I am a Brentwood graduate of 1994, married to Brandon (class of 1993.) Shortly after our son Evan turned one in 2008, I was diagnosed with Stage II invasive ductal carcinoma, breast cancer. Over the course of a year, I had chemotherapy treatments, surgery and radiation. For seven years, I was declared “NED” no evidence of disease. During that time, we were blessed with our twin girls, Brynn and Blake, born in December 2012.

In February 2016, I felt an enlarged lymph node near my collar bone, and a biopsy confirmed that it was the same type of cancer as initial diagnosis in 2008. Numerous scans showed that the cancer had spread to lymph nodes in my chest wall, clavicle, numerous vertebrae, both hips and pleural lining of my lung. After a year of being on a fairly new FDA approved drug, my latest scan showed “NEAD” no evidence of active disease.

My current regimen consists of a daily chemotherapy drug. Trips to Magee Hospital for monthly injections, weekly lab work and PET/CT/MRI scans every three months.

Unfortunately, I will not “beat this disease” I will not “win” - I will ultimately die of breast cancer, the question is when. I will receive treatment for the rest of my life. When my current drug combination stops working, I will try the next line of treatment, and then the next, and so on, until my treatment options run out. The average life expectancy of a Stage IV metastatic breast cancer patient is 3 years. My hope is I will be an outlier, and my treatments will keep me NEAD for longer.

Approximately 30% of patients diagnosed with early stage breast cancer (Stages I – III) will become metastatic in their lifetime. This could happen at any time. While there is a broad awareness, Stage IV or metastatic is rarely acknowledged. Major organizations only give 2% of their funding to metastatic research. Deaths of Stage IV breast cancer have not declined despite Pink campaigning. Patients only die of this disease when it has spread beyond the breast to other major organs. That is why metastatic research is more important than ever. Organizations like **Metavivor** use 100% of their donations to go towards cutting edge research that will ultimately save lives.

Thank you to **Drop the Puck** for giving me the opportunity to educate on Stage IV metastatic breast cancer. We are honored that you have chosen our family as a beneficiary and feel so very lucky to call you friends!

Love, Brandon, Roberta, Evan, Brynn and Blake Szpara

