



By Vicki McLeod

When life gives you lemons...



When life gives you lemons, make lemonade... PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD

THIS article started as a quick follow up on something I'd written for the *Bulletin* recently: Anita Vince had walked the GR221 with friends to raise money and awareness about breast cancer and I thought I'd put in an article about how to check your breasts and talk about the Cancer Support Group's campaign to get all of us chicas checking our "lemons" (or melons, or mosquito bites, or boobs, or breasts, or whatever you'd like to call yours). I popped up a quick message on my Facebook, had any of my friends ever had breast cancer? I thought surely I'd get a reply from one or two people I knew. I wasn't prepared for sixteen women and two men to answer me within an hour, all of whom had had breast cancer or had a loved one who had died from the disease. I didn't realise the extent of the problem, but I realise the power of letting people tell their own stories, so here they are. I asked them all the same set of questions, here are their answers, in their own words. There are so many amazing and moving stories of survival, and loss, that we have decided to spread the article over two weekends.



"Believe that you will come through this." PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD

ULRICA MARSHALL

• When did you first find out you had cancer?
May 2006

• How did you find out?
I'd felt a lump for a while – maybe a month – but had dismissed it as I had two very young kids and breastfeeding plays havoc on your breasts anyway... Finally, my husband prompted me to go saying it just wasn't right. I was still in denial holding onto that much-repeated statistic that 9 out of 10 lumps are benign. Mine, sadly, was not.

• How did you feel when you found out?
Terrified and in disbelief. I was so sure it was going to be nothing I'd brought my feisty 15-month old daughter to the biopsy. I was literally shaking when he told me that it had to come out (whatever it was) and I needed to go into surgery as soon as possible.

• What treatment/surgery did you have?
Lumpectomy – to minimise the damage to the breast – twice as there was still cancer in the margins after the first operation. 6 rounds of Chemo and 33 sessions of radiotherapy followed by 5 years of Tamoxifen. I quit after 5 years without doctors' guidance as I was reading so many negative things about tamoxifen and I had done what I thought was enough.

• How did it make you feel?
Tired. Nauseous. Determined. Angry. Lucky – that my diagnosis was good after the operation. But mainly tired.

• How did it affect your family?
My girls were too young to really understand what was going on, though my eldest started hating cheese and refusing to eat it. I quickly gave up dairy after diagnosis and cheese was the biggest cut. So she clearly knew. My husband didn't take it well.

He was petrified. At the time of my diagnosis he had just been offered a job in Tokyo, which he'd accepted. I insisted he took it and went ahead of me – partly because he was flapping and it wasn't helping me, but also once my 6 months of treatment hell would come to an end, I could make a fresh start in a new city (I was diagnosed in London) with no reminders of the zombie I was at that time.

• Tell me how you are now please....
I feel normal. In a good way. I no longer think of myself as limited by what I went through, not a victim or unlucky. It's something that happened to me that does not define me. The experience improved my diet a lot and I remain non-dairy though I eat some meat these days – hard not to in Majorca. I exercise 4-5 times per week – but then I always did. I try to remain positive and avoid stress and stressful situations as far as possible. I have been 10 years' cancer free, so if it happens again it will be a new cancer. Who knows? Of course, I am still fearful before each check-up but not as much so as during the first few years.

• Do you check your breasts regularly?
Yes but not necessarily methodically, but I am more in tune with my body now.

• What piece of advice would you like to give to your younger self?
Don't stress so much. Otherwise, not a lot. Of course, I should have avoided dairy but it was not a unique cause of the cancer, it is just one of the few triggers that can be controlled and I did love those stuffed crust pizzas!

• What piece of advice would you give to someone with breast cancer?
Take control. I know doing so is hard in a situation where you have so little, but it helped me reading every book I came across – the one I eventually stuck with

was "Your life in your hands" by Dr Jane Plant, which I referred to as my bible. Change your diet - the one area we can exert control - I firmly believe food is medicine and some foods are really helpful to aid treatment - such as eating an (organic, preferably) egg every day during radiotherapy. Finally, do fun things. Do anything to take your mind off 'it'. I didn't have much chance as I was taking care of two kids under 4, but that certainly left little time to dwell. Move forwards and be kind to yourself. Believe that you will come through this.

