Kylie Johnston Lung Cancer Network

Roslyn Hogan

Hello, my name is Roslyn Hogan, I am 59 years old, happily married for just on 38 years. I have 2 boys aged 34 and 31 and a beautiful daughter aged 26. I have been blessed with 2 adorable grandchildren - Luella 4 years and Murphy 20 months.

Two years ago today, 27 th August 2004, I was diagnosed with advanced stage IV Adenocarcinoma Lung Cancer (Bronchio-alveoli). Both my lungs appeared to have been hit by a "snow storm". Inoperable, incurable, not able to radiate - maybe chemotherapy could prolong my life?

To say I was shocked is an understatement. I was not even sick. I was a fitness junkie attending at least 8 classes each week. I belonged to a competitive physical culture class at night and attended aerobics sessions most mornings. If I was not at a step class, then I was at a new body class or a high impact or pump class. I began to notice my breathing took longer to recover after each workout and my instructor suggested I have a check up. My local GP took one look at me and declared he had not seen anybody so fit so I continued along just thinking I should cut out a couple of classes. However, it did cross my mind that maybe I should take up something more suitable for a 57 year old.

After a few months my GP ran some tests and while I waited for the results I had convinced myself to halve my exercise load. At no stage did I think I had anything wrong with me - the word cancer never crossed my mind. So when the doctor told me my prognosis, I simply said - but I have never smoked in my entire life. I had never been sick, never visited doctors, I guess I had the most perfect healthy life anyone could wish to have...that was until 27 th August, 2004.

Both my sons were overseas, one was working in Asia and the other living and studying in the USA - they both came home. I was given only months, maybe longer if I responded to chemotherapy. My husband and children took control and answered phones and visitors. It seemed everyone came to see me; it was a continuous stream of family and friends. They brought food, flowers, books, anything they thought would comfort me.

I had already seen an Oncologist and I immediately sought a second opinion. Both opinions were exactly the same, and so I decided to go with the 2nd Oncologist as he made me feel very comfortable and his rooms were very small and not so overwhelming. I started chemotherapy immediately using a combination of gemzar/carboplatium. I had no idea what to expect, I was walking a path I had never been down before and I tried to be brave.

I handled the treatment ok, but looking back now I feel I just gave in to the beast and didn't fight at all. That was until I received the most motivating and uplifting letter from a young girl who I met through physical culture classes. She spoke of finding the right "balance", of "balance" becoming my mantra. She told me that there would come a time when acceptance and fortitude merge and love of life, family and yourself take over. She said it is at this point, that the balance that you need in life to fight this, will be revealed. Precious memories, current moments, love, willpower and accepting help from treatments and people will all merge and help with this battle.

I began to feel I could be doing more so I sought out help from an alternative health centre. I went weekly to have intravenous doses of Vitamin C as well as immune boosting vitamins. At last I thought I was doing something - my Oncologist told me it was expensive urine!!

My blood markers started to come down and by Christmas 2004 my scan showed a little shrinkage.

Setting goals

As you go along this journey, you must set yourself goals. I desperately wanted to meet my grandchild who was due into this world on 17th December, and I did.

My second son returned from overseas to marry his long time sweetheart also at Christmas. What a wonderful wedding.

If you could say there was a *positive* to come out of this, then it would have to be *the love extended to me by my family and friends.*

I continued with chemotherapy until April 2005 when my doctor told me the drug had stopped working for me and I should take a break and "wait and see". Well, that was just the worst thing he could have told me to do. I decided to go to the Oasis of Hope Hospital in Mexico for some alternative treatment. It was not new to me as I had been a companion to a family friend who attended a clinic there some 10 years previous. However, I chose a different hospital and my husband and I spent 18 days there. You do hear of some horror stories of Mexican clinics but I can honestly say I found the whole experience to be both beneficial and entirely professional in every way.

The accommodation was good, the organic restaurant - great, the staff - fantastic. I underwent various treatments daily - colonics, blood irridation, laetrile infusions, special dietary classes, oxygen therapy, enemas and a large quantity of vitamins, plus psychology sessions. There were cooking classes, prayer and share, motivational speakers and videos, lectures and excursions to nearby attractions.

Each day I wrote in my journal, keeping a record of my 18 days at The Oasis of Hope. On the last day I wrote: "Today I will reflect on my journey since I left Australia 18 days ago. I remember the love and support and the concerns and emotions expressed by my children as they watched me begin this journey. I laugh now when I recall how anxious both my husband and I were at actually first seeing the Oasis of Hope - it looked modern, clean, impressive and most of all welcoming. I was instantly at peace the moment I walked through the front doors.

I remember the doctors and staff, the patients and their carers, the missionaries and of course - the fabulous food. During the past 18 days I have experienced all emotions. I have been relieved just to arrive safely, anxious about my treatment, positive about my prognosis, warmed by love and emotions, sad when I think about how young some of the patients are, happy when I feel good, blessed to have found this place and most of all, lucky to have my adoring husband with me. I am not walking this difficult path alone, and for that I am grateful.

