

Allison Bond: Finding Support in the Fight Against Cancer

When Allison Bond, 36, was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2020, she had no idea the number of resources she and her family would need to deal with a shocking diagnosis right as a global pandemic was emerging.

'An appointment that changed her life'

Currently in her eleventh year of teaching, Allison is a fourth-grade teacher in Leander. A mom of three girls – Emileigh (8), Evelyn (6), and Natalie (3) – Allison has been married to her husband Michael for 13 years, and their family is complete with their goldendoodle, James Bond.

Allison was never really concerned about breast cancer, as there was no history of it in her family. She attended her annual well-woman check with her gynecologist each year and underwent occasional breast exams.

Juggling her hectic schedule of caring for three young children and the responsibilities of her teaching job, she almost missed her annual visit in February 2020.

It turned out to be an appointment that changed her life.

'How do I tell my kids?'

During her routine breast exam, the nurse said she felt a lump, and advised her to get it checked. "I went into 'oh crap mode' on the way home," Allison recalls. When she got home and told her husband, the tears began to flow. "In my gut I knew it was something," she said.

Allison was scheduled for a mammogram, ultrasound, and biopsy. In March 2020, just as she was saying goodbye to her students for Spring Break, she received the call that she had breast cancer. "I was in shock. I don't even know if I cried," she



**Moya Griffin, M.D., FACS,
Texas Breast Specialists
–Austin North**



**Michelle Ashworth, M.D.,
Texas Oncology – Round
Rock**



**Michael Herman, M.D.,
Texas Oncology – Austin
North Radiation Oncology
and Round Rock**

said. "All I could think is – how do I tell my kids?"

'My personal world was shutting down'

Allison was immediately referred to Texas Oncology by her gynecologist. "At the same time my personal world was shutting down, COVID was shutting down the rest

of the world," Allison said. Her husband was only able to be with her at her very first appointment where she learned she had early stage right-sided breast cancer.

"It quickly became clear to me that I had no idea what I was in for or what this journey would entail," recalls Allison. "It was a scary situation talking about some really heavy things without my husband by my side." She quickly built a strong connection with her care team, including Moya Griffin, M.D., FACS, breast surgeon, Texas Breast Specialists-Austin North; Michael Herman, M.D., radiation oncologist, Texas Oncology-Austin North Radiation Oncology and Round Rock; Michelle Ashworth, M.D., medical oncologist, Texas Oncology-Round Rock; and a plastic surgeon.

"Ms. Bond is one of those special patients who handled her scary diagnosis with grace and optimism," recalls Dr. Herman. "I met her in the early part of the pandemic, as she was balancing three young kids and the new world of virtual teaching. She was overwhelmed with the diagnosis and was more concerned about the impact on her family."

'Just in time for the start of a global pandemic'

Allison initially had a unilateral mastectomy on March 31, 2020. "She desired a bilateral mastectomy, but COVID protocols at the time did not allow for non-emergent prophylactic procedures," said Dr. Griffin.

During surgery, the pathology revealed the breast cancer had spread to her lymph nodes. This changed the treatment

plan – requiring the need for radiation and chemotherapy.

"Can you imagine, being diagnosed with stage II breast cancer at age 33, just in time for the start of a global pandemic?" said Dr. Ashworth. "Allison has persevered through challenges upon challenges associated with her diagnosis and the situation."

Allison later had a left mastectomy with reconstruction of both breasts. "She has a more than 80 percent chance of remaining cancer-free long term, and Allison is working hard to do everything she can to reduce her risk of recurrent breast cancer," said Dr. Ashworth.

'We were the first to ever say the word cancer to our children'

At the time of her diagnosis, Allison's children were aged five, three, and one. While she and Michael were worried about them and how they'd handle her diagnosis and treatment, Allison said, "It's good they were young. They don't have perceived notions of cancer or what it is. Mike and I were the first people to ever say the word 'cancer' to them."

Texas Breast Specialists works with several local organizations committed to supporting patients and their families through diagnosis, treatment, and beyond. Dr. Griffin suggested Wonders & Worries, an organization that provides free, professional counseling and other support for children and teens through a parent's illness. Her daughter, Emileigh, participated in Zoom calls with the experts at Wonders & Worries through the chaos of COVID-19.

"The beauty of Wonders & Worries was that they could give her the information she needed in a way that helped guide conversations appropriate to her age," said Allison. "Every time I was going through something during treatment, we were able to discuss it together." She saw Wonders & Worries as incredibly helpful and an invaluable resource for families like hers.

Another suggested resource for Allison was the Breast Cancer Resource Center (BCRC), whose mission is to "empower those affected by breast cancer with personalized support and compassion." The people Allison encountered truly understood what she was going through, and she leaned on their various resources, especially as she approached her breast reconstruction. On the days where she was feeling down about herself, the team at BCRC was there to support her and lift her back up.

"I asked a lot of questions. If they didn't have an immediate answer, they knew someone who did," says Allison. "It felt good to talk to someone in the know."

In addition to the outside resources, the entire team at Texas Oncology and Texas Breast Specialists, were an incredible source of strength and support for Allison and her family. "The nurses stay so positive, and it's such a daunting field to be in," she says. "They were kind and empathetic – that's what I needed. I am in awe of them."

She recalls being in a chemotherapy treatment during Teacher Appreciation Week. "One of the nurses

gave me a cookie with the words "Teaching is a work of heart" printed on it. She knew I wasn't going to be in the classroom to receive the gifts and treats we normally get, and she wanted me to still feel special."

'This is the story of me and my journey'

According to Dr. Griffin, Allison has an excellent mental and medical outlook. Dr. Herman agrees, saying, "She is an incredibly strong and gracious personality. This optimism was felt by me, the team, and fellow patients."

Allison's advice is to be in tune to yourself and your body. "Anytime something feels funky, I go to the doctor. You never know when it will save your life. I thank God every day I went and didn't reschedule."



Allison Bond and her family wear pink in support of Breast Cancer Awareness Month

As Allison reflects on the past two years, she is grateful to be back in the classroom and back to doing many of the things she loves with her family. She feels strong. "After all of this – this is a story. This is the story of me and my journey."

In Texas, an estimated 20,113 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed 2022, with approximately 3,449 deaths. For more information about breast cancer, visit TexasOncology.com.

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