



“BLASTING THE BAS**RD”

My Personal Pink Mountain Climb

By Jo Ryan

BREAST CANCER – YEAH, IT'S FLIPPING HARD BUT IT'S DO-ABLE! LET'S BE HONEST: HOW MANY 42-YEAR-OLDS ACTUALLY STOP AND THINK THAT THIS BEAST COULD EVER AFFECT THEIR OWN LIVES? I NEVER DID.

I have always danced through life, as I like to call it. Life is for enjoying, spending time with loved ones and good friends, having a laugh, working hard... bad things don't happen to you. You only hear of other people's bad luck, having been touched with the Big C wand... Don't you? That's what I believed until it touched me.

07/12/10... I will never forget the day I found Mr Lump. The doubts started in my mind: could it be BC? No, of course not, it'll just be a cyst, nothing to worry about. As always, positive thinking. I have always been a strong, happy character. This time, however, I was wrong and I was faced with a huge mountain to climb... and am still climbing.

30/12/10... The day I was diagnosed. I will never forget the emotions that I and my family went through from the day I was told I had breast cancer and during the next week. The bottom literally falls out of your world. It is a fear of the unknown. The Big C has hit me. The sheer fear that I would not see my little boy grow up. The heart-break at seeing my mum and dad, sister, other family members and close friends so upset, unable to help me yet all by my side like rocks. My rocks that have been with me throughout the past nine months and I know who will always be there for me. I hit rock bottom that first week and allowed myself to cry lots and lots, shout and scream into the open air, lie in my bed and

cover myself with the duvet and wallow in my dark and dreary thoughts. Questions... so many questions and no answers to pacify my mind. Why me? Will I live? Will I die? Is it just in my breast? Has it travelled to other parts of my body? Non-stop worry, fear, a feeling of being totally out of control. This was without doubt the worst week of my life.

But from somewhere deep within I found a strength that I never knew I had and from then on I have grabbed hold of the reins and ridden my way up and around my mountain, head down, fighting all the way. It's a roller-coaster, you can't get off... so many twists and turns around the mountainside, dizzy, sick, tired, but you carry on and you just do it Why? Because it is the hardest job you will ever be given in this lifetime, but it is do-able. I had one thing always clear in my mind throughout the treatments and that was that I had to be in control. I was in control of cancer and not cancer in control of me. Psychologically this helped me enormously. There are dark days when you fall down and it hurts more than anything has ever hurt in your life. I allowed myself to have those dark days, crying so much that I thought I didn't have any tears left. Trying to sleep but troubled with nightmares and so tired, so very tired. Then it's tomorrow, a new day, and you wake up with so much energy and positivity and once again you are in control and ready to battle on. You have to fall down sometimes;

this allows you to regenerate energy levels to get back on the roller-coaster and take the ride.

I have received treatment in Clinica Juaneda and Policlina Miramar. I was lucky enough to meet with two wonderful ladies, patients like me. We called ourselves the Three Musketees and have been on the journey together. We are a great support for each other. I started chemotherapy in January 2011 for a duration of six months. As my Mr Lump was a large boy I could not be operated on first; the oncology team decided to start me on chemotherapy for six months to try to reduce the size of him.

The chemo is again the unknown and the fear sets in. Once again I wanted to be in control of the side-effects I could have. Those of you who know me will remember me with my long dark hair. Knowing that I would lose my hair I took the first step in cutting it shoulder length. I then shaved it all off at the first clump that fell out in my hand. And I felt great, not sad, not upset I had lost my hair. Just fantastic that I had chosen to shave it, not the cancer making it fall out around my shoulders. Control, that's what it's all about... being in control. The side-effects from the chemo are different for everyone and I have to say I was lucky. It wasn't easy, I would be a fibber to say so, but you can do it and it is now a distant memory to me.

From the very start of my treatment I took a huge step back out of society and got my



head down and concentrated on me and my cure. It was the only way I knew how to deal with it: 110 per cent me and my new job I had been given for 2011.

