Crystal Keyrouz

Age: 34

Stage 2 breast cancer survivor

Job description: Senior medical equipment trainer, Medica Group, UAE.

Lebanon

[Intro]

After ignoring her symptoms for five months, Crystal Keyrouz finally sought medical attention for a lump that had formed after a minor bump into a table. What followed was a very tough period of treatment and recovery as she defeated her cancer ‘monster’ and emerged a far stronger and determined person.

[Her story]

It started as a bump into a table while I was on a business trip to Turkey in 2014. Everything at the place we were in was extra-large, so the tables were quite high and I hit a corner as I was walking by. I didn’t think too much about it at the time, and I ignored it for four or five months until I went home to Lebanon. There was a swollen lump that you could see clearly.

Even without doing a biopsy, mammogram or ultrasound, the doctor told me it was breast cancer. I didn’t believe him but I went for an ultrasound and mammogram, and the next day I went in for a biopsy.

I couldn’t wait in Lebanon for the results, so I came back to Dubai and my sister phoned me a few days later to tell me I had Stage 2 breast cancer. It was a shock, and I didn’t want to believe them. I had lost my mother to breast cancer and really couldn’t believe this was happening to me.

I visited seven oncologists to see what they would tell me, and what I would have to do. After seeing what my mother went through, I wanted to just go through one operation and one lot of chemo. I didn’t want to struggle because in previous years, my mother suffered with doctors. She had more than 4-5 operations. There were no advanced technologies in those days. She did her chemo in the US and left after four sessions because she missed her kids. She died when she was 45. She was diagnosed when she was 29 years old and she suffered all those years.

All of my treatment was done in Lebanon. I had to have two operations, and then eight chemotherapy sessions and 18 other injections every three weeks. The whole process was terrible but I am so proud of myself for beating cancer and getting through it. Cancer was a monster for me, and I wasn’t going to let this monster beat me.

Traveling after chemo was horrible. Recovering alone here in my apartment with no friends, no parents, no siblings and no support – that was the hardest thing. To lose my hair was a big shock. The doctor said I wouldn’t lose my hair, and we used a cooling cap that would freeze my head so that the chemo wouldn’t reach. After the third chemo session, I lost all of my hair.

But I’m proud, proud of my scars, and I was very proud of my bald head. I used to go to the beach, and the market and remove my wig because it was annoying in the heat.

Now, I’m fully recovered, my hair has grown back and I’m enjoying life again. I love dancing and I’ve been taking African dancing lessons because I love the music, the beat – and that you have to have a smile on your face all of the time. I have also been in contact with other patients and have been with them to appointment s to help get them through it. I’d love to dedicate myself to these women, because I know how scary it can be to go through this.

I used to look at my accident as a negative. I used to wish that I hadn’t bumped into the table. In the beginning I went through a period where I didn’t want to accept that I had cancer. I was thinking Why Me? I thought it was a cyst because it didn’t hurt, and it took five months of putting it off to finally get it assessed. But I’m glad it happened because it could have been a lot worse if it had not been discovered through my accident.

I would urge every woman to make sure they do their regular checkups. I was 30 when I was diagnosed, so age is no guarantee that you’re not at risk.