



From left: Jeff, Lainey, Lizzie, Alex, Charli & Teresa Burkhart

Our “Why”

The Burkhart Family Melanoma Story

Two weeks before my wedding in 2017, my fiancée noticed a weird spot on my back. As a then 28-year-old, I didn’t think much of it but agreed to get it checked out. Biopsy confirmed it was melanoma. So, five days before the wedding, I underwent emergency surgery. They caught the melanoma at the stage before it gets into the lymph nodes and bloodstream, where the probability of success diminishes and usually requires chemo. I was lucky.

Ever since then, I have been passionate about raising awareness of prevention and early detection. I now serve as secretary for the Board of Melanoma Know More.

Those closest to me have been made aware of the importance of getting checked for skin cancer.

My dad, Jeff, has had a few things removed over the years but recently he got a biopsy that came back as melanoma.

It was stage 0, known as Melanoma in situ, on the outermost layer of the skin. It is highly treatable but recommended it get treated relatively quickly.

In my hometown of Mansfield Ohio where my dad was diagnosed there was a transition with his primary dermatologist, and he wasn’t going to be able to be seen for quite some time.

Knowing it was such an early stage, we didn’t rush to mobilize resources to get it properly removed. That was our mindset when we ran into Zach Binzer, a fellow Board Member, ironically on Father’s Day. I introduced my dad and shared the recent diagnosis. Zach then shared

that he had lost his father to melanoma. This was the conversation and the sign that brought us to the realization that we shouldn’t wait. It’s just too tricky of a cancer to just leave to chance.

I reached out to another fellow board member and doctor, Joseph Guenther. He agreed that we should not drag our feet, and he rushed to get my dad in for surgery down in Cincinnati within a few days.

Dr. Guenther did an amazing job and the peace of mind my family has, knowing my dad was good hands means more than words can describe.

It’s a constant reminder that we all have likely pushed an appointment a few months down the road or decided that the spot on our skin is likely nothing. It’s nothing until it’s too late in the world of melanoma. There are several stages, and you just never know how they can progress or evolve.

The best thing you can do is try to prevent it from the beginning by applying the proper sunscreen, get checked on a proper recurring cadence from a doctor at a free skin clinic, with your dermatologist and so forth.

When something does pop up, it’s important to get proper care from the right experts.

Melanoma is treatable if caught early. And early detection and treatment have saved my life and now my dad’s life. This is a perfect example of three board members working together for a positive outcome. And this also show how many different people this disease impacts.

The Board and the rest of the Melanoma Know More team are working to ensure that everyone gets the same chance that we did.

— Alex Burkhart