ANITA VINCE

It was Easter and I was lying in my bed and doing a breast check and felt a small pea sized lump. Got it checked the following week as have private gynaecolo-

gist and he wasn't concerned but said to come back in 2-3 months. Went back in June and it no longer looked like a lump with the ultrasound. It had little arms like it had developed its own blood supply. He wasn't sure but was concerned.

The next week I had a lumpectomy when he confirmed it was breast cancer. As I was relatively young and it was fast growing I'd need chemo and radio. I remember going to Mercadona after the second appointment in June when I had the op booked the following week and being devastated! I rang my husband and he wanted to know why the hell I was at the supermarket!

"Go to a friend's" and he'd be back ASAP. I couldn't work out why me? I ate healthily, exercised, didn't smoke, or drink too much that often. I thought only

old people had chemo! My family were amazing. My sister and parents came to help and I had fab friends who came and did stuff when I couldn't.

My kids were obviously very worried for a while but I think we're all stronger for it and my son in particular is extremely caring. My relationship with husband is also better. I didn't work for a year. My hair falling out was also a big low. You appreciate the important things in life more and try to be a better person.

I've realised we are all on our way to our graves but it's about making the best time of while we're here: loving relationships, family, friends, striving to do your best but taking the stress away. Life's too short to miss opportunities and not stay positive! My advice to someone with breast cancer is to try to stay positive.

Try all sorts of alternative therapies as some of them were great for me. Keep open minded and try to eat super healthily when going through it.

LEONIE THACKRAY

I found out two and half years ago after I'd had several mammograms, ultra sounds and biopsies. I underwent my first mammogram as I wanted cosmetic implants and that's what you have to do before they will go ahead. When I found out I had it I felt very shocked and bitter as it was my third bout with cancer. I'd previously had Hodgkin lymphoma and the subsequent treatment involving radiation, chemotherapy and several invasive operations over a period of seven years starting when I was 16 and ending at 23.

So I actually thought "why me again" selfishly. I had a double mastectomy, my nipples removed and then implants. My body rejected the left implant resulting in several procedures including the removal of the tissue expander replacing implant and fat tissue from my body placed around the implants. My body rejected the implant as my



LEONIE THACKRAY

"I feel blessed to have been given a third chance." PHOTO: VIVKI MCLEOD

chest area has radiated tissue damage from the previous Hodgkin treatments and it's proven that it is very difficult to operate with success in that area.

The operations were painful and I had to spend one summer with just one boob! But if I'm honest I felt very relieved that I didn't have to have chemotherapy or radiation as I knew what was involved and really didn't want to through it again.

Also having one boob and no hair was not something I could imagine for me, being a little bit vain like most women if they are honest!

My family were obviously worried and concerned but equally know me and knew that I could dig in and deal with it as I had twice in the past.

I feel lucky and blessed to have been given a third chance. A cat

has 9 lives and all that. Do I still check my breasts? I check underarms as I still have lymph nodes.

My advice is to step up and take control of things you can and let go of things you can't. I believe everybody is unique and how each individual reacts and deals with lumps in the road along the way (no pun intended I'm not that clever) is different! It will never be as bad as that first prognosis.

Be kind to yourself and also to those who choose to stand by you because it is actually harder for the people who love you than yourself at times. Take each day one at a time. Good or bad. Remember you're human and you can allow yourself to feel a bit sorry for yourself but don't dwell there.

TO BE CONTINUED...



