

## Nicole Seagriff

Board member, The Pink Agenda

# What I Learned From Being Diagnosed With Breast Cancer at Age 27

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When turning 27 years old, you expect some major life changes to take place. For some, it's a job promotion. For others, it's marriage or the birth of a child. For me, it was cancer. Just two weeks after my 27th birthday, I was unexpectedly diagnosed with breast cancer. Although the disease was no stranger to my family, the diagnosis at my age was absolutely shocking.

Breast cancer has been a part of my life since before I can remember. My maternal grandmother died of the disease when my mom was just 4 years old. We lost my maternal aunt to breast cancer in her mid-40s. My mom was diagnosed in her early 40s, but thankfully, has been a survivor for more than 10 years now.

With my strong family history and knowledge of preventive medicine due to my work as a primary care provider, I sought genetic counseling. After consultation, we found out through a simple, though expensive, blood test that my mom was BRCA2 positive, which meant that I had a [50 percent chance](#) of also having the genetic mutation. In October 2011 (ironically, Breast Cancer Awareness Month), I found out that I, too, was BRCA2 positive. Although its hard to hear that you have a "mutation" in your genetic makeup, I felt grateful to know my risk since it existed whether I knew about it or not. By going through with the test and learning the results, as frightening as they were to hear, I had the power to be proactive about my health.

BRCA positive people need to be proactive about their health through [screening](#), surveillance and awareness. For me, protection involved undergoing a bilateral mastectomy for treatment when I was eventually diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2012 as well as risk reduction for the future. For others, protection could include analyzing your own risks for genetic breast cancer. Though only [five percent](#) of breast cancer occurs in women under the age of 40, it is the [leading type of cancer death](#) among women ages 20 to 59. And of the roughly [200,000 American women](#)

diagnosed with breast cancer each year, it is estimated that [5 to 10 percent](#) of these women have a hereditary form of the disease.

But no matter your family history or genetic risk, we now know we can help "protect" ourselves against breast cancer through a [diet low in fat and high in fruits and vegetables](#). We can minimize our [alcohol consumption](#), as alcohol use is associated with higher risk and put an end to any smoking habits. And, of course, we can [exercise regularly](#) and keep up a healthy routine. Advancements in screening, detection and genetic testing are also helping us to find more cancers in younger people, hopefully in earlier stages, which is key to successful treatment.

Whether you find yourself battling breast cancer early or later in life, the biggest lesson I learned and would want others to know is in that life-changing moment of receiving my diagnosis and confronting the disease, there was nothing cancer took from me that hasn't been replaced with something positive in one way or another. Despite everything, there's been a pink lining, if you will.

I have seen amazing kindness from complete strangers and the wonderful team at [Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#) who put me back together. I have made friends with fellow survivors, all of whom have showed such grace and dignity. Most importantly, I had the blessing of supportive family, friends and colleagues who have been there for me every step of the way, including one who cut his hair to make a wig for cancer patients in my honor and another who is running the New York City marathon for breast cancer research.

Another pink lining was finding the amazing groups dedicated to supporting people with breast cancer, as well as funding research and raising awareness for this disease. I have been fortunate to join one such group, [The Pink Agenda](#), which focuses on reaching out to young professionals and raising money for [The Breast Cancer Research Foundation](#). As a recent survivor, it's nice to see that there are so many people working toward raising awareness for early detection, new treatments and a cure for this disease. When my grandmother was diagnosed in the early 1960s, there was very little treatment available and early detection was not an option. I have seen the advances in treatment and detection even in just the last decade since my mother was diagnosed in 2003. I am very grateful to medical research for affording me the options available today. Although it was difficult to be diagnosed so young and to have to battle breast cancer before being married or breastfeeding children, the cancer existed and would have potentially spread whether I knew or not. Being proactive and learning of its existence let me treat the cancer before it could become fatal and, for that, I am so grateful.

This October, as Breast Cancer Awareness Month surrounds us, I appreciate the growing focus on the disease even more as I enjoy my 28th year of life cancer-free, enriched by the pink linings I have encountered and filled with the excitement of life-shaping events to come