I found therapy in sharing my story, talking about it and being open about my breast cancer. I do understand that everyone is different and totally respect those who deal with their cancer in a more private way. We have always been a close family, even though I have lived overseas for 23 years. My parents have been at my side from day one, and my sister and her family too. I could not have been so brave had it not been for my family, I feel very lucky to have them and will forever be in their debt. I am also amazed at the enormous support I have received and still receive from friends and people who were not friends as such before my diagnosis and now will be in my heart for life.

I used Facebook as a form of communication during my illness. As I went through my treatment and climbed my mountain I gave updates on how I was doing, and where I was up to. These updates were called "Blasting the Bas**rd". The feedback from friends and acquaintances has been uplifting and inspiring and has helped me be stronger, keep fighting and beat it. I will be forever grateful to all of you.

Such was the support from friends that back in March various fund-raising events were organised by close friends here in Puerto Pollença. To my utter amazement the whole community came together and we managed to raise over €8,000 for AECC, the Spanish Association for Cancer. The month of March will always be magical to me from now on. My sister and her work colleagues raised over £3,000 for cancer research. They organised events at work and all ran the race for life for cancer research in May, and I was lucky enough to be able to fly over between chemo sessions to support the girls. I was proud as punch that day and I will be running the race with all the girls in 2012. We will continue the fund-raising events for many years on. They

will be a celebration that you can beat the bas**rd.

From the above events here in Mallorca and also back in the UK we managed to spread awareness, and breast cancer was on everyone's lips. We got coverage on English Radio Mallorca, the local newspaper covered the events, and on top of this we raised lots of money for cancer research. Throughout my journey I have felt a feeling of togetherness and being protected by family and friends. What a lucky girl I am, is a thought that I have on a daily basis. Once the chemo was finished I felt like I was half-way up the mountain. During chemo the stops on the way up are more and more: you feel weak, lose your way a little, everything seems blurry, you can't climb as quick as before. So you rest. Put your feet up and work on building up your energy. It's the only way.

I had a lumpectomy and lymph glands removed on 26 July 2011. I am in total awe of my medical team and have to say a huge thank you to Dr Moragues and Dr Rifas and his team. To say I love my doctors is a bit over the top, but I hold them so high in my esteem. They are life savers and have saved my life. Your medical team become like your family during breast cancer treatment and I am lucky to have the best team I could ever have wished for.

The operation has been a success! Mr Lump has reduced from more than four centimetres down to seven millimetres - fantastic results. I have had six weeks break between the operation and starting radiotherapy. I am now doing "rads", as those in the know call them. Radiotherapy is nothing compared to chemotherapy and I am now four sessions down with 16 sessions to go.

Looking back on the past nine months, my life has certainly changed. It has to be the worst experience of my life, yet I feel that I can take lots of positive thoughts, emotions and experiences from this climb. It's still not over but now I can see the peak clearly in front of me. Not long to go now to reach

the summit and finally be able to say...

That's it, I beat the bas**rd.

I would just like to say a massive thank you to all my family, friends and medical team for coming on this journey with me. Samy Ryan, you are my goal and the light at the end of the tunnel and I will never give up the fight. Mum, Dad and DD, my big sister - you all rock my world!

Should anyone be at the start of a journey like mine, please feel free to contact me. I would be very happy to share experiences and answer any questions anyone should have.

Email me at:

villaplusmallorca1@yahoo.co.uk



Jo Ryan lives in Puerto Pollença and has been in Spain for 23 years. She is a happy single mother of a son, Samuel. She is overseas area manager for villaplus.com. She is a northern lass who loved Spanish from a young age; she studied in northern Spain and always dreamed of living in Spain. She speaks fluent Spanish and Catalan. She says she is "in love with life!" Her battle with breast cancer inspired friends, family and local residents in the north of the island to get together for various fund-raising events in March of this year. In total over €8,000 was collected for AECC, the cancer support charity on Mallorca.