

# TO CANCER, CHINA, AND BACK



GAIL BLUNDELL

Other Books released by same author:

**The Passage to the Future Series:**  
Tymamid



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## **PROLOGUE**



This is the story of Gail Blundell's journey. A journey taking her to the limits of hope and pain. A journey that took her on a search for a cure.

This is a story exploring the narrow-minded arrogance of oncologists which is costing lives in this country and overseas.

It's a story of their ignorance of overseas treatments that Australians only seek when told they are Stage 4 Cancer victims—victims with no hope. Then, and only then, do they look elsewhere. These doctors never tell you - the world leaders in cancer research and treatment are in Germany and China and now Mexico.

They scare people off alternative treatments with statements like; 'they are unproven' or 'they are alternative medicine nonsense'. The fact is these overseas facilities are fully equipped modern hospitals not back yard charlatans. Their treatments may not be proven by Australian standards but those who have been, will testify that these places may not have the magic cure, but they do offer at least a life extension. There is evidence to support the proposal that if they'd gone earlier their life expectancy would probably have been higher.

This might sound like conspiracy nonsense, but pharmaceutical companies make too much money out of chemotherapy. They will not allow that income stream to be watered down by other often cheaper, more effective and less intrusive treatments. Treatments blocked by the medical lobby groups working for these powerful international companies that feed off our ill health.

I accompanied Gail on her journey; I lived every moment with her. I may not have felt the pain and the discomfort, but I suffered from frustration and helplessness as I watched her fight, win, lose, and win, only to be knocked down again. It didn't help when Australian oncologists would not offer any hope, calling it false hope. They seemed to want to crush any glimpse of hope. This negative doctor death attitude that exists in Australia is absent in China, the doctors there are

always looking for new ways to attack your illness. Australia wrote her off three times. China brought her back to us.

This story is one of warning; do not blindly trust your oncologist, he or she might just kill you. Seek out answers from every source you can, it is your life. Never give up trying. If nothing else, it is the fight that will keep you alive longer. Our doctors do not know all the answers and many answers lie overseas. Don't wait until you are Stage 4, start searching early. This book will help you find some places to look if you are prepared to take charge of your cancer.

Gail and I hope that this book may save lives by bringing to your attention some realities. Everything quoted in this book is backed up by Gail's medical records from both Australia and China proving what gains were made and what strategies failed. Many doctors will claim all kinds of excuses and the problem is you can't prove 'what ifs'.

Most of this book is drawn from the chapters that Gail began writing with a view to having this book published. Her use of the word 'bloody' in the title of several chapters is to highlight the frustrations of that part of her journey. I have taken on the job of collating and completing this book on her behalf as she is no longer able to complete this task.

Philip Rainford  
On behalf of my best friend Gail  
7<sup>th</sup> December 2016

# Confessions of a Hospital Virgin

## CHAPTER ONE

My story must begin with my being under treatment for depression since mid 2011. I never let anyone know but both Philip and I were going through a rough patch. Teaching work was drying up as TAFE colleges were being cut back financially. Our bookkeeping business was not expanding and our involvement in the 'The Hive Creative Centre' was stressful with a growing workload. In 2012, the Hive Centre received a \$90,000 grant to develop an online TV station which we accomplished after a lot of work. Little money found its way into our bank accounts, however. Meeting our personal financial commitments became difficult and by early 2013, we needed something to happen or we faced extreme financial difficulties. This also placed a strain on our personal relationship.

I had suffered bouts of depression most of my adult life. I was either high or low, never finding an even balance. I remember vividly sitting on my couch raging at the universe to either. "Let me know what I was doing here or get me off this planet!" Because I'd had enough! I could not get out of my own way. Life had gone from travelling adventures to zombie sitting in front of the TV. I did not seem to be able to change, couldn't lose weight because I didn't exercise, I didn't exercise because I was overweight. I didn't even try to give up smoking. It was all too hard, the same cycle over and over again.

