Dot to Dot

By the time I accumulated 6 dots, I realised they were a part of me. A part of my story and how I am here today.

August 31, 2018 By Amanda Hayes

You probably don't know why this picture is here. It's here because it shows one of my radiotherapy tattoo dots.

So, what are these dots? These are my radiotherapy alignment dots. They are little tattoo marks, permanent markers, the only external evidence I have that shows I have had cancer. These dots are used in conjunction with some laser lights to line my body up for each external radiotherapy appointment. Generally, it is the alignment that takes longer than the radiotherapy itself.

I've discussed previously in Baby, it's just never gonna happen the physical effects radiotherapy had on my skin but I've not really told you about the process of what happens before radiotherapy begins. There's a planning radiotherapy session which is where they measure your body, weigh you and mark you. They need to be precise and accurate, it's important that the alignment is perfect every time because the radio-beams have to hit the tumour in the exact same spot at every radiotherapy appointment.

I have 6 of these radiotherapy tattoo dots positioned on my body. I'm literally a dot-to-dot! 4 from my first encounter with radiotherapy, two on my hips, and two down the centre of my body; on my sternum and pelvic bone. The other 2 are additions from my second bout of radiotherapy; they are on either side of my ribs lining up perfectly with the one on my sternum.

When I first got these dots I had 4, all I could think of was getting them covered up or lasered off as soon as I was finished with my treatment.

looking back I've come to realise I'm glad I didn't jump to get that done. I didn't get to that part mostly because other treatments took over or I wasn't in the best health.

Teeny Tiny Trophies

By the time I accumulated 6, I realised they were a part of me. A part of my story and how I am here today. I'm not ashamed of these dots. They sit there like little dark freckles. They've seen me through a lot.

My skin falling off in chunks, they were little helpers in blasting away my tumours and they are the only physical proof of what I've been through. You see, I've been lucky in my treatment, I have no

scars on my body from it. surgeries were always performed by other means instead of incisions and my chemotherapy was always administered intravenously, so I have no port scar.

These radiotherapy tattoo dots are my little trophies.

New Tattoo

So last week, I got 6 tattoos. Real ones, to sit next to these little dots. I don't want to cover these little heroes up any more. 1) because I actually don't mind them but most importantly, 2) they may well be needed again in the future. These new 6 tattoos have the same theme. I got 6 bugs. They all match quite beautifully. To the unobservant eye my radiotherapy dots are probably invisible as the detail of the new tattoos take over. I don't care, I know it's still there and that's all that matters. These tattoos aren't for showing off, although I will show you a couple of them, I'd probably get done for public indecency if I went parading around showing them off willy-nilly. Tattoos aren't for everyone, and if I'm honest, I probably wouldn't have had them done if this was me 2 years ago. I have no regrets to getting these bugs, I'm actually pretty in love with them. I don't have a favourite or anything like that, they are all just as equal in my story.

The next 3 months

Last week's new additions coincided quite perfectly really as I've been cleared for the next three months. This No Evidence of Disease is lasting longer than I ever anticipated and I couldn't be more relieved. I did however do something unintentionally silly the other day though… I googled.

You see, I'm starting to realise that with my life restarting my blog is probably looking a bit boring to people now, (sorry, not sorry!) So I'm trying to make topics that are a bit more useful in relation to gynae cancers and stuff. In my little research hour I discovered a little snippet that said once cancer metastases, recurrence generally happens within 2 years, or it was something along those lines. Well that's a bit of a bugger! As far as I can say, I'm 6 months clear of it now and I'll take it. It's annoying living with the 3 month segments but I'll take whatever I can, some people are not as lucky as this.

Above are 3 of my bugs… the other 3 are a butterfly, dragonfly and a bee. Any wonkiness is purely down to the photo taker (me) they are actually perfectly aligned as the radiographer's did a pretty accurate job measuring it all up for me.

Just a note…

The tattooist hasn't touched the original radiotherapy tattoo dots… they have naturally bled out over time and also, it's not really important for them to look pretty. Another one to note too is that I contacted my oncologist in regards to getting these so don't go altering any of your own radiotherapy tattoo dots unless they know and approve!

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