

*A Life-Changing Statistic*

I was only 18 years old. This was not supposed to happen to me. I should have been spending my day swimming in the lake, lying on the beach, and enjoying my senior summer. Instead, my afternoon consisted of sitting on a stiff wooden chair in a stale waiting room. The walls were pale gray, and the entire atmosphere of elderly patients indicated I was too young to be waiting for an appointment that could drastically change my life.

Four months prior I was lying underneath UV rays at a local tanning salon. All of my friends were tanning for prom, and I wanted to look just like them, glamorously sun-kissed. I have a fair complexion and blue eyes meaning a tan would not be healthy. I told my mom tanning was a necessity for prom, but she did not agree with my argument. I told her I was going regardless of her opinion because I was 18 and capable of making my own decisions.

After tanning for three months, I noticed two very dark moles on my legs that suddenly appeared. I am a hypochondriac, so the first thing I did was panic and Google images of skin cancer. I was instantly worried, but realized the chance of having skin cancer after tanning a handful of times was very unlikely. For a couple months, I convinced myself there was nothing to worry about.

In July, I scheduled my yearly physical with my family physician Dr. Meyer. I told my mom I was going to ask him to look at the new spots on my legs, but she reassured me they were probably fine. After my physical, I worked up the courage to ask his advice regarding these two little black speckles. “Lindsay, you have nothing to worry about. I am 95% sure they are

completely normal,” he said in a comforting tone. I was relieved until he told me a biopsy was necessary to double check the moles were no concern to my health.

The procedure was one of the worst moments I have ever endured in my life. I cry when I get flu shots and need two nurses to hold me down when getting blood drawn. As expected, I start hysterically crying as Dr. Meyer pulls out a scalpel, scissors, a long instrument resembling a cigarette, and a ridiculously long needle. He said out loud, “one...two...three,” and inserted the numbing needle directly in the middle of my mole. I winced and could not control the stream of tears rolling down my cheeks. Next, the instrument resembling the cigarette, called a punch, was strategically placed and twisted over the mole. I was certain I was going to faint from the sight of my flesh being twisted and tugged upon. The final step of the procedure was the removal of the actual mole. I closed my eyes as I heard the snipping of flesh. I opened them once the sound stopped and discovered the mole was pulled out of my skin. There was a perfect circle that resembled a gaping hole where my mole once was. The procedure was performed on the second mole, and he told me I would have results in a week. I prayed to God I was not going to be the abnormal 5%.

It was a Friday, and I was at my boyfriend Mak’s house. I had been a nervous wreck all week, and I was extremely anxious to receive my results. Mak was irritated with my constant worrying and told me I was blowing the situation out of proportion. We were watching a soccer game on TV when my phone rang and I saw it was a number I did not recognize. My heart dropped and I felt a lump form in my throat. I answered my phone with shaking hands and my nurse quickly greeted me. She proceeded to tell me my results. “Both moles came back from pathology as abnormal. Another biopsy is required of the remaining moles and the surrounding

tissue,” she said with no difficulty. She explained the cells were abnormal which meant the possibility of cancer. Horrible images flooded my mind, and I was speechless. How could I be the 5%! How could I possibly have skin cancer?

After a couple days, my mom told me I had an appointment to see our dermatologist who strictly deals with skin cancer patients. My appointment day arrived and my wonderful mother came with me to reassure everything was going to be okay. I anxiously waited in the waiting room with other patients who were at least 70 years old. They looked at me with compassion and I knew I was too young to be sitting in this waiting room. “Lindsay?” The nurse in the blue scrubs called. I took a deep breath and walked over to the hallway where she was holding the door open for me. I followed her to my room. I quickly observed a stark white room filled with all sorts of cabinets. She gave me a gown and instructed me to put it on. “Dr. Gaul will be with you shortly,” she said in a tone that seemed automatic. After what seemed like hours, Dr. Gaul walked into the room. He was a tall, lanky man with the smoothest skin I had seen in my life. This man would give me an outcome that could very well affect the rest of my life.

He talked to me in a slow manner as he was explaining my results which made me feel uncomfortable. I was trying to be composed but my mind was reeling with negative thoughts. He told me he reviewed the slides from pathology and was not convinced new biopsies were necessary. I felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. However, he did tell me that I had a very good risk of melanoma later in life. The moles were not cancerous, but rather precancerous. I did not want to be defined as a statistic, but I was relieved I was cancer-free.

The rest of my appointment consisted of looking at other freckles and moles to ensure that they were not abnormal. He preached the importance of wearing sunscreen every day

regardless of weather conditions. He strongly suggested to never tan again as it would only increase my risk of melanoma later on in life. Yearly appointments needed to be scheduled to keep track of my moles and any new ones that would form throughout the rest of the year. My appointment was finally over. I shook his hand, thanked him, and he exited the room. I burst into tears and thanked God for the positive news I received. I walked to the waiting room where my anxious mother was receiving the news from Dr. Gaul. She gave me a hug and we exited the office with a bounce in our step.

This July will be my first check-up appointment and one year since my life-changing event. I know the result of what can happen from tanning. I heard stories that were meant to scare young people like me, but I did not think it could ever happen to me. I am thankful for the outcome of my situation, and I could not be any more grateful. I wear my pale skin with pride and have a unique glow of my own. Every time I look down at my pale legs I am greeted by two little pink scars that are a daily reminder of how easily one's life could change.