December Baby...

Somewhere after diagnosis I decided I would smile like my life depended on it because, in my humble opinion, it did.

December 3, 2018 By Lisa Vento Nielsen

See that picture up there — that is from the night of my 40th birthday — a birthday I was so excited for, I did not round up for the first time in my life!

See, my birthday is in December, and though I turn a year older at the end of the year, I had always rounded up, so the day after my 30th birthday, I was already 31 if anyone asked me how old I was, and in my own head I had already gone up. I don't even remember being 35, for example, because I was immediately 36.

For my 40th year, I did not want to rush it — I wanted to savor it. I love getting older — always have and now doubly will love getting older because 2 weeks before my 40th birthday, I was diagnosed with breast cancer! On my 40th birthday, I got a PET scan. A freaking PET scan! Best gift ever is that it was "clear" and I was able to have my mastectomy and lymph node extraction a few days later.

There I am in that photo, surrounded by my husband and kids and I was smiling but inside I was petrified knowing I had a malignant right breast. I was smiling for my kids, who did not yet know I had cancer. I was smiling because somewhere along the way from diagnosis to that point I decided I would smile like my life depended on it because it actually, in my humble opinion, did.

I do not round up anymore. I am 41 and will be 41 until December 13 when I will, God willing, turn 42. I am savoring my year and living each day in the best way I can be — as someone who is truly happy and enjoying each day in any way I can — by writing, by sharing and by trying the best I can to help others. What changed about your birthday rituals after cancer?

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