



‘I owe my life
to my friends
from Creighton’

A Facebook post from an Iowa meteorologist led alumna Emily Belden Bond to discover she had Stage II breast cancer

BY MICAH MERTES

Even though Emily Belden Bond, BA’08, lives in Chicago, she’s long made a point of following the Quad Cities weather forecasts of Kevin Phelps, BSATS’08, a longtime meteorologist for his area’s NBC affiliate, KWQC.

They had lost touch over the years, but Kevin would always be Emily’s first Creighton friend. Twenty years ago, Kevin and Emily were both incoming freshmen driving west to start their first semester at Creighton. On the way, they stopped at the same Iowa gas station half an hour east of Omaha. Waiting in line, Emily asked Kevin, “Are you going to Creighton, too?” He was, he said. He planned to study meteorology (a College of Arts and Sciences program since discontinued) and one day become a weatherman.

Later, they both lived in Kiewit Hall. As did Kevin’s girlfriend and future wife, Christen Schulte Phelps, BSBA’08, and over the next four years, they all ran in the same circles.

Flash forward to Feb. 3, 2023. Emily — now a marketing director and published author — saw a new Facebook post from Kevin that showed him wearing a pink suit while doing his daily forecast. The post read:

“On my wife’s treatment/milestone days, we wear pink. Over the holidays, my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. Since then, we have been building an army of doctors, nurses, friends, family and so many others to prepare for battle. So, when you see me wearing pink, it’s my subtle way of showing my support and letting you know it’s a big day for our family as we navigate this journey.

“Also, my wife wants me to remind you all that it may not be a lump, so make sure you mention any changes (even if you don’t think they are anything) at your annual physical. Luckily, her doctor was proactive and ordered her a mammogram just to check (despite her being 36). Without that, we may not have caught this until much later.”

Emily was startled by the news. She learned through a mutual friend that Christen first discovered she had cancer because of a nipple change. Emily had never heard of that being a sign of breast cancer.

Four months later, Emily was about to turn 37. Christen’s diagnosis was still at the forefront of her mind: *If it can happen to her, it can happen to me.* Emily scheduled her first mammogram. She got the results the next morning. She was clear; nothing to worry about, her doctor told her.

© Emily Belden Bond, BA’08, left, and Christen Schulte Phelps, BSBA’08, at the Jan. 25, 2025, Pink Out men’s basketball game against Seton Hall.

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EMILY BELDEN BOND, BA'08

A few days later, Emily noticed a difference in one of her nipples. She didn't feel any lumps and wasn't especially worried, but she couldn't shake Christen's story. It prompted her to make a follow-up appointment with her OB/GYN.

“The whole time, I was so apologetic,” Emily says now. “I'm taking up this poor person's time to do a breast exam. This is so silly. This is just normal aging. I have clear mammograms. What else is there to say?”

Her doctor felt some firmness and, though he believed the cause to be benign, ordered an ultrasound. Soon after, Emily learned that she had Stage II breast cancer.

A CANCER DIAGNOSIS

In Emily's mammogram, taken just days prior, the tumor looked identical to dense tissue, which is why it had taken a different form of imaging to detect it.

Emily's doctor ordered a biopsy, which confirmed the mass was cancer and that it had spread to her lymph nodes. Emily met with the oncologist later that day.

Her next year would include a double mastectomy (and later reconstructive surgery) and six months of chemotherapy. Today, she is cancer-free, though she will need to take an anticancer medication for the next few years and a hormone-blocker for the next 10 to 15 years.

“It is very plausible that in another universe, I wouldn't have done anything until I had other symptoms,” Emily says. “My stomach might have been hurting, which would mean it had metastasized to another organ. There would have been signs of Stage III or Stage IV cancer.”

Emily's doctors later said they suspected she had cancer for about nine months before she found it.

“I believe I owe my life to my friends from Creighton. Had Christen not shared her journey and Kevin not had his platform, who knows where I would be today?”

When Christen announced that she had breast cancer, Emily reconnected with her on Instagram to express her sympathies. Six

months later, Emily messaged her again to tell her that she, too, had breast cancer.

“More than anything,” Emily says, “I wanted her to know that I was getting the help I needed because of her story.”

Over the next year, Emily and Christen went from estranged college friends to “literal sisters,” talking on the phone nearly every day, Emily says. “She's so important to me. We're bonded forever.”

Christen and Emily's breast cancer journeys were similar, with a delay of months between them. Emily was diagnosed around the time Christen had her double mastectomy. Emily started chemo as Christen was finishing it.

“It meant everything to have a friend the same age as me, who had young children like me, who understood what it was like to go through this experience,” Emily says. “The connection feels cosmic. There's something greater than us that made this happen.”

A PILLAR OF SUPPORT

Christen remembers the day Emily told her she also had breast cancer.

“It just broke my heart because I knew too well what she had to go through,” Christen says.

Christen became a pillar of Emily's support system and helped coach her through her worst moments. But the road went both ways, Christen says.

“She helped me as much as, I hope, I helped her. I might have been further along in the process, but we had many of the same things running through our heads. We could talk to each other about the same side effects, the same everyday mental struggles, the same fears about how this was impacting our relationships with the people we love. I think we kept each other from falling down a dark hole.”

Kevin and Christen say they received incredible support after that first Facebook post, including from their Creighton friends. Those in the health sciences fields, in particular, tried to keep their spirits up throughout. Many others shared similar experiences. Their support and their stories gave Christen hope.

That, she says, is the gift she wants to pay forward as a survivor: to live as proof to others that they, too, can make it through this.

PINK OUT GAME BRINGS HOPE

In February 2024, Emily received a double mastectomy. The same day, Christen and Kevin's family were in Omaha, attending the Creighton Pink Out men's basketball game at the CHI Health Center Omaha. At the annual event, players and fans wear pink and help raise money to honor loved ones who are battling (or who have battled) breast cancer. The game brings in hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for breast cancer patients and their caregivers.

At the Pink Out game, fans are encouraged to fill out cards to say who they're wearing pink for. Christen wrote down “Emily B.”

Shortly before Emily's surgery, Christen texted Emily a picture of her at the game holding the card with her name on it.

“I'll never be able to express how much hope that gave me,” Emily says. “Here was this beautiful woman feeling well enough to go to this game, looking wonderful, her hair growing back, and she's there cheering me on.

“I knew at that moment that, OK, God willing, I'm going to be well enough to go to next year's Pink Out game. I'm going to make it back to Creighton, and I'm going to see my friends again, and I'm going to cheer on everyone who has to fight this battle and let them know they're not alone.”

Fast-forward one year later to the Jan. 25, 2025, Pink Out game against Seton Hall. Emily — now cancer-free, with her hair grown back — waited in the concourse of the CHI Health Center Omaha, trying to spot her friend among the crowd. Right as the game started, Emily felt a tap on the shoulder.

“Before I had even fully turned around, Christen had thrown her arms around me,” Emily says. “It was one of the best surprises of my life. I was able to be at the Creighton game that day because of Christen. I'm not letting go of her.”



Photo top: Christen Schulte Phelps, BSBA'08, shows her support for Emily Belden Bond, BA'08, at the 2024 Creighton Pink Out men's basketball game in Omaha.

Photo left: Emily receiving a chemotherapy treatment.

Photo above right: Christen and Kevin Phelps, BSATS'08, after her last chemotherapy treatment.