I had given up; felt defeated, lost and really didn't care anymore about anything. Normally, I would eventually see the upside and let me laugh off the small stuff. Don't sweat over the small stuff was my 'motto' until the small stuff became my way of life.

I just couldn't get back. God knows I tried.

I had all the tools, Goddess Within, Rebirth Training, Matrix, Reiki, all being positive thinking and spiritual support groups with methodologies, exploring the causes of my depression and providing healing therapies. I could not stick with any one of them.

I just could not get out of my own way long enough to remember how to get going again. I really believed I was becoming senile. My once steel trap memory was fading fast. It became so bad I saw a note in my handwriting I didn't remember writing or even what it was about. That was really frightening. You can't even do the 'Oh yeah I forgot about that.'

I forget what I forgot.

I had hit a wall and bounced off; I was now lying mentally injured on the floor. You can sit on your baggage for a while and not recognise you have stuff. You can modify your behaviour only when you realise how you have been behaving. But these changes sneak up on you.

In that fateful year, 2013, Philip turned sixty. It was around this time that he became aware of my dark state of mind when I started talking about never reaching sixty. Jokingly Philip suggested I should have an "I'm never reaching sixty party" on my next birthday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> May.

Before all of this I'd never really been sick. I didn't have a doctor, I never took medication, never broken a bone or had a stitch. Two panadol fixed everything and even gave me an energy hit.

A year earlier, I'd decided that my health was probably getting a bit bugged by the fact that I smoked, ate poorly and was three stone overweight and my only exercise was walking to the car.

So, I decided to have things checked out. I had a friend who was a doctor, so I chose him to check blood levels, sugar, cholesterol, stuff like that. I gathered up the courage and had a blood test to find out which bit had slowed down and was about to interfere with my so far charmed, completely maintenance free health experience. Spectacular, freakish and dazzling were the words used to describe my test results in all areas. On paper, I was in better shape than an athlete, despite being three stone overweight, smoking and doing absolutely nil exercise. If it's not broke don't fix it; my unhealthy lifestyle was working for me or so I thought.

I was unaware that I was about to be transformed from a hospital virgin into a hospital slut.

On 16 May 2013, my life changed dramatically, I experienced my first oesophageal cancer pain which would send me down a very different life path from the one I was presently treading. Exactly how that would impact me, I could never

have believed. When you get a warning but you have a life time of being ‘warning free’ it is hard to recognise what might be happening, I had no point of reference, so I ignored that pain on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013 when I had trouble digesting a hot dog for lunch.

Things were looking up at the time. Philip & I had planned to establish a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and fill gaps in the training programs left vacant by the closure of the Technical and Further Education Colleges (TAFE’s) in Victoria. I was attending a government briefing on the process when I had my hot dog encounter.

My discomfort was not there all the time, so it was dismissed as indigestion. Even my doctor agreed. So off I finally went on my path to destruction, never realising that the Big C was lurking around the corner, waiting to jump on its next victim - me.

I slowly came to understand my body's cry for help was not being recognized by me. I was working my body to death while it fought to keep me healthy. I gave nothing back, abused it regularly through lack of sleep, too much booze, cigarettes - all the usual fun stuff. Despite my body’s desperate attempt to get my attention, to get me to give it a hand like some decent food and a bit of exercise, I waddled through my life expecting the same level of health forever.

So, how does your body go about getting your full undivided attention, when you have been so studiously ignoring it for so long?

Create cancer!

That should do it!

It did - it certainly did.

Thus, began my journey from cancer victim to cancer patient to cancer survivor to cancer thriver. I was determined to beat this, thanking this rude invasion into my life. Without it, I would never have understood the message I needed to hear. A message that sent me on a soul-searching journey, seeking answers on how I needed to change my life. I thank it and do not resent it in any way. It has given me a lot of positive things I would never have understood before. It provided me a unique view of the other side of the health world, one I was totally intolerant of. If somebody said 'I have the flu, its really bad. I feel terrible.' My head said, “A bad cold; big deal, suck it up. How bad could that be?” I never, never got sick. Never

had the flu. Never broken a bone. Never had stitches. Never been in a hospital and never been to a doctor, so I didn't understand.

