

# ***"A True Story"***

**Update - 6th August, 2023**

## **I AM NOW A 29 YEAR SURVIVOR!!!!**

Below is the story of my Breast Cancer journey that I started writing back in 1993. There was not much information available back then for people diagnosed with Breast Cancer. The internet was basically a futuristic thing that only a few could experience and was very basic, and of course, no such thing as Google. I wrote this story and made a very early Web Page. It was pretty bad compared to today's but, we had such an experience that we wanted anyone who would find it, to be able to read our journey and have some hope.

I did a yearly update for many years, just to let people know I was still around and going strong. Well the website is no longer there, but this is a 2023 update.

So, below you can read what I went through and just how tough it was on myself, my gorgeous Pete, my beautiful children Brad and Katherine, our brand new baby Jess, my Mum and dad, sisters and brothers and their families and also my step-children who were very much involved in what we were going through. And of course so, so many wonderful friends. They all went through it with me and without them I know I probably would not be here now.

Especially my Pete. Wow. What can I say? He saved my life!!!

I often think back to how my poor kids, family and friends were feeling. I was just so involved in having a baby (caesarean), breast operations, Chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Anyway, it's all in the past and now.....

We now have 12 children -

Rhett (Pete), Lara (Pete), Shanie (Pete), Rachael (Pete), Lucas (Pete), Tarran (Pete), Jennes (Pete), Krystle (Pete), Nathan (Pete), Brad (Sue), Katherine (Sue), Jessica (Pete and Sue)

23 ½ grandchildren -

Rhett - Indiana, Tristan, Alaska,

Lara - Mercedes, Zach

Shanie - Jazmin, Tiana, Sigh

Rachael - Aiden, Chelsea, Connor

Tarran - Caleb

Jennes - Olivia, Elliott, Hannah

Krystle - Scarlett, Harper

Nathan - Avalon

Katherine - Ben, Harry

Brad - Natasha, Chloe, Jamie - ½

(4 Great Grandchildren (Pete) - Kaylem, Jax, Tyler, Tilly )

HI. MY NAME IS SUE WALKER. I COME FROM BEAUTIFUL [KURNELL](#) IN SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA.  
EVERY YEAR, THOUSANDS OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN ARE DIAGNOSED WITH  
**BREAST CANCER.**  
I KNOW WHEN I WAS, I FELT SURE THAT IT WAS A DEATH SENTENCE.  
I HAVE WRITTEN THIS STORY TO SHOW OTHERS THAT THERE IS INDEED  
“ A LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL!”

**1993** - At last, things could not have been better for me. I was in love with a wonderful man, Pete, and I had two wonderful children, Brad - 15 and Katherine - 12.  
I had been going through a very messy divorce when I met Pete. We had met through a single parents group that we had joined.

You can imagine my amazement when I found out that Pete had 9 children and 2 grandchildren. Oh my goodness.... I remember my first thoughts when Pete joined the group were **"My goodness, how can anybody have that many children and still seem sane."**

It didn't take me long before I fell in love with this beautiful man and before I knew it, Pete had moved in with me (and lots of extra kids on weekends and school holidays 😊).. What was I doing falling in love with a man with all those kids? Well I did, and wasn't I pleased to find out that his children were delightful. They ranged from 8 to 25 and each one of them was lovely to me and accepted me into their rather large family with open arms. Wow, how my life changed.

So, now Pete and I had 11 children between us. 9 of his, 2 of mine and it is absolutely wonderful to be involved in such a large family and one that is so close. I was very impressed with the love that this man has for his children AND that he actually remembered ALL of their birth dates and times. How amazing!!!!

Finally I had found my Prince Charming that every girl dreams about and he swooped me up into his wonderful world of love, joy and happiness, opened his heart, and I was truly, blissfully happy at last.

It didn't take long and we were talking about having a baby of our own. Was I crazy? Here I was, 39 years old with two teenage children, considering starting all over again. The more we talked about it, the more I liked the idea. My parents jokingly called me their 39 year old delinquent daughter. Maybe they weren't joking!!!! I feel sure at first they weren't too keen on the idea anyway.

I fell pregnant straight away, in February, 1994. We were extremely happy and all of the other children were happy too. Maybe my two were a little bit more excited about it than Pete's. After all, Pete's kids probably thought, what's one more baby when you already have nine in the family. We waited a while before making the announcement to make sure that everything was O.K. After all, I was 39 and hadn't had a baby for 12 years. We decided against having an amniocentesis test due to the risk of miscarriage.



**Pete and I, early in the pregnancy**

I think our news came as quite a shock to a lot of people, but I think it grew on them as the time went by. We made history as being the first people in our single parents group to have a baby.

I kept very well, was not putting on much weight and everything was going fine. Pete had to go to England in September to see his daughter, Lara, and we decided that as I was going to be 7 months pregnant at the time and had other children to look after, that I would stay home and go next time.

The chain of events that followed are not that easy to recall, as I am sure that when you have something like this happen to you that your mind blocks out a lot of the bad things, but I will try to recall things as close as possible as I can.

