

THE PREAMBLE BIT...

I will scream from the mountain top that cancer will not define me, yet here I am writing about it. Forgive the irony...or not.

There are not many words in the English language that appear to conjure up such trepidation and fear as the word '*cancer*'. Until the age of forty-eight, I was smugly unaffected by the power of this word. Of course, I knew what it meant, had observed its rage from afar, but I was not prepared for the impact of its fury and its command for attention that was about to be unleashed.

This book is simply an account of my experiences, thoughts, hopes and emotions that have been connected to my life with cancer over the past eleven years. You may notice contradictions in thoughts and feelings, or perhaps simply a growth in understanding and acceptance, leading us to where we are today.

I have no doubt that overall it will be deemed that my story is my cancer story. However, I hope it is considered more than that. I have included an account from '*Wednesdays with Harry*' at the end of each chapter. A few years ago, I started a diary-type narrative of times spent with my son Harry. It was important to me to create enduring memories. And, in the future, if I am not here, hopefully, he would overlook remembering me as the one nagging him to tidy his room, but rather the one who provided laughter, enjoyment and meaningful moments. It seemed essential to compile these memories into written form, perhaps as a keepsake for Harry, or perhaps as an outlet for my own need to build words into sentences. Either way, they are intentionally light-hearted and showcase indulgent exaggerations and my personal sense of humour.

I fully realise that some readers may question why I have alternated the seriousness of cancer with the whimsical Wednesdays chapters and perhaps become frustrated with this structure. If this is the case, then you have truly come along for the rollercoaster ride that are my dealings with cancer. It is, in fact, the whole point of this book. One day I am laughing with Harry, and the next, I am confronted with concerns. The insight is intentional.

Of course, I hope my cancer ramblings create thought-provoking awareness, but honestly, I hope the Wednesdays chapters shine brighter and are valued more. They are the essence of my life and are what gives me strength, laughter and purpose. They are the hero chapters because they put cancer in its place by denying its very existence. Their presence stomps on cancer's power and represents life without intrusion.



THE BIT YOU NEED TO READ FIRST

We are currently living with the very real threat of Covid-19. It has spun the world on its head and we are forced to proceed with caution. For many, the pandemic has been an introduction to physical and mental health issues, perhaps for the first time. My own initiation into a medically provoked upheaval began many years ago...

I live a very modest life in the incredibly picturesque Yarra Valley in Victoria, Australia. I dearly love my two golden retrievers and twenty-two-year-old son Harry, most likely not in that order. I am old enough to have spent my twenties exploring the world without fear and young enough to still remember most of it.

I am quite determined not to define myself by circumstance or situation; however, I wish to tell you what is currently sitting close by. I have breast cancer. Not the type that is grieved, treated, survived and hope restored. I have the kind that wants to play a nefarious game. Mortality challenged to stamp its reality when I learnt the cancer had spread. It has wandered off from its original source and constantly attempts to lure me into its power and to fall into a chasm of fear. Prognosis is stage four and incurable.

Eleven years ago, when those around me suddenly began to tread lightly, words were lost, and the manual for behaviour was incomplete. Since then, I have become a student in the cancer classroom. I acknowledge its rebellious nature but understand that it is a part of me. Lessons learnt include; resilience, acceptance, purpose, distraction, adaptability, perspective and a master class in humour.

Clearly, I don't have it all sorted, as I absolutely feel the grips of mortality as a scary and lonely place. It is owned entirely by yourself and no one can buy into it. Needless to say, everyone travels their own path.

To counteract cancer's chaos...I chase normal.



Shall we dance?