I have travelled the world with a backpack and little else, to some of the most dangerous unhygienic countries. Nothing ever 'got me'. I never paid the price - until now.

One theory about the causes of cancer is that it requires a trigger. That's why if we take two people who start smoking young, one dies of old age at ninety, the other dies of cancer much younger. The older person never had the trigger activated in their genetic weak point. It is also thought that holding in emotional turmoil and stress, swallowing it so to speak, will trigger that cancer in the throat.

One thing I'm really good at, is putting off stuff until later: trauma, stress, confrontation, not my strong point. Don't deal with it now, suck it up, stuff it down and deal with it later - so many things in the 'to do later bin'. My survival depended on my being able to have a 'later bin' to put things in, so I didn't need to handle them now. It was the only way I knew how to deal with the trauma that life had thrust upon me.

For me, cancer was like having all my 'laters' thrown at me at once to be dealt with... now! There is nowhere else to put stuff out of sight, out of mind, no place left. Fifty-four years of 'avoidance' was about to smack me in the back of the head, or the oesophagus as the case may be. The deeper you push it down, the faster and harder it will blow your life into little pieces.

Now, you can keep avoiding this and die, or you can take a stand to deal with it. You really only have those choices.

There just isn't a third option.

So, get real! Face it! Right now!

I had chosen to ignore it.

Talk about bring it on.

I never resolved the fight between what I needed to do and what I did do. There was always that conflict between wanting to leave this plane of existence and needing a reason to stay. I was always searching for a reason to live; I eventually found that reason in a desire to build my dream home and then to travel.



But it wasn't until I had lost two stone and was vomiting up food and even water that Philip suggested this was more than indigestion. It forced me to go back to the doctor.

# **Bloody Oesophageal Cancer**

## **CHAPTER TWO**

On 20<sup>th</sup> September 2013, I was diagnosed with oesophageal cancer. A biopsy day procedure on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 found and I quote, ‘a large, ulcerating mass was found in the lower third of my oesophagus. The mass was partially obstructing and circumferential creating a blockage, preventing food from getting to my stomach. (Refer Figure 1 in Annex A) You might be left wondering what does that all mean in English? Doctors love to talk in convoluted language, makes them feel important. For us uneducated it meant cancer at and around the point where the oesophagus and the stomach are joined.

Further PET/CT scans indicated no other metastases were found. Blood tests showed that other than a fatty liver, I was in good health, my tumour marker Cancer Antigen 19-9 (CA19-9) which is supposed be less than 37 units per millilitre was only 1 unit per millilitre. A test result the hospital was unwilling to give me, and I was forced to get my doctor to give me access to my own medical record. The hospital claiming, they were private hospital records.

If you were wondering, tumour markers indicate whether antigens in the blood are either being produced by the tumour or in reaction to the tumour. Thus, they are limited in what they can tell us. However, an increasing count is not good. With me, they only tested the CA19-9 and all was good, so I was sent home with a chemist shop of drugs. I was feeling optimistic!

1. Ibuprofen – a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug less apt to cause gastrointestinal side effects,
2. metoclopramide (Maxolon) for nausea and vomiting.
3. Oxychodone (OxyNorm) for pain for medium term pain (opiate),
4. Pantoprazole,agastric acid pump inhibitor for treatment of erosive esophagitis.
5. paracetamol for short term pain
6. Targin for chronic pain

I was advised to approach St Vincent's Hospital and the Austin Hospital. We didn't hear back from St Vincent's, so we went to the Austin, given time was against us.

Our treatment plan was that Chemotherapy, or chemo, was to consist of three poisons: epirubicin (mainly for breast cancer), cisplatin (mainly for lung cancer, breast and bladder) and fluorouracil (mainly for oesophageal, breast, stomach and bladder cancer) all to be given intravenously. The aim was to shrink the tumour to make it easier to do the surgery in January. Within six weeks of completing surgery a further three cycles of chemo were to commence. Symptoms to watch for were redness or soreness around injection site, skin rash, itching, fever, shivers, dizziness, breathlessness.