It was one morning in August, 1994 that I woke up and felt the lump. I remember Pete was on the toilet, (sorry for all the gruesome details) and I went in to him and said "Wow, feel this lump". He felt it and was quite surprised at the size of it and the fact that we hadn't noticed it earlier as it was quite big and easily noticed, on my left breast, above my nipple. It seemed to virtually have come up overnight. We decided to go straight to our local G.P., a really wonderful doctor who had become a good friend over the years, but we were not too worried at that time. We told ourselves it was probably just something to do with me being pregnant.

We phoned up, made an appointment, and Pete and I went down to see him that morning. To us, he didn't seem too worried, but looking back, this was probably his way of not getting us worried, as, on examination he found a lump under my left arm as well. He sent me to have an ultrasound (they did not want to do a mammogram as I was pregnant) as soon as I could. He said this was just to make sure, that he could not leave any suspicious lump unchecked.

I was feeling a bit scared, but every woman that I spoke to assured me, "Oh, don't worry, it's only a milk lump. I had them with all of my pregnancies". This made me feel a lot better, although I **DID NOT** have them with my other pregnancies, so I was still not quite convinced that everything was O.K.

The results of the ultrasound were promising, but not conclusive:

**"The clinically palpable lump superior to the left nipple has ultrasound features most consistent with a cluster of simple cysts. However, the appearance is unusual and other causes including a mitotic process are not excluded. Careful clinical review is recommended. Progress ultrasounds may be helpful. A FNAB (fine needle aspiration) is suggested to obtain definite fluid or tissue for diagnosis."**

My G.P. then referred me to a local breast clinic and armed with these results, we attended a consultation with a supposed breast "SPECIALIST". He did a fine needle aspiration (they stick a very fine needle into the lump to try and get the fluid out, if any, or some sample cells.) He told us that if he was able to suck fluid out of the lump, then we could go home happy. Unfortunately, there was no fluid in the lump so he suggested that he send away the small amount of cells that he got to pathology for further testing, and also I was to go and have a mammogram. I would have to wear a lead shield to protect the baby from the radiation.

I went straight away and had the mammogram and took the results back to him the same day and they read:

**"Mammographic appearance of the lesion in the upper aspect of the left breast has BENIGN features. However, further follow up after pregnancy is suggested". What a relief. The results of the fine needle aspiration were not too bad either. The breast specialist suggested that rather than wait until after the pregnancy, that he do another fine needle aspiration in six weeks.**

Pete went off to England feeling a little more at ease. We both felt that over the next few weeks the lump would just disappear. Every time I spoke to Pete on the phone he would say "How is your lump?" Unfortunately, I would have to say that it was still there and did not seem to be getting any smaller. I was doing all sorts of things to try and get rid of it. I was running the hot water on it in the shower hoping that this would disperse it and massaging it every time I thought about it. Nothing seemed to work and I must admit I was getting a bit scared. Yet, still, so many people assured me that they had exactly the same thing when they were pregnant and after their babies were born, or after they stopped breastfeeding that the lump just went away.

I kept praying that this is all that it was, but of course, in the back of my mind, there was always that element of doubt. Then I would think, there is no history of breast cancer in my family, so it could not possibly be malignant.

Pete arrived home from England the day before I had to go back for the next fine needle aspiration. We went to have the test the day after Pete arrived home. We were both so happy. We hadn't seen each other for six weeks and our baby was getting closer to being born and we felt sure that this test would come back benign. He did the test and sent it away and we went back to get the results the next day. We were a little bit apprehensive but we were also quite happy, thinking that this was the last of it and we could put it all behind us and get on with our lives and the preparation of having our baby.

We will never forget the next few minutes of our lives. We sat in his office, quite nervous, especially when we saw that he was not bubbling with joy, and waited for the results that would change our lives forever.

This doctor was cold, rude and seemingly uncaring about the news he was about to deliver to us. In words something similar to this, he broke the news to us: **"Well, the test has come back positive, it is cancer, I want you in hospital immediately. We will have to take the whole breast off and of course we will have to take your baby. We have no options."**

**It was like we had been struck by lightning ⚡**

He said he had to take the baby as the oestrogen, because I was pregnant, was feeding the cancer, so the baby absolutely had to go and he would have to take the whole breast off as, because I was pregnant, unless he took the whole breast, the wound would never heal because the milk glands would leak into it, not allowing it to heal. The only thing he could think of was to remove the whole breast, thus eradicating all of the cancer and all of the milk glands.

As he was telling us this news, he was busy filling in a hospital form and was already on the phone booking me into the hospital. You could see the dollar signs light up in his eyes!

He said sign here, and pointed to a place on the form, and go straight to the hospital. We were in a total state of shock, I was crying and Pete was very distraught too but this Doctor didn't seem to care one little bit about the news he had just broken to us, or what he was about to do to my body and our baby.

We told him that we couldn't go straight to hospital as we had things to organise and children to get minded. He said, oh well, just sign the form and get in there as soon as you can this afternoon.

Thank goodness Pete took a bit of control and suggested that we not rush into anything, and that we go outside and have a talk in private about what we are going to do, and just so that we can calm down a bit and absorb what we had just been told. This could not be happening to us. We virtually went there just to get the all clear and suddenly we are planning mastectomies and having a premature baby. This is the sort of thing that you hear about happening to other people and feel very sorry for them, but you never, ever expect it is going to happen to you.