ANITA VINCE

"I thought only old people had chemo!" PHOTO: VIVKI MCLEOD

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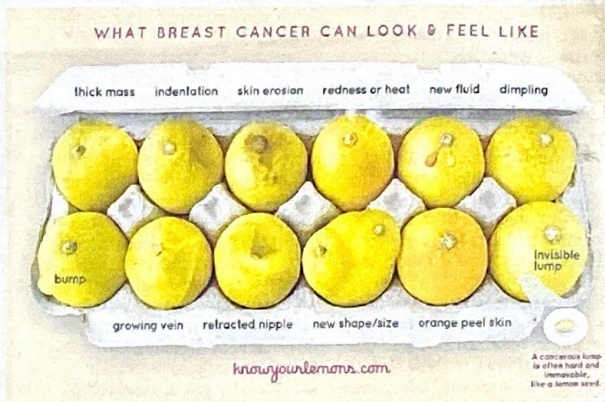


By Vicki McLeod

When life gives you lemons.....

THIS is a continuation of last Sunday's article telling the stories of people whose lives have been affected by breast cancer here in Majorca. You can see the entire series of stories on www.mallorcammatters.com My thanks to all of the people that have given their time to appear in this article who had the courage to not only share their stories with me but with the *Majorca Daily Bulletin* readers as well. Please get in touch with us if you would like to tell your story. There will be more in the Sunday edition next week with more information about caring for your body, more stories of survival and more information about help available on the island. If you need practical or emotional support as a person who has any type of cancer or you have a friend or loved one who has cancer then you can contact www.cancersupportmallorca.com or call their helpline on 659 887 455.

HOW TO CHECK YOUR BREASTS



There's no right or wrong way to check your breasts. But it is important to know how your breasts usually look and feel. That way, you can spot any changes quickly and report them to your doctor.

Every woman's breasts are different in terms of size, shape and consistency. It's also possible for one breast to

be larger than the other. Get used to how your breasts feel at different times of the month. This can change during your menstrual cycle. For example, some women have tender and lumpy breasts, especially near the armpit, around the time of their period. After the menopause, normal breasts feel softer, less firm and not as lumpy.

Look at your breasts and feel each breast and armpit, and up to your collarbone. You may find it easiest to do this in the shower or bath, by running a soapy hand over each breast and up under each armpit.

You can also look at your breasts in the mirror. Look with your arms by your side and also with them raised.

See your doctor if you notice any of the following changes:

- A change in the size, outline or shape of your breast
- A change in the look or feel of your skin, such as puckering or dimpling
- A new lump, thickening or bumpy area in one breast or armpit that is different from the same area on the other side
- Nipple discharge that's not milky
- Bleeding from your nipple
- A moist, red area on your nipple that doesn't heal easily
- Any change in nipple position, such as your nipple being pulled in or pointing differently
- A rash on or around your nipple
- Any discomfort or pain in one breast, particularly if it's a new pain and doesn't go away (although pain is only a symptom of breast cancer in rare cases)

Breast changes can happen for many reasons, and most of

them aren't serious. Lots of women have breast lumps, and nine out of 10 are not cancerous.

LINDY TITTLE

I found out I had cancer in a dingy cubicle in hospital at Queen Alexandra in Portsmouth in September 1999, the whole process was hideous. I found the lump as I was drifting off to sleep. I was laying on my back my hands were resting in my chest and my little finger in my right hand touched a bit of chewing gum! Well it felt like chewing gum that had been chewed for a very long time and then stuck under a desk: hard really hard So I felt it and tried to think of when I would have been in contact with a gum chewer. It was a long hard lump that went from the top of my collar bone right down to almost my nipple.

I went cold and actually felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise, I knew for sure that I had breast cancer. A few days later I went to the doctor who was really angry with me for waiting, he made an appointment at "the one stop breast clinic" for soon, he actually said make it soon! I went to the appointment, you have to bear in mind that you know you have cancer but you have to wait for the appointment. Eight days later I had the appointment, and then had to go back the next week for a biopsy, they needed to take a lump of my breast tissue and grow it. Then you go

home and wait for 2 weeks for the lump to grow! Finally two weeks later they told me that I would need to have a mastectomy. How did I feel when they told me? I felt relieved. I felt thank god for that, let's put a plan together to fix me. The treatment made me feel, sick, angry, furious, sad and eventually better.

