



Surviving breast cancer through rhyme.

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There are lots of very informative books out there to help anyone understand and become better informed about breast cancer. If it is answers and details you are seeking, I would encourage you to research those.

This little book is my personal story. It reflects my thoughts and feelings through rhyme.

Whenever I have had something important or difficult to say I have found myself turning to poetry; whether it be a retirement ditty, wedding or birthday ode or a farewell message when a loved one has died, I have found I express myself best through rhyme.

Don't get me wrong I am no Poet Laureate- we are talking very simple rhyming couplets more often than not. However, through such rhymes I seem best able to express my thoughts and feelings.

In September 2018 I was diagnosed with invasive lobular breast cancer. I had no idea and so it came as a complete shock.

(Lesson to all.... mammograms should not be missed.....go along and get checked.)

Life changed overnight. I went from wife, mother, sister, headteacher, friend to cancer patient.

Over the course of the year I have had various surgeries and treatments and I am lucky enough now to be coming out the other side. I feel like I have been on one of the toughest rides at the fairground with more loops and turns, ups and downs than I have experienced before. Throughout that 'ride' I have experienced a range of emotions. Some of my feelings and thoughts I shared openly at the time but others I kept to myself until now. I have learnt to listen to my body, listen to what is in my head and heart and for the first time in a very long time I am putting me first.

I hope you enjoy this collection of my thoughts and they bring you some reassurance and comfort. Above all else I hope they help you realise that your thoughts and your feelings are important too.

You matter!

BREAST CANCER

It's true what they say
You'll never forget the day.

Time stands still
And how ever hard you will
Life will never be the same
Now you've heard that name

BREAST CANCER.

Anger, tears and frustration
Affect you and every relation,
But initial thoughts of fear
Will eventually disappear
When you realise things can be done

You're not the only one
with **BREAST CANCER** .

So many people who care
You'll find them everywhere
Have been touched by this disease
And will talk about it with ease.

People just like you
Know what you're going through
with **BREAST CANCER**

Once you receive the diagnosis life does change. You become a 'cancer patient' and for the rest of your life you are someone who has/had cancer, either having treatment or post treatment. People view you differently when they know and you view yourself differently.

You hear so many statistics banded about how many of us will get cancer these days, that after a while we just take it for granted. I have lost my father, father in law and my wonderful sister through this awful disease. One of my brothers received the diagnosis December 2018 and my other brother is now 15 years post lung cancer. There is no denying most of us know someone who has suffered at the hands of this dreadful disease. We all have our stories to tell but I have learnt they are our own individual stories. It is often reassuring to hear of others experiences and know that you are not the only one, but ultimately it is about acknowledging how it is impacting on you.

Some of us are talkers whilst some of us are not. You have to do what feels right for you. There are all sorts of organisations, drop in centres and clubs offering support. You can reach out to them at any stage of your treatment and know that there will be people ready to listen who really do understand what you are going through. Alternatively, if you are like me, you might prefer to just talk to one or two personal friends who have experienced cancer themselves or use an online forum where you can hear others stories without any face to face contact.

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS

So many questions running through my head.
So many anxieties as I lie here in my bed.
They crowd my thoughts, invade my dreams, every single night
Impossible to cast them away, try, try as I might.

Why didn't I know it was growing there?
Was it because I didn't dare?
All awhile it's attacking me
Deep in a place that I cannot see.

Had it been there for very long?
Could the medics have got it wrong?
Time to ask questions now.
What can be done? When and how?

So many questions you need to ask.
Make a list, address the task.
No query is too small.
Best to raise them after all.

Knowledge is empowering or so they say.
What's most important is you do things your way.

There is a saying I used to always say to the children I taught and that was, that there is no such thing as a stupid question. It is a popular phrase that reminds us it is better to ask than be left wondering or even pretending to know when we don't. You may hear things or read things that leave you feeling very confused about your situation and what you need to do. This can cause undue worry which is further harmful to your well-being.

I found writing things down really helped. Sometimes I took my questions into my appointments at the hospital and went through them one by one. At other times I rehearsed them in my mind in the waiting room. I am sure many of the things I could have looked up on line, and believe you me I did that too, but I am wary of some things you read and wanted to feel confident about how the questions related to me personally.

What is it Francis Bacon said in 1597,

'Knowledge is power.'

It's good to feel empowered.

TREATMENT

Non-invasive, invasive what's in a name?

At the very start it all means the same.

It's CANCER I don't need another term

But different types of cancer I soon learn.

Diagnosis confirmed, it's about treatment now.

What's going to happen next? What will I allow?