The Doctor was not happy about our decision and said it doesn't matter how long we talked about it, it will make no difference, and that he could not wait for us to make up our mind, he had to go, he will leave the form at the front desk. He was so rude and we were in a deep state of shock and his attitude did not help us at all. I know that our GP does not refer anyone to him any more.

We went outside and sat in the car for about half an hour. We didn't know what to do. We were both very upset at what we were about to go through and were also very worried about the health of our baby. The thought of losing my breast was devastating, but even worse, it could have also meant that, because my baby was only 34 weeks, many complications or even the life of our baby. On top of this was the very real fear that if I made the wrong decision, I, or our baby, was going to die. We decided to go back and sign the form and then go home and talk about it some more, but by signing the form, this did not mean we were going to go through with anything.

We went home, still in a state of shock, broke the news as gently as we could to my wonderful parents and my most gorgeous children and started packing a bag for me to take to the hospital. After all, this man was supposed to be an expert in his field and would only have my best interests at heart.

It was a Friday evening when we turned up to the hospital, full of doubt and fear about what we were about to go through. As I was pregnant, I had to get booked in through the labour ward. I was to be operated on the following Tuesday but the Doctor wanted me in hospital on Friday so they could start treatment to improve the babies lungs.

The staff in the labour ward were absolutely wonderful to us. They could tell how upset we were and sat with us and talked for quite a long time. They were so worried about us that they went and got the Hospital Superintendent to talk to us. It was quite obvious to us, after hours of talking to the staff and also the hospital superintendent, that we needed to get a second opinion. They told us that the treatment that was needed for the babies lungs need not be started until Monday for the operations on Tuesday so to come back on Sunday Night. Although they were not allowed to tell us straight out to get a second opinion, we read between the lines and certainly got the message. We will be forever grateful as we never went back to the hospital on Sunday night, which was to be a decision we will never, ever regret.

It was late on Friday night when we got home, so there was not much that could be done, so we rang my parents and told them what had happened and took ourselves off to bed for a not so restful night's sleep. Pete kissed me goodnight and told me that in the morning we would get on the phone and not get off until we had an answer. First thing the next morning, Pete took control and I will never ever forget what he has done for me and I will thank him for the rest of my life for what he did for me over the next few months. I would never have been brave enough to walk away from that hospital by myself, but this decision changed the outcome of my problem, my life, our baby's life, in a way that could not be imagined.

We lay in bed on Saturday morning trying to think where to start. The only place we could think of was the breast cancer council. We phoned there, but being Saturday morning, we got a recorded message.

What to do! Pete then suggested, the only thing he could think of was that he knew of a lady named Dianne (one of his son's soccer coaches) who had had something done to her breast a couple of years earlier. He wasn't sure what it was, but he said it was worth a try. She had a silent phone number and after much tracking down through the soccer team, and a stroke of luck, we phoned her. It was still very early on Saturday morning. Her husband answered and told us that they were just walking out the door and had to go but could they call us back later. Pete gave him a brief version of our story which he relayed to his wife and Pete heard her say to her husband, "You go, they need to talk to me". Had we phoned one minute later we would have missed her and our story would have been totally different again.

Dianne told us that she had had a total mastectomy due to breast cancer and was now totally recovered. She talked to us for quite a long time, and highly recommended us to her breast specialist and gave us his name. She told us that she felt quite sure that he would talk to us even though it was a Saturday morning. We looked him up in the phone book and to our surprise he had his home residence number listed. This man, **Dr. Christopher Magarey**, is a professor of very high standing. We phoned him at home and told him of our predicament and asked him for his advice.

He said he doesn't normally see patients on Saturday's, but he had to go into his office to do some paperwork and would we like to come in. We couldn't thank him enough and arranged to meet him in his office at 11.00am. We took with us all information we had and rang the pathologists and asked them to fax direct to the professor any information that they had, which they were happy to do.

Full of hope we turned up to see the professor and he had received the faxes from the pathologists. He read the reports and told us that he could not see on these reports any indication that confirmed cancer. We were stunned but extremely excited. We could tell after talking to this professor for a while that this was the man we wanted looking after us. We asked him for his opinion but before he could give it, as we were already somebody else's patient, he said that he needed to know what we wanted to do.

Pete looked across to me and then said, "I think I can speak on behalf of Sue and say that we would like you to be our Doctor." I immediately agreed. He said he would not make any decisions at all until he had done his own tests and told us that he would do a core biopsy in his surgery that very day and send it off to the pathologists immediately. He did tell us that our other breast specialist was about 20 years out of date and that if the results did come back as cancer, then he would definitely not have to touch our baby and a total mastectomy was the very last resort.

He then took me in and did the core biopsy. This is a large piece of the lump, sucked through a tube about the thickness of a drinking straw. He numbed the area first and then did the biopsy. I felt no pain. We thanked him immensely and left feeling at last in safe hands. We were told to come back on Tuesday afternoon for the results and we would deal with the outcome then.