I had good support: my best friend at the time had been diagnosed 6 months before me, we helped each other lots, she even picked me up from hospital after the mastectomy! But she died ... I still feel very sad about that.

How did it affect my family: I was a single parent with 3 teenagers, my children pulled together and looked after me .. they would look in the Delia Smith cookbook, go buy the ingredients and make food. I stayed in bed a lot .. the kids hung fairy lights around my bed .. (so I always had love hanging around) they loved me ... they guarded me ... and I am so very proud of them ... we are a team.

Now I'm fabulous. I'm well. I also had to take Tamoxifen so to have gone on and had two more babies was very lucky. I have just finished my yearly mammograms. I do check my one remaining boob. I have since had a lump removed from it .. but I'm okay.

Piece of advice I'd give my younger self .. find my husband David and meet him sooner .. I have always eaten well .. by that I mean proper vegetables and fish and salad and meat .. I just think it was my battle .. everyone has something .. breast cancer was mine. The advice I'd give some-



"The treatment made me feel, sick, angry, furious, sad and eventually better." PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD



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one with breast cancer, know you will be better and eat broccoli... as much broccoli as you can. I still eat it pretty much every day.

LINDA KING

I first found out in Oct 1995 after feeling sharp pain in my left breast and feeling some hardened tissue but not a defined lump. The hospital did a mammogram which showed no abnormality so they did an ultrasound which showed a



LINDA KING

"Hearing the news felt like falling through a trapdoor into a deep black abyss of devastation."

PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD

2.5cm lump. A needle biopsy was negative too but the surgeon decided the lump should be removed anyway. The lumpectomy was done and a week later when I went for the stitch removal I was told it was malignant.

Hearing the news felt like falling through a trapdoor into a deep black abyss of devastation. It was a ductal infiltrating carcinoma so 10 days later I was admitted for a lymph clearance to check for spread.

Modern surgery takes only the lymph node closest to the tumour but in 1995 the maximum number of nodes were removed (which means the lymph cannot drain properly ever again and my arm swelling). Luckily the cancer had not spread and so I only needed radiotherapy.

I had to travel to hospital 40 miles away three times a week for 8 weeks, even though I was not allowed to drive myself it was exhausting.

My family were in total shock and feared for the worst outcome although my husband tried desperately to keep upbeat. I felt I was living in a pain-filled, anxious, brain-numbing bubble and losing weight. It was a very black episode in my life. However it taught me a valuable lesson - we all have plans and dreams we hope to achieve "sometime".

We decided that if I recovered we would put those plans into action ASAP!

Now I am happy in my place in the sun! I now check my breasts during every shower. I would tell my younger self that stress and anxiety is often connected with developing breast cancer so try to relax.

My advice to those poor women who are currently fighting this cruel disease is that it is no longer a certain death sentence and treatment is now much more effective. Also to take care of yourself, don't try to carry on being "wonder woman" and let your family and friends look after you for a change.