This all seemed a bit hit and miss since only one chemo was specifically targeting the oesophagus. I would also draw your attention to the symptom of 'breathlessness'.

Prior to this I was to have a minor op to insert a "Port" into my chest leading from my breast up through the neck and around to the heart so that I did not have to constantly have needles inserted into my arm at every treatment. So after a two-day procedure in hospital I was ready to start treatment. They also installed 'an oesophageal stent' a hollow tube placed inside the oesophagus to help move food from my mouth to my stomach by-passing the tumour. This all occurred on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

On discharge I was sent to the nutritionist who was obviously employed by Nestle as they only offered Sustagen and other powdered foods. Never did they mention fruit, vegetables or a good diet. This only encouraged me to continue to eat badly as even ice cream was considered okay as I found that comforting and easy to swallow. Although I knew it was wrong, I wasn't quite ready to listen. Not just yet!

At this point I was very concerned that this cancer had been declared aggressive, yet the oncologists didn't seem to have any sense of urgency. It had taken from May to September to diagnose. Chemo didn't start until 17<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and no operation was planned until the New Year.

Philip was doubly concerned about the delays. He'd had a friend with breast cancer twelve years earlier who'd found lumps. She had gone to the doctor, who'd

said wait three months and see how they develop. Philip urged her to press for an earlier test. When they did, they found she had malignant tumours near the lymph glands which could have already spread. Luckily, they had not. She had the breast removed, had chemo and is still alive today. What might have happened if she'd waited those three months?

It made me wonder if my diagnosis had been earlier would my chances of becoming a cancer survivor have increased. Perhaps some seeds had already escaped and gone in search of a nice place to set up camp and grow.



However, I placed my faith in the panel of doctors who appeared eager to get me better. They kept talking about me having a key place on their agenda at diagnosis meetings, making me feel important. When they took extra interest in me, wanting to seed the tumour with markers as an experiment to verify growth, I thought ‘why not’? They advised it was a new technique, but I decided ‘why not get involved’, keep their interest up. I had become one of their special patients...or was I just a guinea pig?

Concerned I went to visit a private oncologist to get a second opinion, but I was told: “He wouldn’t treat me unless I had medical insurance.” I was currently on the public health system.” Hippocratic or Hypocritical Oath?

So began my weekly trip to the Olivier Newton John “Day Oncology Centre” for my dose of poison. It usually took an entire day and if Philip couldn’t make it, my mother would attend. We did after all still have jobs and clients to deal with.

When you leave the Austin Hospital and enter the Olivier Newton John Centre you notice a complete change in atmosphere. You leave that heavily depressing hospital ambiance to a more uplifting, healthier, happier environment. The patient lounge offers a very pleasant, restful place to sit, listen to the water trickling in a nearby fountain, read a book, have a FREE coffee (instant) and relax. You can have massages and other relaxation treatments. They made me feel very comfortable.



Even when you enter the Oncology Treatment Room, the atmosphere persists with nurses who greet you, escort you to your treatment chair, which are a bit like dentist chairs, attach your drip and a volunteer offers you coffee (instant again) or water with a biscuit. Philip often ducked out to the kiosk and got a real coffee and a donut for us both. Surrounding us, were other patients in an open plan format also undergoing treatment. There was little or no exchange between patients so Philip and I would discuss work, the meaning of life, family, facing death and our plans for the next twenty years.

In between weekly treatments, I was connected to a bottle of chemo that hung around my neck in a little bag that provided a slow drip throughout the week. About mid week, a nurse would visit the house and check my bottle and see how I was coping. What amazed me was the big purple bucket I was supplied with for emergencies. I checked inside and there were chemicals, protective gloves, coveralls, masks, all to protect the nurse from the toxic chemicals should the bottle break. Made me wonder what those chemicals were doing to 'my' body.