We left his office feeling a touch more hopeful, and thinking that maybe the whole thing had been a big mistake and that this Doctor was going to give me the all clear on Tuesday. Pete was furious with the first Doctor and said that if fate had not stepped in, we would have been in a totally different situation. We would definitely have lost the full breast and possibly even our baby. Even if the results of these tests still came back positive, the outcome was sure to be totally different than if we had gone along with the first Doctor's decision. **A very big lesson was learnt about getting second opinions.** The fact is, that if I had not had Pete with me, I probably would have gone along with his decision and I will be forever grateful to Pete for staying calm and leading me in the right direction.

On the train on the way home, Pete told me that we were going straight to the library, (no Google back then) and we were going to get out as many books on breast cancer as we could find and we were going to know more about it than the Doctors. We spent quite a while at the library going through many books deciding which ones were right for us, some were very old and with all the advances with cancer were too out of date. We also wanted others with diet, natural health and alternative medicine. We left laden down with books and went home and started reading. We have read so much (Pete more than I), that we now know quite a bit about breast cancer. Pete has a scientific background so he understood more than I did and was able to explain to me what a lot of it meant.

Even when we went to bed we were still reading into the small hours and **even when I fell asleep, Pete still carried on. He was not going to rest until he knew more than anyone else could possibly know about Breast Cancer.**

We also started making phone calls and talking to people who had been through it, although I was slightly different being pregnant as well. It was good and bad. Once you start talking to people you find that everyone has known someone with it and they would say things like "my cousin died of breast cancer, she was only 34" or "my friend had it and now she has brain cancer" so it did get a bit depressing. Then there were the positive ones like "my aunt had it 30 years ago and is still going strong". In the end I didn't feel much like hearing other case stories as sometimes they made me feel up and sometimes they made me feel very down. Pete did talk to a lot more people than I did and always found some encouraging things to relay to me. This could not be happening to me, there was no history of breast cancer in my family and I had never been sick a day in my life.

Pete never for one minute made me feel like I was going to die. Every time he held me and told me that everything was going to be OK, I believed him and it made me feel like he knew something that I didn't. I know deep down that he was very, very scared as well and it was so stressful for him not being able to break down like I was doing all the time and having to be brave for me when all the time I knew that in the back of his mind there was that element of doubt. There had to be. It was CANCER after all! The same thing for my family. They were so worried about me but all remained so strong for me. Looking back now, I feel so much for my Mum and Dad, sister and brothers and of course my big kids. I am so close to my family and I was just so wrapped up in the disease and the treatment that I am ashamed to say that I cannot remember thinking what they were going through. My parents must have gone through so much. We are so close and since I have had breast cancer, my cousin who was only in his 40's died suddenly of a heart attack and my Aunt and Uncle are devastated and just cannot get over it.

Everyone was so brave for me and encouraging when all the while I knew that they were just as scared as I was. I truly cannot thank them enough. Pete, Mum and Dad, my sister, brothers, my beautiful children, Brad and Katherine, Pete's children, my Aunts, Uncles, and all of my friends. How do you ever find enough words to say thank you, when thank you just doesn't seem enough. **You are my family and friends and I just adore you all so much and I am so sorry that I put you all through that horrible time. I wish I had understood how you were feeling at the time. Just know how much I love you all.**

Mum gave me a charm from one of her friends, (Charlie) in their retirement village. **(2023. I am still wearing this now. I NEVER take it off).** Apparently they were all praying for me and he (Charlie - a good friend of Mum and Dad who I had met on numerous occasions) was particularly worried about me and sent me a silver charm of Saint Peregrine - The Patron Saint of Cancer. I put it on that day and I have never taken it off. Thankyou Charlie. I feel quite sure that your prayers were heard.

I immediately started on massive doses of vitamin C, E and A. We also changed our diet and lifestyle. My breast specialist also held meditation classes for people who had cancer. I attended these for a few weeks and found them very helpful and relaxing and both Pete and I were able to talk to people going through the same or similar treatment and feelings as we were.

I felt terrible for my beautiful children, Brad and Katherine. They were so brave and not sure what was happening and whether they were going to lose their Mum. We kept them filled in on everything that was happening and tried to explain what was going on to them but at the same time giving them hope that everything was going to be alright. Thanks for your love and support, kids. I love you so, so much and it was with everyone's love, like yours, that we got through this trauma in our lives.

After a very long and tense few days, it was now Tuesday afternoon and time to go and see the future of my life. We very nervously waited in the waiting room, but as I said, still there was that tiny glimmer of hope that it was all a mistake, and we held on to that thought.

Unfortunately, our wishes did not come true and we were told, in a much gentler and caring manner, that it was indeed cancer.

I can't quite remember our reactions to the news. I think we had expected it and we just sat, resigned to the news and inquisitive about what was about to happen to me, to us. Our Doctor told us that the lump would have to be dealt with as soon as possible and he booked me in for surgery on the following Monday, 31st October, 1994. I went in on the Sunday night and tried to prepare myself for the outcome.