To Mexico

I reflect now on my life before cancer and realise that I was the luckiest person to have what I had and do what I did, to see what I saw and to love as I did and still do. I am positive that some good will come from this treatment. I have nothing to lose. When faced with a choice of doing nothing or taking some treatment in Mexico where thousands of people have been before me, some with amazing results - I chose the latter. Some of the patients survive and sadly some do not - I am going to survive - I am determined."

I still follow the strict diet - no sugar, meat, dairy, alcohol, coffee. I only eat organic and drink one litre of home made organic fruit and vegetable juice daily. You may think it is a lot of work, well it is, but I just think of it as having a job but also keeping myself healthy and alive.

My Oncologist did not approve - he told me desperate people do desperate things!!

I had my break from chemotherapy and it was time to start my 2nd line of treatment so in August 2005 I started Navelbein. I handled it really well with no side effects except a little nausea after treatment. I still felt I could do more so in October 2005 I started seeing a Chinese doctor. Dr. Chen told me acupuncture would wake up my T-cells and make them fight the bad guys. He also introduced me to more pills (52 each meal) however they are only small and can be eaten with a spoon - easy. I now no longer experience any nausea and I feel great. Dr. Chen tells me I am very good and gives me lots of positive comments - he makes me laugh.

He has introduced crushed apricot kernels - 15 each meal - just one more thing to digest but I am not complaining - I am still alive 2 years from diagnosis.

I am always out there looking for something new, I research the net constantly. I am an active, interested, determined patient. My Oncologist has got to know me well and will never send me home to "wait and see" again. My life has been turned upside down but I can honestly say I have more "up" times than "down". I plan my life extremely well, always between chemotherapy and Chinese and I can still manage to babysit my grandchildren, lunch with friends, party with family, holiday with family and friends and generally just be around good company.

I know all stage IV Lung Cancer patients are given a very poor terminal prognosis, however, with a positive attitude you can succeed. I have walked my 2nd Relay for Life as a survivor and feel great. Remember, set yourself goals and allow yourself to celebrate when you reach them. When diagnosed, my youngest son had 2 years to complete his PhD in Psychology. I wanted to be there with him to share the moment and I set myself this goal. So on 10 th July 2006 I was there in Los Angeles to see him accept this honour. It meant so much to me but it was his acknowledgement on the first page of his dissertation that made me cry. It read.....

> *"In dedication to my mother, whose courage over the past 2 years is a testament to the power of love. If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And today I still have a dream...Martin Luther King Jr. Thank you Mum for continuing to dream. It is a lesson I will remember long after the words on these pages fade".*

My next goal is to meet another grandchild in 2007.

Inspiration

When I started this journey I was enormously inspired by Lance Armstrong. His cancer had spread to his lungs and presented as a snow storm, as mine did. When I asked my Oncologist why Lance could be cured but not me, he quickly pointed out that I did not have testicular cancer!! That was the difference.

My next source of inspiration came from Kylie. She was out there talking about lung cancer, making a difference, making people aware. I wanted to do something but it just got too hard for me, until I followed Kylie's journey. As a result of Kylie's fantastic efforts, I am planning a fund raising day for Lung Cancer Research. I will be 60 on 12 th March 2007 and I will be having a huge celebration under a marque on our tennis court, inviting everyone I know to share this special day with me, in return, I ask for no presents but a donation for Lung Cancer Research. Hopefully, I too can make a difference.

To all those out there walking this same path, safe journey and happy endings.

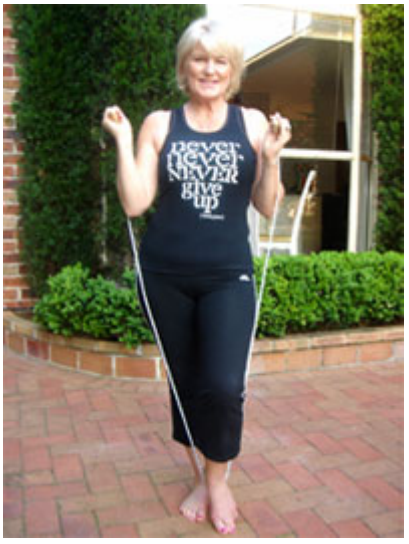
Update October 2007

I continued on Navelbein chemo treatment through until November 2006 when both scan and blood markers indicated that this was no longer working for me and it was time to change. After 2nd and 3rd opinions from both the Royal Prince Alfred and Royal North Shore hospitals, I decided to try a Tarceva vs Zactima clinical trial however even though I had all the side effects, the targeted therapy was not successful and in April 2007 my scans showed increased tumour growth and I was removed from the trial.

I started my 4th line of treatment in May using a combination of Alimta plus Avastin - making a total of 6 different chemo drugs so far. Scans last week indicate no change - NED (no evidence of disease) would have been great, however I am more than happy with NO CHANGE.

In August I became a 3 year survivor, have now returned to aerobics, physical exercise dance class and try to lead an active interesting life. I am passionate about supporting The Australian Lung Foundation and their bid to promote research into the early detection of lung cancer and I will NEVER, NEVER, NEVER give up the fight.

Ros Hogan



Roslyn exercising

Roslyn, husband and grandchildren

Roslyn and grandchild

Happy birthday Roz!

Roslyn's Granddaughter Luella

Collecting donations to help others with Lung Cancer

Roslyn giving a speech

John Williamson at Roslyn's party