Chemo seems to be a battle between which kills you first, the chemo or the tumour? I guess it depends on who is the strongest to start with.

Due to the obstruction in my oesophagus, I was forced to eat slowly. Solid foods didn't go down well despite the stent. I was told to drink lots of Sustagen, Fortsip and other liquid supplements which I hated. So, I tended not to take much notice of the nutritionist. Instead, I ended up using the vanilla Sustagen as whitener in my coffee. As long as I ate slowly, I found I could eat most things and then sit for awhile to digest. Ice cream was found to be very soothing and settling.



During the chemo, I very quickly started losing my hair and my morale. My car being stolen depressed me even more than I thought possible. Just another kick while I was down. My eyes were hurting, and I felt detached from myself. I also felt like the universe was plotting against me. I know this was my creation, that negatives feed negatives but I couldn't seem to pick myself up. I've taken up smoking again because I feel defeated. I cannot connect to anything. I know I'm sabotaging myself,

but I can't help it. It was Philip's sister Kathy who was also fighting cancer, who pulled me out of it, buying me a few wigs, giving me the confidence to return to work teaching at TAFE with a combination of wigs and scarves. (Picture above)

Then came the tooth ache which sent everything off the rails.

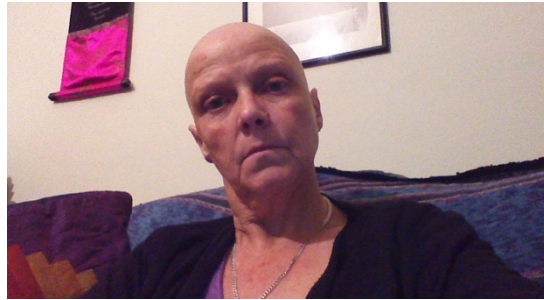
On the advice of my dentist, I went back to my doctor as my tooth had developed an abscess, so he prescribed anti-biotics. After which I developed severe ulcers, a common side effect of chemo but these were aggressive. I was admitted to the Olivier Newton John Hospital, a much better equipped ward than the Austin and they tried to determine what had caused the reaction.

I don't know if you've ever had mouth ulcers, but these were 'beauts'. Your world centres on the pain and does not give you a moment's peace. It felt like a needle was being stabbed through my tongue and my lips were bleeding.

I was being told to eat but just couldn't. When in such discomfort you need people around you to listen to your obsession with pain, people who don't judge you, didn't shut you down. I wouldn't have coped if they had. I was fortunate enough to have those friends around me.

One evening, suffering the full affects of mouth ulcers, the size of football fields, or so they felt, I had my cocaine mouth wash which deadens everything - except for the main ulcer which persisted in making its presence felt. I was given a red tube of ointment to assist with the troublesome ulcers so I could eat.

Here I was, a bald captive desperately trying to eat something, sipping soup with a teaspoon, allowing it to drip down the side of my mouth in order to avoid contact with the ulcers. In desperation I glanced up and saw



my friend Bob, watching my frantic attempts to eat. His eyes were glazed with tears. For a moment we shifted places and I felt what he was feeling and seeing. I was startled to realise that while it was me that was suffering the most, I'd forgotten those around me were suffering as well. Because you just get on with it, every moment of every day you just struggle on. Doing anything it takes to get through it. The mirrors were out, he could see right through me and me through him. The realisation that this was now my life was unmistakable - it hit me hard.

Later that evening, Philip noticed that I was beginning to slur my words. On investigation, we discovered that the instructions on the red tube read 'once every four hours', I was taking it as required not knowing it had a high cocaine content. So, I was off on one of my early unintentional drug trips. Philip told me to enjoy it while I could, he felt left out.

In the middle of the night, came the chronic diarrhoea. You get up think you're done, get back into bed and... as if waiting for you to relax, another bout comes. Overall, I tried to take all this as an interesting experience as I've said before; I'd never had pain or been sick before.