Our Doctor was going to do a partial mastectomy and removal of the lymph nodes under the arm as I also had a lump under my left arm. He was going to take as little of the breast as possible, but until he actually opened me up, he could not tell how much he had to take and there was still the possibility that he may have to take the whole breast, but he assured me that it would only be done if it was needed to save my life. He warned us that I may go into labour as a result of the anaesthetic. The baby was monitored throughout the whole operation and the labour ward was on standby for an emergency caesarean section if necessary. We were told that the baby would just have a sleep, the same as me, and would wake up around the same time.

The time came to say goodbye to Pete and I really felt so sorry for him and for everyone else at home during this period of waiting. At least I would be asleep and I wouldn't have to think about what was happening and I would wake up and it would be all over. As they wheeled me into theatre, I think I was amazingly calm (probably the sedation) and prepared for whatever the results were.

The next thing I knew I was waking up in recovery and all I was worried about was our baby and could I hear the heartbeat on the monitor. I was assured by the lovely staff that all was well with both me and the baby and that the baby was probably still asleep but the heartbeat was loud and strong. As they wheeled me out of recovery, I was so pleased to see Pete's beautiful face waiting at the first door for me. I was not sure of what had happened to me yet, and at that stage I was not sure how much Pete knew either. He confided in me later that when he first saw me that he thought they had taken the whole breast off as all he could see was bandages.

I was on a drip and I also had a tube coming out of the breast attached to a collection bag for any blood or fluid to drain into, which had to be emptied quite often. I can remember feeling quite well considering what I had just been through. I was ecstatic when I felt those first kicks from our baby and Pete was also thrilled to bits. After the grogginess had worn off we decided we would sneak a peek inside the bandage to see if there was any breast left or just a large hole filled with padding as we had not yet seen the Doctor nor heard any results. We had known before the operation that it was a very large lump and by the time they took surrounding tissues as well, they would need to take at least quite a sizable chunk of my breast. As we gently eased the bandage back, we were both delighted to see at first a nipple, and then still at least a small breast. Even though it was still a horrific event, it was a far better outcome than was offered by the first Doctor.

Pete stayed with me every minute and it wasn't until quite late that evening that I convinced him to go home and get some sleep as I was fine. My Mum and sister had also been to see me but I had to convince my Dad not to come as he had only got out of hospital that very day after having a prostate operation. I had already been told that I would probably only be in for about three days so I told him I would see him when I got home. I also told everyone else not to bother visiting me as I would only be in for such a short time.

Pete went home that night with both of us feeling a bit more at ease and with finally the first stage over and our baby still intact with its heart beating contentedly in my tummy.

The next day, Pete was back bright and early and I was sitting up feeling terrific. We had a visit from the Doctor with the results of the operation. This was the first news that we had heard as to how things had gone. They had removed the lump quite successfully and quite a large amount of the surrounding area just to be sure. An area about the size of a large mandarin was removed. There was found to be no cancer cells in the tissue around the lump. They had also removed 10 of the nodes from under my arm as this is the only way that they can tell if the cancer had spread. They had found one node was full of cancer cells and two others had microscopic traces of cancer. This apparently is a very favourable result and the likelihood of it having spread was very minimal.

The results came back that I had "**Grade 3 Infiltrating Adenocarcinoma, 3.5cm**".

I found this explanation on the internet...not sure how correct it is, but it may help you to understand how the cancers are graded:

### **The Stages of Breast Cancer**

Stage is important in predicting the likelihood of distant spread or metastasis. Stage also influences treatment planning and determines prognosis. As stage of cancer increases, the risk of metastasis increases. Depending on your stage, your physician may advise various tests such as X-rays, bone scans, and CT scans to determine the presence or absence of measurable metastasis. Stage and presence of metastases will influence treatment. Staging of a breast cancer occurs after the surgical sample is examined by the pathologist. To make this process easier medical science has devised a system of staging called TNM (T = tumour, N = node, M = metastasis).

**Stage In situ** - Ductal Carcinoma In situ or Lobular Carcinoma In situ, or Paget's Disease of the nipple.

**Stage 1** - The tumour is equal to or smaller than 2 centimetres. There are no axillary lymph nodes positive for cancer, and there is no evidence of distant metastasis.

**Stage 2** - The tumour is over 2 centimetres but not more than 5 centimetres in size. The axillary lymph nodes may or may not be positive for cancer. If a tumour is smaller than 2 centimetres, but the lymph nodes are positive, this would also be considered Stage 2.

**Stage 3** - The tumour is larger than 5 centimetres with axillary lymph nodes positive for cancer. It may extend into the pectoral muscle. In Stage 3, there is no distant metastasis.

**Stage 4** - If distant metastasis to other organs has occurred, the cancer is considered in this stage regardless of the size of the tumour or the number of nodes involved.

Apparently I was doing very well after the operation and the baby was fine and I was just to be watched for the next couple of days and then I could go home. I started getting sore from being pregnant and having to stay in bed and apart from being a bit sore under the arm if I moved it, I felt on top of the world. I had Pete with me every minute and I know how boring for him this must have been. I tried to convince him to go home or at least go for a walk just to give him a break. He usually would only go if it was meal times. He was wonderful.