At this stage of the process I so nearly ran.

Wanting to leave the medics to decide my treatment plan.

Examinations, Ultrasound and biopsy too.

All these things being done to you.

Chemotherapy, radiotherapy what will they choose?

Your breast, your hair and femininity you stand to lose.

Share your preferences, and your thoughts don't be overwrought.

It really mightn't be quite as bad as you had thought.

Yes, its hard to know you're going to lose your hair

But in the scheme of things you will soon not care.

It's different for all of us, we're each a different case

But whatever treatments best for you, you must try and face.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder or so I am told.

You alive and well again, will be beauty to behold.

The minute I heard I had cancer I started thinking about loosing my hair. Strange looking back now that I didn't think about whether my life would be cut short like my sisters. Vanity overtook me and it became about my looks. (What an admission!) It's not like I have long flowing locks at the best of times, but for me it was big thing! I was particularly anxious about potentially loosing my eyelashes and eyebrows. I investigated permanent make up and researched bandana's and wigs. As it happened, I did not need chemotherapy, and so I wasted such a lot of time worrying. However, if I had lost my hair I am sure now it would have been ok. We are so much more than our bodies and our looks. What is the saying? "Beauty is more than skin deep." I firmly believe a good heart or a good soul is what really matters.

BREASTS

Breasts, boobs, tits
Whatever you call your bits
They're a special part of you
No matter what you do.
Over the years they change
As your body starts to age.
But what of the surgeon's knife?
He's going to save your life.
Baps, bosoms, mammary glands
Put them in his safe hands.
He'll cut the cancer away
So you can live another day.

Breasts come in all shapes and sizes, and bras in various guises.

You'll be amazed at the variety out there, so many websites I could share.

You can feel sexy again or romantic with lace, just get searching and find the right place.

Your body has changed but it's still really you. I've learnt to love mine. I hope you can too.

I hope my last poems caused no offense, but there is no getting away from the fact that breasts are regularly the brunt of humour or sexualization. Attitudes have changed over the years and they are no longer the things we don't talk about. On the contrary they are discussed often and these days we can even buy 'a perfect pair' if we should so desire.

As a young girl they mark the start of growing up. Although mine had long ago given up the fight with gravity, I was still quite proud of them. This pride partly evolved from having a flat chested friend who regularly looked at my cleavage with envy. The thought of loosing one completely or having a lumpectomy filled me with horror. My friend would never wish she had my boobs again and would my husband still fancy me, after all he is definitely a boobs and not a bum man. I was filled with fear.

As it turned out I didn't need a mastectomy but needed a lot taken away. I was left with one very floppy breast alongside, a new pert, smaller one. Notice the words I usealmost immediately I was delighted with my new right breast. Mr Kevin Harris my consultant had done a great job. All I could think about was when could he do the other? Now, I realise that this won't be everyone's experience and for some it is a huge shock. My initial love of my new breast did turn to frustration when I struggled to find bras to fit. But time is a great healer and there are a surprising number of online shops who cater for women like us, post-surgery.

My message to you is give yourself time. Learn to love yourself and allow yourself to be loved again.

THE WAITING GAME.

Surgery's complete, they've marked your card.

Now it's the waiting that's so hard.

Will it be chemo, radiotherapy and drugs as well?

Sadly sometimes, it's impossible to tell.

Further investigation might be the only way.

My results were sent to the USA.

The waiting is difficult, you just want to know

But it's good to be sure of the best way to go.

LOOKING BACK NOW

I always thought I was a patient soul

But putting this disease behind me is the ultimate goal.

Waiting is difficult in so many ways.

I find myself counting all of the days.

Looking back now it makes no sense to me

I should have realized what will be will be.

Being patient is probably one of the hardest things.

- *Waiting for the results of the mammogram or the biopsy.*
 - *Waiting for surgery.*
 - *Waiting to know about the lymph nodes.*
 - *Waiting for therapy.*
 - *Waiting for reconstruction.*

The list goes on.

The waiting can feel like years not days, and all the more frightening as you start thinking about how much life you have left. It is tough but ultimately you will get there in the end and it is important that you are armed with the best information to ensure you have the right treatment.

EMOTIONS.

