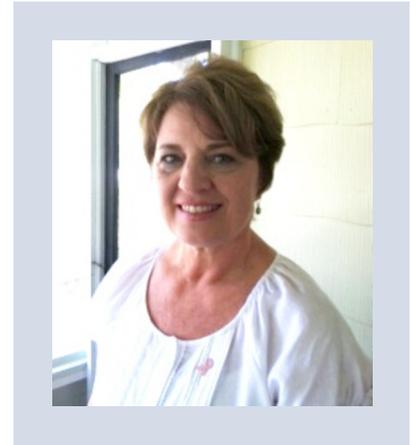


Georgetown Memorial Hospital, Georgetown, SC

Cancer Changed My Life

In January, 2010, I noticed a change in my left breast and, not having health insurance, I ignored the symptoms until they could no longer be ignored. I had a very large fast-growing tumor in the breast that doubled in size very quickly. I was scared and distraught, but needed to see a doctor, in spite of my fears.

I visited a local medical clinic, since I did not have a regular physician. When the doctor saw the enlargement, he advised me to be prepared for the worst. Of course I had heard of people having terminal breast cancer with an undetectable lump, so one of this size, I thought, had to be fatal! As an answer to prayer, this physician personally knew Dr. Craig Brackett of the Coastal Carolina Breast Center and was able to get me an appointment with him that same day! Dr. Brackett examined me, performed a needle biopsy and, sensing my fear, told me, "Everything will be alright. I will take care of you." His words helped put me at ease, even though it was a scary time for me.



The tumor turned out to be a phylodous tumor and was very rare. Untreated, it could spread to my lungs. Because of the size of the tumor, the breast would have to be removed.

My husband and I were worried about the cost of the surgery and treatment, because of me not having insurance coverage and not qualifying for any government help. We had never had to ask for any kind of financial help from anyone, so that added to our fears. Dr. Brackett's staff sensed our fears and knew that we had no insurance. They advised us to contact Lynn McClain, the Foundation director for Georgetown Hospital System, about their programs to help people who are in the same situation that we were. Lynn told us not to worry and assured us that there was help through the hospital programs.

The surgery took place, with no complications, at Georgetown Memorial Hospital on April 13th, 2010. I actually went home the same day as my surgery! The whole experience was unbelievable! Everyone was great, from check-in, through surgery and treatment. Having a mastectomy is nothing to look forward to, but having a warm and wonderful staff to help you through the experience is wonderful! I cannot say enough about all of the wonderful people that helped me through this!

After completing radiation in August, I learned of a breast cancer walk sponsored by the Georgetown Hospital System, and I wanted to be part of it. That day, my husband and I met Lynn McClain face to face and we were able to thank her for everything. We told her how much we wanted to let the hospital know how great the whole experience had been, and how much we appreciated everything that had been done for us. Lynn asked if I would speak to the hospital's Foundation Board at their year-end meeting. I gladly accepted and, although nervous about speaking in front of the group, was thrilled at the opportunity to thank them in person.

That evening I spoke of my story and how I wanted to "Pay it Forward" by giving back to the group that had helped us, and that is just what I did. I joined the Women's Board the next spring and was made president of the group the next year. I hope to be an inspiration to others to give of their time to help others, because the difference it makes could be life changing, as it has been for me.

With sincere gratitude,
Katherine Houston