By the Tuesday afternoon, (I was operated on on the Monday morning) I was getting very edgy and all I wanted to do was go home. They started giving me exercises for my arm so that I would get full use of it back and showing Pete and I how to empty the bag that the drain went into. I tried to convince them to let me go home as I was feeling so well but they said until the Doctor came in the next day, that they could not get the approval.

I would have to have radiotherapy and chemotherapy but none of this could be started until the baby was born. I was definitely not looking forward to any of this. The lady in the bed opposite was in for massive burns to the breast from the radiotherapy treatment and was in terrible pain. Chemotherapy to me meant I would lose my beautiful thick, long brown hair and I think I was more worried about that than being sick with the treatment.

I was released from hospital on the Thursday, only two days after my operation, still with my bag attached to my breast and "Doctor Pete" had strict instructions on how to empty it when it got to a certain level. I was very pregnant and Pete had put me straight to bed when I got home and between him and my parents I was very well looked after over the next weeks. We had to leave the bag attached until the fluid draining out had lowered to a certain amount each day. When this happened, my local G.P. removed the bag and we were amazed at how long the drain tube was that weaved its way through my breast.

By the next week I was well enough to get up and around and started thinking about the baby who was to be born at any minute. I was now on weekly visits to my Gynaecologist and already knew that as I have had two previous caesarean sections that this baby would be born the same way. The Doctor decided to put me in two weeks prior to my due date so on Sunday night the 20th November, 1994, I was admitted to hospital, (the same one I went to the first time who sent me home), to be operated on the following morning. The staff remembered me and were so happy for us at how things had turned out, much better than when they first met me.

Pete would often joke with me and the nurses (to try to ease my discomfort of the looks of having part of my breast removed) and he would say that he was a very lucky man. Now, when we made love, he'd have the choice of a mature woman on one side and a young teenage girl on the other.

At 8.34am on Monday 21st November, 1994, our beautiful baby girl , **Jessica Susan**, was born. A very healthy 3.6kg with extremely good lungs. An Angel had been sent to us from heaven. I was awake during the operation and Pete was giving me a blow by blow description of what was happening as I was unable to see because of the sheet that they had up

I am sure they did not want Pete to watch either in case he passed out as they kept telling him to sit down and stop peeking. I only got to have one tiny little peek at her before a midwife and Pete whisked her off to be cleaned and checked out.

As I lay on the operating table, my second major operation in three weeks, I remember praying and thanking God for delivering me this beautiful little healthy girl and wondering if I would be around for very long to see her and my other children grow up.

I promised my poor Mum and Dad waiting anxiously at home that Pete would ring as soon as anything had happened, but Pete got so involved with feeding and looking after Jess that he completely forgot about making any phone calls.

After I had been sewn back together and returned to my room, I finally caught up with Pete again and was desperately waiting to see my baby but apparently they had put her straight in a humidi-crib as she was two weeks premi and they wanted to make sure her lungs were working OK.

As I had had a caesarean, I couldn't get up and see her but they told me that if she was going to be in it for more than a couple of hours, that they would actually wheel my bed around to the nursery so that I could see her.

I asked Pete whether Mum and Dad were excited. "Oh my God, I forgot to ring them". Pete had been so busy with everything going on here that he completely forgot to ring anybody. As I had a phone next to my bed, we decided to ring everyone from there. Of course my Mum and Dad had become so anxious that they had been in constant contact with the hospital and knew the news and had passed it on to other members of the family and friends. They were ecstatic to actually hear my voice and pleased that I felt well enough for them to come straight over and see me. We then phoned the various schools where some of the other children were and asked them to deliver the news that they had a new baby sister and decided that Pete would do the rest of the phone calls from home later that evening.

After the excitement of a new baby in the house had died down a bit, the harsh reality of what I still had to go through finally hit me and we made an appointment to see the Oncologist to find out about the Chemotherapy and Radiotherapy.

He was a lovely Doctor who filled us in on exactly what was going to happen. Pete had done heaps of reading about both treatments by this time and had lots of questions for him which he answered in a very professional and caring manner. I was told that the operation had been successful and that the treatment that I was having was called adjuvant therapy. It was just in case any cancer cells had escaped through the glands and into other parts of my body and the radiotherapy was directed only to the breast, surrounding areas and under the armpit to kill any stray cancer cells that might still be left. The most important thing to me was whether or not I would lose my hair and he told us that with the mixture of drugs in the therapy that I would be having, in most cases, people did not lose their hair. I was warned that I would feel quite unwell at times but that in time these feelings would pass and that it would only be while I was having the treatment. I was to have six months of chemotherapy with two treatments each month and then to be followed by six weeks, every day, of radiotherapy.

I had my first Chemotherapy treatments in December, a mixture of drugs fed through a vein in my hand. It only took a couple of minutes and I was fine and felt no effects. Then Christmas was upon us and I was improving every day from my two operations. Our gorgeous little girl was a godsend and gave us so much pleasure. She came with us to every single Drs appointment and treatment. She was perfect and all of the staff fell in love with her. We were so happy that the other children had accepted their new little half sister so well and all adored her so much. They were so wonderful through this whole thing. What a drama for children so young to go through.

Things were starting to look a bit brighter. The treatment was not having any effect on me and we had a very happy home life and we realised that once we got this treatment out of the way, that maybe our life would get back to normal.