ZOE AUSTIN YORK

I found out on the 2 June, the day before my birthday last year. As my younger sister was diagnosed with breast cancer in March, I was convinced that no way would it hit both of us within a few months of each other, so I went to the appointment feeling really confident and had the wind completely taken out of my sails. How did I feel? Absolutely gutted. I'd just been through it all with my sister and now it was my turn to go through it all. I had had a routine mamo in February which highlighted a suspicious area, microcalcifications that could become cancerous, so I was scheduled for a second mamo in August. When I told my gynae that my sister had been diagnosed, she said we won't wait, we'll book you in for an MRI now. That lead to an eco (scan) to see if they could do a biopsy by eco, it wasn't clear enough, so I had to have an MRI biopsy which wasn't comfortable and turned my whole boob purple. I had a lumpectomy (a week later than the surgeon wanted, but I wanted my daughter to have finished school for the summer and not be worrying about me). As it happened, delaying was good as my boob was still so damaged from the biopsy it was like a bloodbath when they opened me up and the surgeon wasn't convinced he'd got it all, by then I had two tumours. My oncologist wanted me to have chemo but I refused - the statistics didn't stack up to me. As she put it: it doesn't help 80% of people, for 12% it's too late, but it saves 8%. As mine was caught so early, I didn't feel I was in the 12% bracket or the 8% - time will tell. But as the surgeon thought there was a bit left on my chest wall, I had radiotherapy, every day for a month, then started on Tamoxifen which I have to take daily for the next 5-10 years. One of the side effects of Tamoxifen is cancer. I don't want to take it but felt it would give me a better chance. The radiotherapy wiped me out. I had 9 days off work to recover from the surgery then started on radio at 9.30 every day, by 2pm I was exhausted so for the duration (August) I couldn't work full time which was frustrating. To me it was all an inconvenience, something to stop me living my life as I was used to living.

My daughter was gutted, not only did her auntie have cancer, but now her mummy.

My partner John was very supportive and although he's very against all of the treatments on offer preferring natural (cannabis oil) remedies, of course he supported my decision to take the radio. My parents were distraught. Dad blames himself (his mother died of breast cancer when he was only 13). How am I now? Absolutely fine. I feel fine.

It was only recently that I could wear a bra again, and I missed that. I am a slow healer so until only 3 weeks ago, my boob was still too sore (damaged from the radio) for me to wear a bra. I am still undergoing tests to see if the radio caused nerve damage due to a few issues that I have, but otherwise, I am carrying on my life and reminded from time to time if I overdo things that I am still not fully healed.

Do I check my breasts regularly? Daily! I can feel the scar tissue inside the damaged boob, so constantly feel it to see if it's gone down but otherwise I am happy that I am being very closely monitored. We found out two months ago that my sister carries the BRCA2 gene. Our oncologist reckons I will have it too, I get the results of my test sometime mid-late May. This puts us at a higher risk for not only getting cancer in the other breast, but also ovarian cancer, so we now have 6 monthly gynae check ups.

It also made me worried for my daughter, for her future. Especially if I also carry the gene, that gives her a 50% chance of inheriting it. With the gene we have a 60% chance of getting breast cancer, 40% chance of getting ovarian cancer (the silent killer). So of course I am worried about having passed it on to her and at the moment, as she's only 14, there's absolutely nothing I can do about this.

What advice would I give my younger self? I don't know. I think that knowing if I have the gene will help a lot, then I won't blame myself for drinking or smoking so heavily when I was younger but I never felt a lump, it was so small when found under MRI that I couldn't have felt it, so I don't worry that I should have checked my boobs more often.

What advice would I give someone with breast cancer? Pfff, that's a hard one. To make sure you take someone else with you to the early day appointments as it's impossible to take it all in. Think of the questions you want answered, all the what if's and make sure the person you take has good listening skills!

As I'd been through it all with a friend before my sister, I



ZOE AUSTIN YORK

"It made me worried for my daughter, for her future." PHOTO: VICKI MCLEOD

knew what to ask so I kind of took over her appointments as she just couldn't take it all in, we discussed her questions beforehand, so I knew what she wanted to know and made sure we got the answers.

They don't offer information here, you have to ask for it. So make sure you think of what questions to ask and ask them, write down the answers and consider all of your options - don't blindly follow just because they say you should have chemo - ask how necessary it is because I feel too many people go through it at such damaging consequences to the body, without it being necessary.

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By Vicki McLeod

When life gives you lemons.....

THIS is the final instalment in our series covering stories of people affected by breast cancer in Majorca. Our thanks to everyone who has participated in the articles. For more information and support for anyone living with cancer please contact www.cancersupportmallorca.com or call their helpline on 659 887 455, they can direct you towards resources and services designed to help. You can read the articles at www.mallorcainmatters.com

TERRY MOTT, HUSBAND OF KIM

My wife, Kim, was diagnosed in April



Terry's wife Kim.