Positivity is hard to sustain
Well, today anyway it is starting to wane.
I'm sitting in the sun with not a smile but a frown
Not sure really why I am feeling quite so down.
With cancer comes emotions; emotions of extremes
Bear with me a few minutes while I explain what I mean.
Emotions can be striking, whether happy or sad,
Angry, frustrated, despondent or glad.
I'm usually well balanced; level-headed, you know what I mean.
Confident to show my feelings, but never make a scene.
Cancer has changed me in ways I do not know
One minute I am fine, but the next I am low.
Don't feel you have to, push your emotions aside
Accept your feelings. It's really important they are not denied.
It's good to open up, get things off your mind,
But above all else, to yourself, be kind.
Allow yourself, if you need, to shed a tear
Accept your emotions without any fear.
Don't worry about your family and everyone
Thinking all the time you have to stay so strong.
Ultimately your true feelings shouldn't be fake.
Let them out and share them or you will surely break.

Early on I felt the need to put on a brave face. This was especially the case around my family and close friends. Don't ask me why as they are a really caring crowd and I know would have thrown their arms around me and let me cry if I needed to. Instead I bottled a lot of my emotions up.

Funnily enough it was during my visits to the nurses that I relaxed and let me feelings out. Every visit the tears flowed, sometimes without me really understanding why at all, but it helped so much. Watching a few emotional films also helped....it gave me the excuse I was looking for to have a good howl.

It's back to that analogy of a fairground ride- a roller coaster. My emotions were all over the place and the more I tried to explain them the more frustrated I got with myself. Add Tomoxifen to the equation (the hormone drugs I was given post-surgery) and I lost all sense of self. I just didn't feel like me.

It was a very special friend, Claire, who has had cancer herself who helped me, by simply saying 'be kind to yourself.' I was worrying so much about everyone else. I didn't want to cause others upset and so I wasn't able to express my own feelings. I needed to be open and honest.

It is important to share your anxieties and believe you me, it is healthy to sometimes shout and swear if you feel the need.

RADIOTHERAPY

The radiotherapy team go the extra mile

Welcoming everyone with a great big smile.

Each session starts exactly the same.

Date of birth, address and of course your name.

They mark you up, measuring rays in line.

Lay back calmly, you'll be just fine.

It seems scary at first. I cannot lie

All high tech- very sci-fi.

But it'll be over before you know it, lie back still.

Let the rays do their work, bad cells they will kill.

I couldn't write this book without a special mention about this team. For me they were the ones who helped me turn a corner. They helped me feel normal again. We laughed together, discussed TV and music together and discussed holiday plans together.

During my sessions we had a period of snowy weather. They did their utmost to ensure appointments were maintained, even going outside themselves to shovel snow in the carpark and walking to work. Each and every one of them was amazing. A truly supportive team.

I sailed through my radiotherapy sessions with them, but be warned it was when I finished that the side-effects kicked in. Despite lashings of E45 cream my skin became very itchy and dry.

Sessions were cold too, so make sure you have wooly socks and even gloves if you need. It's incredible what a difference these small things can make when you are lying there topless on the machine.

THE END OF MY CANCER JOURNEY.

Health matters are getting sorted, the end is insight.

Hormonal ups and downs I'm determined to fight.

I have become very aware that none of us live forever

But I am determined now to enjoy all of our time together

With family and friends who bring such pleasure

Time to enjoy life with them at our leisure.

They have been with me each step of the way.

Thank you so much is all I can say.

There's so much to be thankful as my cancer journey comes to an end.

For the medics, my family and each and every friend.

For your kindness, your love and your listening ears

For supporting me through all of my fears.

None of us know the future from here on in,

But I'm determined to embrace it.....let my new life begin!

At last I feel I am regaining control of my life. The last year has been a little surreal. Quite frequently I felt like an observer watching things happen to somebody that wasn't really me. It has felt like life has been on hold.

A huge amount has changed for me and there is no question I have changed too. Surprisingly my confidence has grown. I am less worried about what others think of me and am more prepared to say no when I need to. Previously, I was very driven by my work/my job. Looking back now it had become my identity. I no longer feel that way. My priorities have changed.

I have realized just how special friends and family are. I have felt truly blessed by the love, support and encouragement I have received. I am not just talking about the wonderful flowers cards and gifts but the regular, encouraging text message, and phone calls with kind words of support. I have visited more coffee shops and sampled more scrumptious cakes than ever before!

In the years ahead I want to spend more time with these wonderful people. I also want to get fitter. My body has done such a lot for me this year.....it's kept fighting....it's survived. Time for me to be kinder to that body and embrace a healthier lifestyle now.

One of the key messages I hope has emerged throughout my poems is the importance of self. Breast cancer has helped me realise that I matter. A whole army of people, (medical staff, my employers, work colleagues, M & S bra fitters, friends and family) have invested time in me.

Time to be kind to myself now...as I said in that last poem....let my new life begin!