

Emily Martin

Personality Profile

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Two weeks before Peris Ochsner moved away to college, she was play fighting with her mom and accidentally elbowed her in the chest.

"It was more sore than normal, and she realized it wasn't just like a bruised feeling. It was a lump," Peris said.

"I'm kind of the reason that my Mom found out she had cancer," Peris said, her eyes getting teary. Cyndi Ochsner went in for a biopsy of the lump in her chest, which tested positive for cancer.

Three weeks after her biopsy, Cyndi was diagnosed with Triple-Negative Invasive Ductal Carcinoma breast cancer, which is a rare form of breast cancer. The tumor isn't fed by the typical three paths of breast cancer, which is through the hormone's estrogen and progesterone, or by the HER2 protein. This means that triple-negative carcinoma breast cancer doesn't respond to hormonal therapy treatments or treatments to target the HER2 protein.

"My mom went straight into chemotherapy," Peris said. "They couldn't do a mastectomy first because they needed to figure out what kind of treatments would actually work, instead of going into an invasive surgery only to have it fail."

Cyndi, and her sister Lorie Price Bischoff, started a blog through CaringBridge.org to document Cyndi's journey.

"I have a port placed and will start chemo on September 17th," Cyndi wrote in her first blog post.

"Treatment will be every other Monday for the following eight weeks. Then, I will begin a new cocktail of chemo that will be every week for 12 weeks. I will lose my hair 17 days after my first treatment."

Before starting chemotherapy, Cyndi had multiple tests run, which determined her cancer hadn't spread to her brain or other parts of her body, which Peris described joyfully as their first big win in this journey.

Peris' brother Blake played football for Eastern Washington, and Cyndi wanted to continue driving to his games as long as she could. The first game that she went to after chemotherapy, she wrote in her blog that she didn't even need to lay down to rest. Peris said that her mom kept this positive, fighting attitude throughout all of her chemotherapy sessions.

"My mom often described how she felt after chemotherapy as 'a hangover, without the night of fun,'" Peris said with a laugh. "I don't think she remembers much of what happened during her chemo, but she was always in good spirits."

Friends and family members put on an auction to raise money for Cyndi's treatments in February of 2019 in Spokane. Peris' best friend Claire Wilson, along with their sorority Delta Gamma, wanted to surprise the Ochsner's with overwhelming support.

"I figured out the price of the tickets and let everyone in the sorority know," Wilson said. "Girls started buying the tickets, some donating more since we couldn't be at the auction."

The auction was a success, and Cyndi was in good spirits for her last session of chemotherapy. Cyndi's body reacted well to the first round of chemo but struggled with the second round. Peris said that overall, she did well. The tumor was golf ball sized when they first found it, and once chemo was over, it was only 3 centimeters wide. The tumor was at an operable size, and Cyndi went on to have a single mastectomy before starting radiation.

"I cried when I first saw myself unwrapped and standing in front of a mirror," Cyndi wrote in her blog after her mastectomy. "It was the whole picture, seeing myself bald and without a precious body part. It was the first time I think I let myself totally and completely admit that I have cancer."

Once Cyndi had healed up enough from her surgery, she started radiation treatments. She underwent a total of 33 treatments. Radiation treatments left her with the scent of burning flesh around her all the time, as well as peeling skin and feeling dehydrated. "No amount of lotion works, I still feel mummified," Cyndi wrote.

By October, Cyndi's hair started growing back, and she began working on general pain management. Her latest doctor's appointment showed that she is cancer-free.

"It takes five years to consider someone cured of cancer," Peris said. "But I'm so happy that she's made it to the first benchmark. I am so proud of her."

Peris said that she had grown so much through her mother's journey with cancer. She has a new appreciation for what it means to go through cancer, and she hopes to help encourage others that are in her position to keep fighting and to reach out when you need support.