

Jenn Schultz: A Journey of Resilience, Advocacy and Hope

Jenn's rollercoaster of a melanoma journey ultimately guided her towards a passion for patient advocacy and raising awareness of early detection and research funding.

April 18, 2025 By [Melanoma Research Alliance](#)

Sports have always been an important part of Jenn Schultz's DNA. Growing up in Wisconsin, she spent countless hours watching her cousins play baseball, traveling to games with family, and enjoying the energy of competition.

Jenn carried this part of her upbringing into her education and professional aspirations. First getting her undergraduate degree from Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota, with a focus on sports communication, accompanied by multiple internships in local sports and journalism.

Her undergraduate degree and early professional years paved the way for Jenn to chase her dreams. In 2013, she moved to Chicago to work for the Chicago Cubs and simultaneously pursue a master's degree in sports management. Balancing a fast-paced career with her studies, everything seemed to be on track for the young professional.

While still getting settled a little over a year after her move to Chicago, Jenn noticed a large, discolored mole on her shoulder. It was not something she recognized as familiar, but she was not sure when it first appeared. She brought it up to her mom over the holidays, who urged Jenn to get it checked out.

Her mom's urging took Jenn back to a gen-ed health course she took while in undergrad that overviewed the [ABCDEs of melanoma](#). Having never been to a dermatologist before and with the ABCDEs in the back of her mind, Jenn was able to find a local doctor in Chicago and schedule her first ever [skin check](#).

A Shocking Melanoma Diagnosis

Within just a few weeks, Jenn was seen by a dermatologist. Upon seeing the mole, her doctor showed immediate concern. He placed a hand on her shoulder and said, "thank you for coming in." Jenn's stomach sank. A biopsy and follow-up a few days later confirmed her fears – she had melanoma.

“You’re never prepared to hear the words ‘you have cancer’,” said Jenn. “Everything happened really fast from that point forward.”

Jenn was quickly scheduled to undergo a [wide local excision surgery](#) to hopefully remove all the melanoma. Her surgeon also performed a [sentinel lymph node biopsy](#) of both her neck and underarm to check for spread. The results showed no spread and that her melanoma was successfully removed at [Stage 1B](#), but the experience was both physically and emotionally draining.

Jenn’s recovery from surgery was not easy – she experienced extreme nausea from the post-op pain medication, pain and discomfort from the multiple surgeries, and the emotional reality of being a cancer patient as a young adult. Not only that, but her doctors expressed concern at the rapid growth of her melanoma. Her treatment plan moving forward needed to include frequent monitoring for recurrence or new melanomas.

Navigating Treatment, Recovery, and Survivorship

Far from her family and without the type of support system that usually takes years to build, Jenn had to make the difficult decision to move back home. “I was really working my way up in my career, and this decision felt like starting over,” she recalled.

Over the following year, Jenn underwent biopsies at every single dermatology appointment. Results showed that her moles were moderately to severely atypical and needed to be removed. Medical bills were piling up and she still had not found a job. “I felt like a burden,” said Jenn.

With her new reality weighing heavy on her, Jenn found herself at a stoplight one day, thinking, I just don’t want to be here anymore. That moment was a wake-up call that she needed help. Seeking professional mental health support became a lifeline as she worked to process the trauma of her diagnosis and the aftermath.

For several years, Jenn remained vigilant with her check-ups. Then, in March of 2021, a biopsy came back as [Stage 0 \(in situ\)](#) melanoma. Six months after that, in October 2021, another melanoma diagnosis – Stage 1B. Then, just four months later, in February 2022, another Stage 0 melanoma appeared.

In an effort to stay ahead of the disease, Jenn turned to mole mapping and total body photography – technology that tracks changes in moles using high-resolution imaging. For the first time in years, six months passed without a biopsy for Jenn. Adding this technology to her care plan allowed her doctors to monitor changes more accurately, reducing unnecessary procedures and giving her some much-needed peace of mind.

A New Chapter: Writing Her Story

Jenn's rollercoaster of a melanoma journey ultimately guided her towards a passion for patient advocacy and raising awareness of [early detection](#) and research funding. She became deeply involved with several cancer advocacy organizations and within the melanoma community, sharing her story and supporting others facing the same battle.

As she connected with others, Jenn realized there was a desperate need for more honest conversations about life after melanoma.

These lingering questions led Jenn to the start of yet another whirlwind journey: writing her own book about survivorship.

[Bravely Becoming: Overcoming Grief and Loss to Find Yourself Again](#) is Jenn's vulnerable account of the challenges, fears, and victories that come after a cancer diagnosis. The book reflects on Jenn's personal journey but is ultimately meant for anyone who has walked the path of a cancer diagnosis. Jenn hopes her book provides a supportive and hopeful roadmap for those navigating the uncertainty of survivorship, struggling to find their way back to themselves after loss.

"Healing is not linear, and it doesn't come with a timeline. But as you turn these pages, the hope is you'll find the courage to face your grief with grace, and the strength to become the person you are meant to be: whole, resilient, and thriving," Jenn wrote.

Today, Jenn embodies this message and is thriving both personally and professionally, having found her way back to sports as well. In addition to teaching at her alma mater, she is the Vice State Lead Ambassador for the [American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network \(ACS CAN\) in Minnesota](#), and she serves on the Associate Board for [Athletes Committed to Educating Students \(ACES\)](#), a nonprofit whose mission is to empower youth and expand opportunity through engaging, inclusive, and accessible learning experiences.

Jenn recently celebrated her three-year cancer-free milestone, a moment that felt almost surreal given everything she's been through. But her journey isn't just about melanoma – it's about reclaiming her life, using her voice, and helping others.

This blog was published by [Melanoma Research Alliance](#) on March 27, 2025. It is republished with permission.