2004. She had just turned 40 in the previous February. She had decided to clean the conservatory windows one Saturday morning. While stretching to reach the top of the window she said she felt a sore tightness in her left breast. It was as she felt the sore spot she noticed a hard lump

set quite deep into her breast. It worried her immensely on that Saturday and Sunday. We went to see her doctor directly on the Monday morning and she referred her immediately to the Nuffield Private BUPA Hospital in Brentwood. We got an appointment on the same day and went there in the afternoon. They did X-rays and a procedure there and then to remove tissue for a biopsy. They asked us to return the following evening. At our appointment the following evening, we were told that she did indeed have breast cancer. It was an aggressive, non hormonal, stage 3 cancer.

The news left us numb. That's the only adjective I can honestly use to answer that. I remember a stunned silence from both of us. There was no crying, there was no hysterical reaction. There was just a controlled numbness and an immense feeling of shock that seemed to, almost immediately, wrap us both in cotton wool. It was only years afterwards that I actually appreciated that shock can be a wonderful thing. Especially when you begin to realise what it enables you to do during a period of immense stress.

They decided that she should have 5 courses of chemotherapy prior to a full mastectomy. During that ten week period, the oncology surgeon referred her to a plastic surgeon and suggested the possibility of a full reconstruction during the same operation because he would have to be removing the whole of her breast. They strongly suggested that one major operation instead of two would be hugely beneficial. Kim decided that would be what she wanted and the two

surgeons actually performed the operation together.

At the time of the surgery, the doctor said the chemotherapy had reduced the cancer to a mere 'ghost' of what it was. I remember him saying that the actual cancerous tissue was about the size of a golf ball and he suggested it would have been growing for at least a year to get to that size.

One of the most important things I remember from consultations regarding the reconstructive surgery was that the skin of her original breast had to have enough flesh still attached in order to maintain a blood supply to the skin. Fortunately they were able to do that and so the mastectomy and reconstruction was carried out successfully. She actually looked amazing. She even had a 'nipple' tattooed onto the reconstructed breast.

A week went by and results from the operation showed that all the cancerous tissue had been removed and she was officially classed as 'in remission'.

All was going well until six months later when she found another small lump in her armpit, on the opposite side to the mastectomy. Again, she had it removed and the results showed it to be the same type of cancer again. This was critical as it meant the cancer had entered her lymphatic system. The gateway to the rest of the body.

Over the next 12 months she underwent further courses of chemotherapy. The cancer had spread to her liver, lungs, kidneys and bowels. She spent more and more time in hospital. Then she started to complain of headaches, something Kim never had. Scans showed the cancer had now spread to her brain. She underwent a course of radiotherapy but it was too late. She passed away a couple of weeks later on 16 August 2006 aged 42.

During the entire period of her illness, I honestly felt every emotion known to man. Each one as strong as is physically possible to take. But if I think about it now, the strongest feeling I had, as her husband, her life partner and her best friend was.... frustration. Frustration like I'd never known. A level of frustration I didn't know was possible. It tore me into pieces. I was always the person to 'fix' a problem. It was my job to make everything okay again and I usually did. And now, here I was and I couldn't do a single thing to stop it or make it go away. I had to sit, hold her hand and watch as this awful disease slowly took hold.

It brought the family together and tore it apart at the same time. What made it worse was that it didn't just affect our

family. It was her friends as well. Kim had an abundance of 'best' friends, but each one of them only had one 'best' friend. Each one of those family and friends dealt with situation in a different way and trying to understand all their reactions simultaneously whilst going through it myself was tremendously painful and hard to cope with at times. I was seen as the go between. The guy between them and Kim. It was incredibly hard to handle that as I only wanted to be there for Kim. She was my only concern. But then, each family has its strong members and thankfully they stepped up and gave me all the support I needed when I needed it most.