I went for the treatment again in January and I didn't feel quite as well and by the February I was feeling quite ill for about three weeks out of each month. I started getting very bad headaches and feeling very ill and depressed and convinced myself that things had gone wrong and that I was now dying. The chemotherapy knocked my immune system around and I caught a massive dose of the flu and I had to miss one of my treatments. I felt so bad that I said to Pete that I just wanted to run away from it all for a

while, I couldn't take any more. We looked in the paper that Sunday and on the Monday we booked a holiday to China.

My hair started thinning and falling out by the handfuls, but I had such thick hair that it could not be noticed yet. The Oncology staff promised me that it was only thinning and that it would soon settle down, but every day I lost more and more hair and I was not convinced. Luckily, they were right and it did settle down, I probably lost half of my hair, but to most people, it was hardly noticeable.

I put off my next treatment until I returned from overseas as I did not want to feel unwell the whole time we were away. People probably were not sure that it was the right thing for us to do, but you look at things in a different light when you have had a life threatening disease and things that you have been putting off for financial or other reasons, all of a sudden become of great importance to you. Apart from the first couple of days, I felt fantastic while we were away and had the most wonderful time. We took our four month old baby and she was wonderful. We will never regret what we did and we both now have a different attitude to putting off until later the things that you really want to do in life.

When we returned from overseas, I returned to my treatment, and to feeling unwell again and to the massive headaches, blurred vision, sore eyes, paralysis down one side of my face, etc etc. I had by now convinced myself that I had a brain tumour and Pete had been so wonderful throughout the whole thing, being my rock of Gibraltar, just holding me, comforting me, telling me that I was definitely NOT dying, that it was only the treatment, how much he loved me and that we could get through this as long as we had each other and the love of the rest of the family and our friends. We had been telling the Doctors how I was feeling and they had not seen these symptoms before. I had this numb feeling down the left side of my face and down my left arm. They advised that if it did not go away soon that maybe I should have a brain scan. I was feeling so unwell from the chemotherapy that the Oncologist advised me not to have the last months treatment and I must admit I was not sorry to hear that.

As time went on, I was feeling worse and I now felt quite sure that I had brain cancer. Pete was trying to convince me to have the brain scan, just to ease my mind, that I was not dying and that I would feel much better afterwards. I was so sure that I did have a brain tumour that I was scared to have the scan as it would only confirm my worst thoughts. I broke down one day in my Dads arms and told him what I thought and he made me promise that I would have the scan so that it would put my mind at ease. He said that it probably was OK but if it wasn't, it was something that we had to find out and that everyone would be there to help me through, no matter what the result was.

That was one of the scariest days of my life, lying on the table and going inside this machine that was going to give me the answers to whether I was dying or not. Throughout this whole ordeal I was always feeling so bad for Pete and the rest of my family as the waiting and not knowing has to be the worst part.

We sat in the waiting room while they looked at and prepared my results. I felt quite ill and was still convinced that I knew the results. When my name was called, I took the envelope with the x-rays and we headed for the train station. We had to go straight to the hospital to have my first meeting about my radiotherapy and did not even have time to go to my GP to hear the results.

Here we were with this envelope, not knowing what answers it had inside. It was addressed to my GP with strict instructions that it could be only opened by him. We discussed whether or not to open it. It would be hours before we could get to the GP and we just could not stand it any more. We drove to the

station and decided to make a decision when we got there. Pete left it totally up to me. I decided to open it and if it was bad news, then we would go straight home and not even worry about going to the radiotherapist.

My hands were shaking as I opened the envelope and read the results to Pete:

### **CEREBRAL CT SCAN.**

**Scans were obtained both before and after administration of contrast. No focal abnormalities could be seen in the brain. There is no evidence of mass lesion, abnormal enhancement or infarction. The ventricles and subarachnoid spaces are of normal volume and there is no evidence of a mass effect.**

### **CONCLUSION : Normal examination**

We screamed, cried, hugged each other and just were absolutely overwhelmed with relief. We got out of the car and I ran to the phone on the station to ring my parents while Pete bought our tickets. Mum and Dad were ecstatic. We hopped on the train and headed off for the next adventure in this very long and draining business. Almost immediately, I started to feel better. The headache lifted and now that the chemotherapy was finished, all of my other symptoms started to disappear.

I made a joke with everyone now that at least I had proof that I had a brain, but I had grave doubts about the rest of them.

The radiotherapy staff were absolutely wonderful. Kind and caring and we could tell that they were very skilled at their jobs. We were told that I would probably burn with this treatment and that it would be like a very bad case of sunburn. I was taking very high doses of vitamins A and E and after each treatment Pete would **religiously rub the area with the juice of the Aloe Vera plant** which he would pick fresh each day and cut open the leaves.

As the treatments went on I kept enquiring as to when I could expect to start burning as I was not looking forward to it at all. I saw other women there who were in so much pain because of their burns and had to be wrapped in bandages and come back to the hospital for treatment even weeks after their radiotherapy had finished.

