

# My Motivated Moment: Jay

*This program is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.*

[Announcer] What was the moment in time when things changed for you? What motivated you to move forward or take action? Welcome to My Motivated Moment, a podcast featuring young women bravely facing a breast cancer diagnosis or risk of breast cancer, and the people in their lives who support them. In these live recordings, you'll hear all about the moment everything changed for them. And how their experiences inspired them to become empowered advocates for their own health.

In this episode, we hear a spouse's perspective. Jennifer's husband, Jay, stood by her and supported her difficult decisions through her breast cancer journey. For Jay, his moment was when he saw how strong of an advocate his wife was for herself.

[Jay] The day had finally come, the day that I was going to propose to my future wife. We woke up on a Saturday morning, and we started the day out with a hike in the mountains of Orange County, California, the beautiful waterfalls where we ended up. After those few hours, went back home, got cleaned up, and Jen said, "What's next for the schedule today?" We always like going on little adventures. "So, we're just going to go out for dinner tonight in Newport Beach at the Harbor." Okay, so we got ready, went out to dinner. And as we got out of the car in the parking garage, out of the shadows emerged this tall figure, and in a very cheap Italian accent we heard somebody say, "Hello, I am Giuseppe. I'm your gondolier for the evening." And my wife said, "What ... what is this?" I said, "I don't know let's check it out."

So he ended up taking us to his gondola, and I said, "We're just going to go on a boat ride tonight before dinner." So about half an hour in, as we're in the canals of Newport Beach, the gondolier puts on a floodlight, puts on a siren, and says, "Folks, I'm really sorry. I have to stop your boat ride. I see something in the water and us gondoliers, we don't like to let things be in the water that look suspicious. So if you don't mind, give me a few minutes. I'm going to get this and fish this out of the water." Jen looks at me and says, "Is he really stopping our boat ride right now?" I said, "I don't know, let's see."

He fishes something out of the water and says, "Jen, would you mind holding this for me?" "He's giving me trash on our boat ride?" And interestingly enough, it was a bottle. And when we looked at the bottle, there was a message in the bottle. So I said, "Let's open it up." Jen opened the letter. She began to read it, and sure enough it was a letter from me. By the time she was done reading the letter, I was down on my knee with ring in hand. And I know what you might be thinking. This was not a skinny gondola from Venice. This was a sizable gondola, and she looked at me and said, "Thank you." Not yes, "thank you." But I knew what she meant. The rest of the boat ride was spent with her on the phone calling her mom, her sisters, and all of her friends sharing the wonderful news.

Fast forward. We had our wedding and been married for three months. And on a Friday night, Jen calls me upstairs. Something was upsetting her, I could tell in her voice. And she said, "Get over here. You need to feel my chest. I feel something." And right away I knew where her mind

had gone to because both of our grandmothers and her aunt had all been survivors of breast cancer. And my wife always thinks the worst. So, in my fashion, my typical cool and calm and collected attitude, I said to her "Yes, I feel something, but we don't know what it is. It's the weekend. There's no news until there's news. Let's try to relax. First thing Monday morning, we'll call the doctors and we will see what's going on."

Jen got an appointment, went to see her doctor, and even the doctor tried to reassure her, "You're so young. You're only 27. It's so unlikely that this is anything. Young women get lumps and bumps all the time, but let's get it tested." Sure enough, after testing the doctor said, "It's cancer." And instantly our lives were changed forever. Our plans, the path that we had set out for ourselves, the things that we wanted to do was forever redefined. And amazingly, my wife took the bull by the horns like she always does, and she set the tone for all of us—for myself, for her mom, for our families, our friends. And she made it quite clear to everybody, "I'm going to kick cancer's ass, and we're gonna to get the show on the road and do everything that we need to do."

Now during the process, one of the doctor appointments that we went on was to meet with a fertility specialist. Fertility specialist, who specializes in meeting with women who have breast or ovarian cancer, in order to think about and consider fertility preservation. We'd never thought about this. We never thought this is something that we had to consider. So he suggested, you know, the technology exists. We have the science. Let's save your eggs, make embryos, you should freeze them as a security blanket, as a safety-deposit. But her oncologist said, "You know, I'd rather not you'd be exposed to the extra estrogen since the cancer that you have is estrogen receptor-positive. And because of your age and because it's a Stage 1 cancer, I really believe that you'll hit the five-year mark and you should be able to carry on your own and get pregnant naturally."

So we put our faith in God and that's the path we went on. So we start counting down the years... one year, two years, three years, year four we move to DC. At about four and a half years, Jen says, "You know, we're only six months away." I said, "I know." And we really started to talk about what does this mean and how do we prepare and it's like, "Whoa, this is for real. Like life's about to get real for real." And almost immediately after, a couple days or a couple weeks later, she called me upstairs again to our bedroom and said, "I need you to feel my chest. I feel something." And there was something there. And again as usual I said, "Let's see the doctors. You just got your results back, your recent blood tests, everything's clear, everything's fine." And sure enough, it was back. Now before anything else, Jennifer said to me, "I don't care what we have to do, we're going to meet with a fertility doctor and we're going to figure out what our options are." So we did that and we ended up freezing embryos and having that for us.

Jen starts going through the treatment again, go through the motions, but something was different this time. Gone was her confidence, gone was her...her attitude that we're going to kick ass because, as she said, "If this came back now for the rest of my life, I'm going to wonder every day and every month and every year when's it coming back." And she was depressed and she was sad and it was really hard and really tough. And one night over dinner, she looked at me and said, "Thank you." I said "You're welcome. Wait a minute, thank you for what?" "Thank you for staying with me." "What do you mean staying with you?" "Well, I've learned that many women

who go through this have either spouses or significant others who end up leaving. They say that, "This isn't what I signed up for. I can't handle this. I can't deal with this."

And as I thought back to our wedding standing under the chuppah, or wedding canopy, at our ceremony thinking about how I felt about her and my commitment to her and that no matter what, for the rest of our lives, through thick and thin we were in everything together. And there was no other option. So I said, "You're welcome. Glad to be here."

Couple months ago, we found out and confirmed that we're going to have a daughter. And if there's one wish I can hope for it's that she'll have the same strength and tenacity as her mother. Thank you.

[Announcer] Fighting breast cancer together made Jay and Jennifer a stronger team who can look forward to an even stronger future. Caregivers and supporters of young women diagnosed with breast cancer play an important role in their physical and mental wellness—and their stories matter too.

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