There were times when Kim would say to me "I don't want anyone to see me like this", "please ask people not to come to see me". There were some family and friends who simply couldn't understand that, and I have to say I took some hostility after she passed for 'not allowing' them to see their friend. It took some time to come to terms with that.

I think that you should live your life now. Tell someone you love them every day. And, never be afraid of doing the right thing. Even if this means some people not understanding you at the time. They will eventually.

I believe that, possibly, the best thing you can own is a clear conscience. And that comes from not having any regrets. Kim and I had a fabulous relationship based on trust and honesty. All throughout her illness, she never needed to doubt I was trying to do the right thing for her. She trusted me. It helped me to eventually find acceptance after her passing.

Breast cancer doesn't always mean the end. Survival rates increase and get better every year. Listen to your doctors and follow their advice. Also, look into all your options. Some holistic medicines may not be for you but think about them as a complementary treatment alongside the more mainstream prescribed by your doctor. It can't hurt and the benefits they can offer may just make you feel better in yourself which can only help.

HELEN PITT

I was heading off for my summer season on board the yacht I work on. The yacht was leaving from Palma to the South of France and luckily my captain allowed me to do the passage and instead fly to the UK to see my mother overnight and then meet the boat in the South of France. After a good evening together and night's rest I was up and showering when I noticed a lump on my breast which wasn't there when I left Palma the day be-



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HELEN PITT
My heart pillow was a great help to me.

fore. As soon as my Mother's local doctor's surgery opened I went to see them. The doctor agreed that it was something to be looked at as soon as possible. They then said it would take me a couple of weeks to be seen even with a private appointment but I could get to see a counsellor while I was waiting. Luckily I have private insurance so I could get an appointment in France when I arrived there. It was only a few days before I got my appointment but they were the longest waiting days. Within those days the lump got bigger and a hole then started to develop next to the lump. I went to have a mammogram in France and they confirmed that I had a tumour but not if it was cancerous. Further tests were needed.

I came out from the mammogram in shock even though it was obvious that something was wrong it still didn't seem true. I called a good friend in the UK that had had breast cancer twice and asked advice from her experience and shed a few tears. I decided that I wanted my treatment in Majorca whatever it was going to be. When I arrived in Majorca I got several different opinions but they were all the same. It needed to come out as soon as possible.

The first thing was to have a biopsy of the tumour. This was one of the most uncomfortable procedures which I didn't like and neither did the tumour. After being shot the tumour grew and doubled in size along with the hole getting bigger. It was as if it knew we were onto it. The results came in and it was confirmed it was cancerous. I was then booked for an immediate lumpectomy. They took 1/4 of my breast with the tumour but sadly they didn't get it all. Another operation was needed. I decided that I didn't want the risk of it not being taken completely and

having chemo or radiotherapy, so that I would then have a full mastectomy instead. I think it was very important that I elected to have genetic testing on my tumour. It was sent away to California as it didn't exist here then. Two weeks later with the results came back showing that with taking Tamoxifen for 5 years there was only a 12% chance of it returning and that chemotherapy would be of no benefit. Over 50% of people have chemo unnecessarily. There is now a company called Mampoint in Spain that can do the same test though some insurance companies still don't cover it. The national health and private health care in the UK now do. I know at least 7 people I have told about this that have not had chemo from having the same test.

To be honest I think I was in shock for several years. I was never angry or 'why me' but felt guilty that I hadn't had to go through as much as other people. The people I was meeting then were going through chemo etc and I felt that I had cheated and not had to deal with as much. The mastectomy affected my self confidence more than I expected. I couldn't bear to look at myself and hated showering. The turning point of this was to have a beautiful butterfly tattoo done using my scars to form the wings.

My family were devastated as I was the first in my family to have breast cancer. My sister said she couldn't believe it as she had always thought of me as being indestructible. Most of my family had the same feeling and if it could happen to me then it could happen to anyone. My sister was brilliant and gave up all her annual leave to come over and stay with me and nurse me.

