

## My name is Janine and I have risky genes



### *Janine at the Out of the Blues fundraiser - post- double-mastectomy and reconstruction surgeries*

My name is Janine Blair, and I am 24 years old. It is springtime in Edmonton, Alberta. The days are getting warmer, the grass is getting greener, the sun is staying out later, and so are my friends. Most girls my age are taking in spring right now, they are out for jogs, they are wearing smaller clothing, and they are out late with a drink in hand. I, however, am in bed recovering from surgery, this is my second surgery in 6 months. I have the BRCA 1 gene mutation, and this make me different than most of the other 24 year old girls I know.

I was told I had the gene at age 19, and although it was devastating news at the time, it took me a couple years to get a grip and change my life style. I was a partier. For a long time, having the gene meant little more to me than knowing that “one day” I would have surgery to remove my breasts. The severity of my situation came crashing down on my after the loss of my older sister Lianne lost her battle with breast cancer. I was floored by the loss of her, but now, I was also truly afraid for my own life.

Shortly after Lianne’s passing I got serious about what I had to do, there was no more time to burry my head in the sand. I suddenly felt like I had wasted so much time and that I was inching closer and closer to a breast cancer diagnosis with every day that passed. I began seeing my doctor regularly for check-ups and screenings, and we started my referral process with surgeons, which resulted in more appointments with more doctors. It was at this time I started to feel quite different from the other girls my age, I was in my early 20’s preparing for a double mastectomy, and they were preparing for final exams.

I was afraid for my surgery of course, however, I had other concerns surrounding this procedure. Some of these concerns were/are:

- Not having nipples. This means I can’t breast feed any of the children I may bare. This also means explaining to any man who may see them why I don’t have nipples, and possibility of one day telling him if he wants to have kids with me I can’t breast feed them.
- Telling any man that wants to be in my life about my cancer baggage, what if they go running?
- Ending up with a man who is truly willing to bare my cross with me. Getting married and having kids is a sooner rather than later thing for me now because I am also at risk for ovarian cancer. I am on a timeline. Would he even want to have kids with me knowing I might pass on my gene?
- Ovarian cancer. My Grandmother died of it. What if after all of this work, and this time lining, I still get ovarian cancer?

But first thing was first. My mastectomy. After a couple years of appointments and consults I went under the knife on October 29, 2013 and had a double mastectomy with immediate reconstruction using Alloderm. The experience was both worse and better than I anticipated. Before going under it was the surgery itself I was terrified of, with no thought really of the recovery. But I was asleep during surgery! The recovery is the hard part! I spent 2 months recovering. The first few weeks it seemed like I would never feel normal again, I was in pain, I had drains hanging out of my armpits, and

I was dependant on others to help me with simple tasks. But what is normal? I got to a healthy place again, active, and positive.

I never went back to how I was before surgery, I was forever altered, physically and mentally. I now had tissue expanders in my chest that required filling every couple weeks. They were uncomfortable but I adjusted to them. I also now had a weight lifted off my shoulders. My breasts were gone, I no longer needed to fear breast cancer. I had overcome it.

I have just had my second surgery, to replace my tissue expanders for permanent implants. The recovery period is much easier this time, but surgery is surgery, so I have to take things slow in this time of sunshine and warmth. My journey to defeat breast cancer for myself is almost over, but I have other concerns to battle with. There are other women in my family who could face this same fate. I just recently went with my 20 year old cousin to get her genetics test, I am sick with worry for her. She has a younger sister who will one day be tested as well. I worry about my 6 year old niece, and the fears she will possess once old enough to understand.

None of this has been easy for me, I struggle everyday with sadness and pain and worry. But every step that I have taken has brought me to my place of recovery and it is worth it, so that I can be here for those I love through their journeys.



#114, 11728 Kingsway Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5G 0X5  
Ph: 780.488.4262 Toll-free: 866.786.HBOC (4262)  
E: [info@hbocsociety.org](mailto:info@hbocsociety.org)  
[www.hbocsociety.org](http://www.hbocsociety.org) | [www.riskygenes.org](http://www.riskygenes.org)