I was told that I should probably have started burning by now and that I was extremely lucky that I was only going a tiny bit pink. Still, every day I would take the vitamins and Pete would rub on the aloe vera. Then one day I felt a bit sore under the arm in an area that we didn't realise was being treated and sure enough, it was starting to burn. It was an area that Pete had not been rubbing the aloe vera on as we did not know that the treatment was going under there. He immediately put some on and from then on I had no more burning.

I got right through the treatment without getting any more than a bit pink and the Doctors and staff were amazed. They wrote down everything that we were doing and I think that now they are recommending it to other people in the same situation.

With the radiotherapy over, life started to get back to normal. I started feeling very well and even though I was still having regular 3 monthly check-ups, I started to try to put it all behind me. My check- ups went

well and as far as the Doctors could tell, there seemed to be no recurrence. My breast specialist, radiotherapist and gynaecologist were all amazed at my excellent recovery.

My breast and underarm have healed so well that you can hardly even tell that I had anything done. At one stage we were quite worried about my breast as it seemed to be quite swollen. My GP could not find anything wrong and said it all looked wonderful. What had amazingly happened was that, somehow, my breast, which was almost half the size of the other, had grown back to almost its normal size. It actually looks better than the healthy breast as it is not quite so saggy.

On 16th October, 1995, almost 12 months after my Breast Cancer operation, Pete and I were married. Jess was 11 months old. We just had a very simple service with very close friends, my gorgeous big kids and other family at a Registry Office in the heart of Sydney and then went to a very low key reception. Cappuccino and cake just up the road. It was very nice, but looking back, we have both decided that we should have done it in some beautiful gardens or something. We then had relatives take all of the kids and we just stayed at one of Sydney's top hotels for the night. We had a lovely time, and now, every year on our Anniversary, we go away, just for one night, usually to a show, dinner and a night at a really classy hotel, just to spoil ourselves. It is lovely. We stay somewhere different every year, but usually in the city.

Then, at the end of October, twelve months after the operation, I was to have my first mammogram since it all started. I was so scared. This was the first real test to see whether all of the cancer was gone and if they even found one little trace, then the whole thing would have to start over again. I had been having regular checks but they were just by the Doctor, feeling with his hands. This was the first real test.

Again I had these terrible feelings that I had had in the past and was feeling quite ill for weeks before the mammogram. To say we were delighted when the test came back ALL CLEAR would be an understatement. Every time I get a headache or sore throat or sore toe or feel even the slightest bit ill, then I think that it has come back and Pete has a huge job convincing me that I am not dying. **"SUE, YOU DO NOT HAVE TOE CANCER!!!!!"** \*\*\*grin\*\*\*. I believe that these are quite normal feelings and are to be expected for a few years after such an event.

It is now 18 months since my operation and I am extremely well and happy. Our beautiful baby Jessica is 17 months old and an absolute delight and we feel that she was sent to us as some kind of reward for what we have been through. I say "WE" all the time, because it wasn't just me who went through this. Pete was just as involved in this as me, and also my family and friends. It affected everyone's life, not just mine. We are also extremely lucky to have our other 11 children. We have a double Brady Bunch and they all get on so well together. (Maybe not QUITE like the Brady Bunch, but pretty close). I think all of our children now have a better understanding of cancer and they have all been so wonderful and we love them all dearly. We have been on another lovely holiday and we now don't take life for granted and live every day as if it is our last.

I guess the main moral of our story is, there **IS** light at the end of the tunnel. Breast Cancer is not necessarily a death sentence and one of the most important things that we have learnt from our experience is to **DEFINITELY GET A SECOND OPINION** and **NEVER** give up hope. It is **YOUR** life and **YOU** make the decisions of what you want to happen.

One of my heroes is **Olivia Newton-John**. I know that if she can beat this, then so can I. I admire her so much. She is the sweetest most lovely lady and she once said, **"It makes me so proud to be someone**

that can inspire and help people," she says. "Maybe that's why this happened to me, maybe that was supposed to be my job all along.

To anyone going through this or any other disease, I feel for you and your family and wish you well. Keep your spirits up and I pray that my story has given you some hope.

## **SUE WALKER**

**1st May, 1996 (My 42nd birthday)**

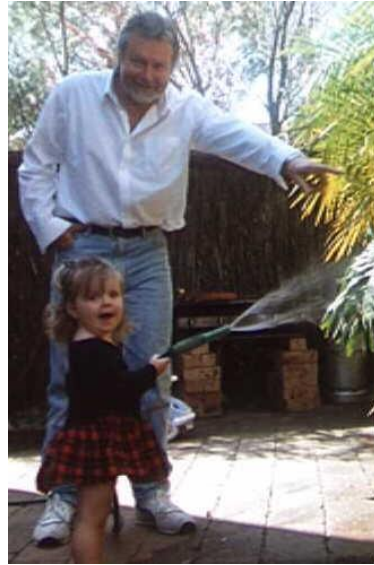


**2023 update - Pete and I were actually fortunate enough to meet this amazing lady. It was definitely one of the highlights of my life.**





Here are a few photos of Jess just to show you that my having cancer while pregnant with her, has not affected her beauty.





Jess got to meet Bec Hewitt when she had a min role on Home and Away