

After waiting my entire life to have a little girl, I was more than ready for the birth of my daughter, Lily. I probably bought out the pregnancy section of the local book store. I showed for my timely appointments with the best doctors I could find, and I altered my diet according to what would be best for my baby girl. I was elated the first time our eyes connected, and I couldn't wait to spend the rest of my life as her guide, confidant, mother, and friend.

I never imagined that that "rest of my life" could possibly be cut short. Following Lily's birth, my doctor diagnosed me with pleural mesothelioma, a form of lung cancer. The devastating news didn't end there and my doctor advised that, unless I sought treatment immediately, I'd likely only have fifteen months to live.

They say that upon news of your life ending soon, you see a flashback of your past. I only saw Lily.

After evaluating all of our options, my husband and I decided that I would need to leave my new baby girl and travel over 1200 miles to Boston where I would be treated with surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. At the same time in the year prior, I had envisioned spending Lily's first year humming to her softly in our new rocking chair, trying to make her laugh in her first photos, and showing her off at family get-togethers. It seemed so unfair to have been given the gift of life, to fight for my own almost in exchange.

An entire precious month of Lily's infancy passed as the lining of my heart and diaphragm and my left lung were removed. My parents cared for Lily in HER time of need while I attended to my own. I will eternally be grateful for the love and support provided to me by friends, family, and my husband.

Lily and I adjusted to our first official, unexpected year together. When I had the energy, we did all the things of which I had initially dreamed; we played at the park, took walks, and had play dates. When I wasn't up to it, I found understanding in Lily's big eyes, and it soon didn't matter what we were doing—as long as I was there to spend every minute possible with her.

Looking back, life is relatively similar to the time following Lily's birth. As a result of my former diagnosis, I was able to give Lily what is perhaps the greatest gift of all—the recognition of the value of life. I am grateful that Lily will never recall the fright and hardships my husband and I endured throughout her first year. My family has grown noticeably closer in the last eight years and we have come to never take anything for granted. As long as I live, and I'm eight years strong, I will always remember what it was like to face the unexpected. I will continue to share my story as an offering of hope and happiness at the end of the uncertainty tunnel that so many continue to face.