But now I feel brilliant! I have my regular tests coming up and then it will be every year. There is always a bit of a build up when the tests are due just in case something is discovered. I don't think that once cancer has entered your life that it ever totally leaves you but you learn over time how to live with it and to feel so lucky to have the opportunity to do so when others don't. Make the most of all that you have and relish life. Look after yourself as much as possible and don't bring in any stress that is not necessary. I know stress is a big culprit and I have allowed it in my life on too many occasions and then you realise your health is everything, not all the other things in life.

If you have any doubts if there is something wrong get it checked out as soon as possible. Early detection makes the world of difference. Don't leave it. Get as many

opinions as you want to confirm the treatments are the best for you. Speak to others that have been through it. Remember though that we are all individuals so that not all cases are the same and how you deal with it will be different from someone else. If you remain focused then you will find the best way for you, do it at your own pace and don't rush your recovery because you feel you should.

SABINE ROOKE

It was October 2008, I was 31 and my baby daughter was just three months old. I felt a lump in my breast. It felt like it was the end of the world. I was in shock, as if it was not happening to me

They did a biopsy, and afterwards told me to open a bottle of champagne as the lab said there was no cancer. I also had a mammogram when I felt the lump: they told me to come back in 6 months as they only saw some calcification so nothing to worry about. But I decided to have the lump removed anyway as I had to get a hernia in my belly fixed. So during my hernia surgery they removed the lump, and sent it to the lab. Four days later they told me it WAS cancer after all. It was a big shock. I had a second surgery to remove more tissue. Then I had a course of chemo and radiotherapy. And since then I have been taking Tamoxifen



SABINE ROOKE
I never trust a biopsy anymore.

every day as the tumor was hormonal. I felt quite okay during chemo, not sick at all, but very lucky and very tired. I lost my hair so I had a wig, but it looked really good. I never went outside without it and I always had makeup on. I didn't like it when people on the street looked at me, the cancer patient, with pity. I tried to live my life as normally as possible.

My baby daughter, Naomi, of course did not notice anything, she was too young but my partner John was really in shock

on the first day. He didn't hear a thing the doctor said. These days we appreciate the little things in life. We think you should enjoy life now when you can, and don't wait 'till you get older' (if you are lucky enough).

I am very well at the moment. I have every 6 months an mri and echo for the rest of my life as it runs in the family (my grandma, aunt and mother had it) They did a genetic test but did not find the brca1 or brca2 gene, but it is obvious that my family is at a higher risk. I never trust a biopsy anymore. If I had decided to leave the lump this could have been a totally different story.

I would recommend every woman to see a doctor when you think there is something wrong with your breasts. And get a second opinion if you don't trust it. Looking back I would have chosen a different contraceptive option as I don't think the pill is a very positive thing for women.

I would advise other people with breast cancer to stay positive, try to live your life as normally as possible. Don't sit on the sofa crying the whole time feeling sorry for yourself as it makes you feel even worse. Inject your life with positive energy, and enjoy life as much as you can. You never know when it is over.

THE HEALTHY BREAST PROGRAMME WORKSHOPS.

These are offered on the first Saturday of every month at the Ra Ma Yoga centre in Palma on Calle Despuig 51. The mission of the programme is to educate women globally in ways to reduce their risk of breast cancer and prevent its recurrence. Subjects in the workshop include getting to know the breasts and the emotions connected to optimum breast health, recommendations on screening techniques, lymphatic system, immune system, hormonal system, detoxing, environmental contamination and concerns and how our bodies are connected to mother earth, living with purpose, the power of prayer and meditation and more. You can see more about the program on www.mammalive.net. The programme is open to any woman interested in learning about prevention and support in recovery and in healing a woman's body. The workshops are run by Jeanne Lurie (www.lifeyoga.es).

Breast cancer support groups in Majorca: **Un Lazo en Movimiento (Pink Ribbon in Motion)** www.unlazoenmovimiento.org, www.aubamallorca.com and www.almohadadelco-razon.com (the Heart Pillow project)



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