

# Brave & Beautiful

Sarah Norton



**S**arah Norton was diagnosed with blood cancer in late 2020 and breast cancer in early 2021. Her mother, Claudia Paone (see accompanying story), also had been diagnosed with breast cancer in July 2020.

A bond of understanding between mother and daughter has supported them during their journey through treatment toward remission.

And it has helped Norton comprehend the experience to have loving family members beside her, she said, including Sarah's sister, Amanda, who works in the Breast Cancer Center at Aultman Hospital.

"Along with the great doctors I have had, I wouldn't be able to complete this journey without my family," Sarah said. "Their strength has definitely kept me going throughout this whole journey."

## Life

It was a little more than two years ago when she and her supportive husband, John, brought their two children to Lake Township. Their days were filled with family activities before COVID-19 stifled life for most people.

"I grew up here and moved away when I was about 20," she said. "I lived all over the place, but my husband brought me back here."

Then life changed because of cancer.

"My mom was diagnosed a year ago in July (2020)," said Norton. "On her birthday, she said 'All I ask is for all of you to get (genetically) tested.' So, we did. I have three sisters and a brother, and all five of us tested positive (for being at high risk for certain kinds of cancer)."

## Diagnosis

In the summer of 2020, Norton was shown to be more than merely "at risk."

She was stung by zees, and within seven minutes, she was unconscious.

"That's how they found out I had cancer," she recalled. "They did tests because my reaction was so unusual."

It took months and many tests, including a blood marrow biopsy, to determine that she had blood cancer.

"It's an aggressive form," she said.

Then early in 2021 came the news that she had breast cancer.

"The phone call in February, I'll never forget it. It changed everything, knowing what my mom went through and knowing that I don't heal like everyone else because of the blood cancer — I knew my life was going to significantly change."

## Treatment

Norton has been taking oral chemotherapy twice a day for her blood cancer. She has to come off of it for a week prior to each time she has surgery. And, ultimately, she will have had several procedures.

Initially, Norton had a bilateral mastectomy, followed by reconstructive surgery.

"I immediately reached out to my sister, who works with Dr. Sabrina Shilad. Dr. Shilad did the mastectomy, and she was fantastic. She actually held my hand until I went to sleep (from anesthesia).

"Dr. Stephen Lopez did the reconstruction, and he was wonderful, as well."

When she spoke to About magazine, Norton had two more surgeries scheduled. Because of her risk of ovarian cancer, she was to have had her ovaries removed in August. And she was scheduled for additional breast surgery in October.

"Then it will be over," she said, "at least for this year."

## Experience At Aultman

Treating two different forms of cancer has proved to be a balancing act.

Doctors at Cleveland Clinic have been treating Norton's blood cancer, coordinating with physicians at Aultman, who are addressing her breast cancer.

"The three doctors of my Cleveland Clinic team have been wonderful working with my doctors at Aultman," she said, noting that her Aultman doctors include Dr. Shruti Trehan, an oncology specialist. "I can't have temperature changes, and I can't have certain medications (because of the bone cancer). I come with a long list of what I can and can't have.

"My first surgeon (Dr. Shilad) was wonderful at letting me know that everything was going to be OK. And Dr. Lopez made sure everyone in that (operating) room knew what could happen and what needed to happen."

## Closing Thoughts

Her family support and the skills of the medical personnel that surround her has left Norton with a reassuring feeling of gratefulness while she battles her cancer.

"My sister, being in the Breast Cancer Center, she basically took the wheel, and it's been a flawless journey. Nobody ever missed a beat," Norton said. "I'm grateful that I have found the doctors that I have on my team; I'm grateful for everyone on the team. They are the best, and they have made this experience so much easier.

"I know I have a long road ahead, but they make it a pleasant journey."

— GARY BROWN