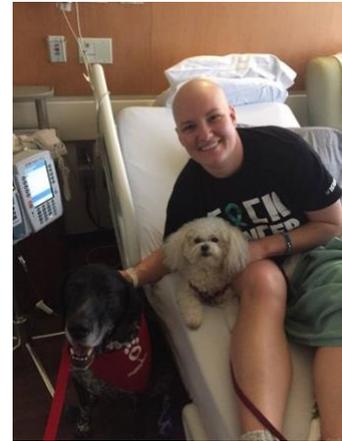




**Survivor Story: Chelsea Dick  
Firefighter/Smoke Diver Marietta, Georgia  
Diagnosed with Ovarian Cancer  
2019**



In 2017, I started Crossfit in Texas and began a fitness journey that entailed numerous hours of training and watching everything that I ate.

From 2017-2019, I was the healthiest I've ever been. In August of 2019 my wife and I moved to Atlanta for her job. I was put on her health insurance because I was taking my time to find something that I really wanted to do job wise. I am a massage therapist so it took time to find clients. I also found part time work using my physical therapist assistant degree and also was coaching at a crossfit gym.

Looking back on it, August and September were filled with some appetite changing, bloating, distention and some fatigue I couldn't explain. At the time, I thought it was all stress related from the moving process.

In October of 2019, my wife and I went to PRIDE and had a late-night meal. Immediately after eating, I had sharp cramps that felt like it was gas related. These pains lasted for about a week. In November, I had an episode of wetting the bed and then in December I had a weird episode of vomiting on a plane twice. Around November, I went to urgent care just to make sure nothing was seriously wrong because I was about to get dropped from my wife's health insurance due to not having the correct paperwork filled out. On December 27<sup>th</sup> I had just rowed a 5k at my house

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when the gas like pains came back. I tried going to the bathroom, tried drinking ginger ale, and tried laying in a fetal position and nothing relieved the pain. By 1 am, I could hardly walk and breathe without having the worst pain I've ever experienced. My wife had to convince me to go to the ER. We got loaded up in the truck and going over any kind of speed bumps made the pain even more unbearable. Once we arrived at the hospital, the front desk said the flu season was really bad and to put on a mask. Looking back on that now, it was already Covid times. I waited in the waiting room for 5 hours before I was called back to a room and another 2 hours before a doctor or nurse came to check on me. A series of tests were started including CT scan, xrays, and vaginal ultrasound. The hospital finally admitted me and diagnosed me with an abscess/infection on my left ovary. They pumped me with antibiotics for 2 days hoping to shrink the infection. After two days, the hospital sent me for an MRI. The results came back as "possible" endometriosis and told me I needed to have my left ovary removed and would try to save the fallopian tube. I went in to surgery December 30<sup>th</sup> so I could start the recovery process and have only 1 giant medical bill and I could start fresh January 1<sup>st</sup> 2020.

The doctors had to remove my left ovary, fallopian tube, and reported they did a "routine abdominal washing" which isn't actually routine at all. The washing is done to check for cancerous cells. 1 week later I was given a stage 2C ovarian cancer diagnosis. The stage 2C just meant that the cancer was contained within my ovaries and had not spread anywhere else. I met with an oncologist within the next week and was scheduled to have a complete hysterectomy and removal of the omentum that covers the intestines.

Going in for my pre-op, they measured that my incision cut would be 11" from my sternum to pubic bone and would be done on January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Being scared is an understatement. The doctors told me they were going to go in laparoscopically first to make sure no changes had occurred. If all presented the same, they would do the 6–12-hour surgery and I would go to ICU for 24-48 hours just as precaution. If there were changes, they would back out and figure out plan B on whatever that needed to be.

Unfortunately, within the 3 weeks between my official diagnosis and the surgery, my cancer had spread to my rectum and colon and the doctors had to back out. The doctors staged my cancer as 3A. The new plan of attack was to do 4 chemotherapies, spaced out 3 weeks apart, do surgery again, and then do 2 more chemo treatments. I started the chemo treatments and went through the process of losing my hair and trying to keep my spirits high.

I continued to do crossfit workouts as I could, take naps, and focused on spending time with my wife.

In March of 2020 is when Covid really hit and this was during my 2<sup>nd</sup> chemo treatment. My 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> chemo I was not allowed to have visitors. My new surgery date was May 6<sup>th</sup>. Because the

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cancer has spread to my rectum and colon, I had to be fitted for a possible colostomy bag in case the cancer had taken over pieces of my intestines. Not only was I going in for major surgery, but I also had a 50/50 shot of coming out with a poop bag for the rest of my life. May 6<sup>th</sup> approached and the surgery was successful and I did not need a colostomy bag. Thank the Lord! My surgery lasted a little over 6 hours.

Covid continued to be an issue and I was unable to have visitors for my 8 day stay at the hospital. I had to have a shot in my stomach each day for 3 weeks to help prevent any blood clots. OUCH! The day after my surgery, physical therapy came to get me out of bed and to take some steps. I went from being a competitive crossfit athlete to hardly being able to stand. What a humbling experience. I lost 15 pounds in the 8 days I was at the hospital. Once my doctors felt it was the right time about 2 months later, I completed 2 more chemotherapy treatments. What little hair I had grown, I lost again from the treatments.

I officially became cancer free in July of 2020. I had to get CT scans every 3 months for a year to check for reoccurrence and as of November 2022 I am still having to do every 6-month follow-ups with my oncologist. I spent many days talking with close friends, and it was one day that my friend made me realize something so important. She said, "Crossfit prepared you for this 6-month journey." I just had to stop and take that in because she was absolutely right. Going into the cancer journey healthy made all the difference.

Looking back on my cancer journey, I was extremely lucky to have the friends, family, and support system that I had. Being at the lowest I have ever been mentally and physically; it was the first time I truly knew that I needed to ask for help.

I was no longer prideful and trying to put my ego above all else. My biggest recommendation for those fighting or who will fight the fight is ASK FOR HELP! People want to and they don't always know what to do or how to.... Tell them. Getting cancer is hard.... So so hard. Nobody understands it unless you personally go through it. It is even hard for family members to FULLY understand what cancer feels like. But they are the closest ones that can have a good grasp on it because they see the good days, bad days, and ugly days.

It is also important to understand that family and friends also have to sift through their own emotions. Everyone has feelings of sadness, anger, stress, and everything in between. Be kind and patient to everyone involved. I think it is good to have those pity parties, but it is also important to spend the days trying to do normal things, staying active and doing all the things that you have control of to fight the fight. It is better to say you did everything you could than look back on things and wonder if doing something different could have helped the journey.

Find you a mantra that you can live by and that really speaks to you. Everything is temporary in life. Just know that going forward. My quote that I have lived by for a while now is "Every storm

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runs out of rain.” There is a fine line in life, unfortunately between line of survival regarding cancer and successfully winning this fight. Some things can be in your control. Be in control and fight. Don’t only fight, but fight HARD. It is the only option we have as cancer patients. You have one job when that diagnosis hits. The one job is to survive. Let friends and family do everything else. Make yourself a priority and give it hell!

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