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Feeling the HEAT

Discovering a suspicious mole at age 23 was terrifying and eye-opening. One woman's story of skin cancer. **By Katherine Zoepf**

Early in 2009, as Lindsey Floyd was making plans to celebrate her first wedding anniversary, it was also time for her biannual visit to the dermatologist. A fair-skinned blonde with, as she puts it, "really mole-y skin," Floyd knew that she was in a higher risk category for skin cancer.

She'd had a few childhood sunburns and had used a tanning bed a few times during high school, but by college, she'd become diligent about applying sun-block and visiting the dermatologist for screenings. Floyd's older sister, Lisa Moore, had even cofounded a company, Cover Clothing, that sells sun-protective resortwear, and Floyd had begun working as the company's sales director.

In the words of her dermatologist, Lisa Rhodes, Floyd was "very aware of her skin." She exercised, ate healthfully, and monitored the moles on her face and body for signs of changes.

But the spot that turned out to be cancer was one that Floyd never even knew

she had. On January 27, 2009, Floyd, who was then 23 and living in Austin, visited Rhodes for a routine checkup. As the doctor examined Floyd's moles, she paused at a new spot that didn't look like a mole at all. "It was a tiny black dot" on her left arm, Floyd recalls. "Like if you held a pen on a piece of paper for five seconds."

The doctor took a biopsy of the area and, Floyd remembers, "She saw a red border around it, and I could kind of tell that she was worried."

On February 2, Rhodes called Floyd with the news: malignant melanoma.

*"It was a tiny black dot,"
like pen ink, she says.*

"I knew it was the worst skin cancer there was," Floyd says. "I was bawling, saying, 'Am I going to be able to have kids?' And she said that before she knew anything, she'd have to cut it out." But the doctor was optimistic: The fact that Floyd had been coming in for regular checks meant that Rhodes was confident the spot had developed within the previous six months, so there probably hadn't been an extensive period of potential damage. Still, in some cases melanoma can quickly become invasive, meaning the tumor grows dangerously deep in the skin, Rhodes explains. "When it spreads through the body, there's not yet a good cure," she says. "But if you catch it early on, when the melanoma is thin, you can usually treat it with a simple excision."

Floyd's melanoma was not deep, according to her biopsy. Two days later, Floyd brought her husband and her parents with her to the appointment for her exci-

sion. Using a local anesthetic, Rhodes removed a piece of tissue one centimeter in diameter. Now, Floyd says, there is "a dip" in her upper arm, where a two-and-a-half-inch scar remains.

Lisa Moore says that her younger sister's diagnosis influenced her own attitude about sun protection. When she had launched Cover Clothing three years earlier, "I was just thinking about the beauty aspect," she says. "I was 28, and I was just thinking, I don't want to get wrinkly, mole-y skin! It really is the most insane thing. Lindsey's melanoma totally changed my focus."

Floyd was shaken by the experience. "It was so ironic thinking that just a year before, I was getting married in the sun, in Mexico, having the best time of my life," she says. "At first I was really depressed, thinking that this could happen again. I asked Dr. Rhodes to take off every mole on my body. And she said, 'Lindsey, we're not doing that.'"

Instead, the doctor scheduled regular skin screenings using a technique called mole mapping, taking magnified images of Floyd's moles and using specialized equipment to track changes over time.

Melanoma is the most common form of cancer among those ages 25 to 29, and Rhodes recommends yearly screenings at a dermatologist's office for everyone. "People can get new moles up to the age of 40 or 50," Rhodes says. "And one person every hour dies of melanoma. We would much rather someone come in and ask us to look at something that turns out to be nothing than catch it too late."



Floyd in a Cover Clothing hoodie

Her wedding in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico