

In The Pink

Here in this breast cancer special we talk to five women from Guernsey and Jersey who want to give the message that there is life after breast cancer.

There is life after breast cancer

THIS October will be the 11th year for Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The campaign is now well established and aims to raise awareness because one in nine women in Britain will be diagnosed with breast cancer at some point in her life. The good news is that with early detection and better treatments coming to the fore never before has there been such strong weapons in the armoury of the battle against breast cancer. The pink ribbon is a delicate pink battle badge which every woman should wear during October to ensure that the breast aware message is strong and clear.

Margaret de Ste Croix ABC

I was diagnosed with breast cancer last June, just as I was about to celebrate the big 50. At first I found it difficult to look beyond the forthcoming surgery because I was terrified. I went to London for a double mastectomy with immediate reconstruction. I was in theatre for 14 hours but I think it was harder for my partner Simon and my family as I didn't know much about it

It took quite a few months to get over the surgery and chemo surgery, but I will always remember how I felt when the surgeon told me I had to have chemo, but followed it up with the words "But I am pretty sure we got it all." That was the day I started to look forward.

Also how many women at 50 get new boobs and a tummy tuck into the bargain! I lost all my hair which was a bit strange to say the least. My son used to call me Sigourney and ask me when the alien was due to arrive! When my hair did grow back I did hope it wouldn't grow on my legs! But it did unfortunately. Above all I feel lucky to have had a surgeon like Mr El-Gazza in Jersey and the UK team, together with Oonagh de Ste Croix, the Breast Care Sister - and to have had the support of the other members of our group. There are times when we all need to talk to each other because nobody else can quite understand how we are feeling. One message I want to give too is that if you think there is something wrong then get it checked out and ask for a second opinion, you know your body best. The other message is there is cleavage after cancer too!

Ruth De La Mare

I was diagnosed with cancer in 1999 after a routine mammogram. I didn't even know I had a lump which makes me want to say to every woman of 50 and over who is able to have screening that you really must go along. If I had not gone then my cancer would not have been found so quickly. When they found my lump I was told that it was probably benign. With this in mind I told my husband not to bother to

come along with me to the hospital appointment for my results. 'I'll be in and out in five minutes.' I told him. It didn't turn out like that. While I was in the waiting room a woman came out crying and I felt very sorry for her. Little did I know that minutes later I would hear the same news.

But I was lucky, I had a partial mastectomy followed by radiotherapy. I have come through it and feel fine. But you really must go for that mammogram just don't assume that everything is OK. I know some women, some of them quite close to me, who are just so frightened they won't go for screening. But they really must, everyone should. If you have a problem then the quicker you start to sort it out the better

Jo Allen, Guernsey Pink Ladies support group

I was diagnosed with breast cancer four years ago. I found the lump myself when I was just 32. I had to have a mastectomy and chemotherapy, followed by breast reconstruction a year later. I was one of the original members of the Pink Ladies. There were just six of us back then but we are 72 strong now, which is incredible. We have members who come to us on diagnosis and some who were diagnosed 10 years ago or more. The thing is we all support one another and are able to share our experiences to help each other get through it. We now have a 24-hour support line manned by our Pink Lady volunteers, so you never have to feel alone. The group has given me friendship and support through what is a very traumatic time, and I like to think I can give something back by helping others who are going through what I did.

Regine Hern, ABC

I went to have my breast checked out three years ago after I noticed a strange thickening. I didn't think it was anything serious as it wasn't a lump. But I was diagnosed with breast cancer which came as a shock. Keeping busy was my way of coping with breast cancer. While I was in Southampton discovered a hobby craft centre

which the nursing staff came to refer to as my 'heaven'. I started creating my own greetings cards.

It may sound strange but I did have a good time over there while I was having my radiotherapy

When I got back to Jersey I started selling my cards to raise funds. I also do weekly car boot sales and donate the money I make to our group funds too. I must be the only person who comes away from car boot sales with more goods than they arrived with because people donate their left over bric-a-brac for the charity. It's the reason I am looking for a little pick up truck or van please!

We all know cancer is scary, we are all still a bit scared. I found a lump a year ago and thought to myself, "oh dear here we go again, can I go through this all once more," but thankfully it was nothing. But you do worry. The support of our group is important, we all help and it's my way of giving something back. I know of one or two women who have come through breast cancer and stay away from group meetings because they don't think they need the support. But I tell them that it's not about them, it's about the help that they might be able to give to someone else.

Pippa Simpson, Jersey After Breast Cancer group

"We were just about to move house in 2001 and Christmas was looming when I was diagnosed with the dreaded BC. What great timing! I was too numb to be devastated. I had always been the healthy one: a non-smoker who ate healthily. But there it was out of the blue, the one club that no one wishes to join.

Various things got me through. Whilst I was on chemotherapy I read a lot, in particular a book by Bernie Siegal called 'Love, Medicine and Miracles', also, therapy of the retail variety! I went out and bought a nice camera, I didn't do much with it, but simply looking at it made me feel better. Christmas was a blur, the only present I wanted was my health back. On Christmas morning a strange thing happened, something in me said "don't worry, you'll be fine." It was curiously comforting. Before, during and after the chemo the Jersey medical team, especially Mr Allardice, were excellent with their care and the ABC support group provided the reassurance, that, with luck, there would be life after breast cancer."

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Article from Issue 72 dated Friday 15 October to Thursday 21 October 2004