender age of 16, when my then thirty-something mother sat the family down to talk about the terrible disease. My mother had found a lump and after a lumpectomy, biopsies and further testing it was determined that she did indeed have breast cancer and it had progressed to stage IV. After being told by the doctors that my mom had six months to live, my mother and father sought treatment from one of the most aggressive oncologists in the area who bombarded the advanced cancer with high doses of chemotherapy for a prolonged period of time. My two younger sisters and I watched as the treatment to this horrendous disease drained the mind and spirit of the most happy, healthy, positive person we had ever known. After the fight was over and the battle won, YES, my mom is now 21 years cancer free and my biggest fan, I knew that I had to be ever vigilant. Having a mother who was stage IV in her thirties, I knew the genes were not on my side.

At the age of 30 I went for my first baseline mammogram. All was well, but I knew I could never become complacent. At the age of 34 I went in to have my digital mammogram and this time something was "different". My doctor said, "I really don't think it's anything, but with YOU, I don't want to mess around." A week later they did the needle biopsy and we waited for the results, wondering if this time was going to be THE time. Unfortunatley, it was. I thought about my own two precious daughters who were one and three years old and felt so sorry for the genetic legacy that I had potentially left for them. The "something" they found was extremely small and was thought at the time to only be stage 1. A lumpectomy and a little radiation would have done the trick, but I didn't want to live the rest of my life waiting for the other shoe (or in this case... the other "boob") to drop. I wanted those B sized ticking time bombs GONE! Now with my bilateral mastectomy and reconstruction complete, the scars won't let me

forget, but because of my "radical" treatment choice, I fell like my personal fight is done and I can sleep at night. Both my mother and I won our battles, but the war is far from over.

I have two younger sisters and two beautiful daughters, so my mind still can not truly leave the disease behind.

UPDATE

Just last month my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer AGAIN. It is in her other breast (back in the day, 1989, they did not do bilateral mastectomies). All the more reason why I am so thankful I chose to get both of mine taken care of at once!! Her surgery is September 15th. She will have a mastectomy and natural breast reconstruction on BOTH breasts so she's even. We will know after the sentinel node biopsy what "stage" she is, but based upon the size of the lump and because we are ON TOP of boobie cancer round these parts, the doctors think it's early so please cross your fingers and toes for "stage I". Also, my sister had a prophylactic bilateral mastectomy May 6th 2009, because she didn't want to wait around for the cancer to get her. Here is a powerful photo taken of both of us by a friend. Yes, that is a real tattoo on my sister's arm and those are my perky new tatas!

Ten percent of the proceeds from *The Pink Collection* go to help fund breast cancer research and find a cure. Maybe someday, we can let this disease live only in the past. I also give back to the cause through the "*Pink Collection*" of my product Grill Charms: www.grillcharms.com/the-pink-collection



PHOTO BY: TERESA ROGERS OF PLUFF MUD PHOTOGRAPHY