Finally, they agreed on a diagnosis. The anti-biotics prescribed for the abscess had reacted negatively with the chemo, enhancing the side effects of the chemo, resulting in the development of mouth ulcers. Why didn't the doctor know? After all he'd prescribed the chemo! Treatment followed but it had reacted negatively causing the chronic diarrhoea. After several more attempts to get the medication right I was finally getting better.

All was going so well. That is, if I ignore the heart incident.

One morning I developed a severe pain in my chest, had trouble breathing but no one would answer the buzzer. A nurse, standing in the doorway to my room talking to another nurse failed to notice as I silently gasped for breath. Eventually she noticed and sounded the alarm.

Later, I was told not to bother with the buzzer, pull out the heart monitor, it triggered an alarm. So much for patient care!

I was found to have had a mild heart attack brought about by the treatment. So, it seemed one bungle after the other might kill me... if the cancer failed to do it.

Eventually they released me, and I returned to the outside world and my chemo treatments which completed on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2013. I returned home to find St Vincent's Hospital had decided to offer me an appointment – about three months too late.



Philip and I left for Queensland and a break before my big operation in January.



## CHAPTER TWO ANNEX A

**Medical Results of biopsy day procedure** on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2013, that revealed an ‘intense Fluorodeoxyglucose uptake (FDG - A radio-fluorine derivative used to trace metabolic activity or detect malignant tissue) commonly used as the agent in **positron emission tomography** (PET Scan) in the distal 6cm of a thick-walled oesophagus, extending into the gastro-oesophageal junction. Multiple FDG-avid lymph nodes were present, adjacent to the gastro-oesophageal junction, at the lesser curvature of the stomach and the largest measuring 25 x 20mm in axial diameter, inferior to the gastro-oesophageal junction. There is no FDG-avid mediastinal lymphadenopathy or distant metastatic spread.’

**Metastasis**, or metastatic disease, is the spread of a cancer or disease from one organ or part to another not directly connected with it. The new occurrences of disease thus generated are referred to as metastases. It was previously thought that only malignant tumour cells and infections have the capacity to metastasise; however, this is being reconsidered due to new research. Metastasis is a Greek word meaning "displacement", from μετά, meta, "next", and στάσις, stasis, "placement".) She was offered three rounds of chemotherapy (regimen: ECF) before surgery. This proved effective in reducing size of the tumour.

**Medication & Supplements** offered by hospital; Fortisip flavoured milk, Novasource 2.0, Novasource Renal, Resource Fruit Beverage, Sustagen. Supplements offered by Wellness Practitioner; Vitamin D3, Melatonin, Bio Omega Sure, META super Mushroom Complex, TH basic B Complex, U Flora Immune, NC Gut Relief, Lactose, CPMP, Bio D3 Forte, Mel SL 3mg Xmojen, PI Glutamine Powder and Celloid Duo 170. Additional medication offered by hospital: metoclopramide (an antibiotic), Oxychodone (for relief of moderate to severe pain), Peter MacCallum Mouthwash (for mouth ulcers), Loperamide (for diarrhoea), Metronidazole (for nausea and vomiting)

**Stages of Cancer:** "Doctors use a range of ways of describing these stages. Usually, stage 0 is in situ cancer; stage 1 is localised cancer, although further local spread may take it to stage 2; stage 2 also usually includes spread to the nearest lymph nodes; stage 3 usually indicates more extensive lymph node involvement and stage 4 always indicates distant spread.

**Antigens:** A toxin or other foreign substance which induces an immune response in the body especially the production of antibodies.

Figure No 1

**Austin Health Endoscopy Service**

<b>Patient Name:</b>	Gail Blundell	<b>MRN:</b>	2152019
<b>Gender:</b>	Female	<b>Procedure Date:</b>	20/09/2013 14:09
<b>Date of Birth:</b>	23/05/1959	<b>Medicare #:</b>	31922692871
<b>Consultant:</b>	Steve Lontos, Gastroenterologist		

**Procedure:** Upper GI endoscopy

**Indications:** Dysphagia, Weight loss  
**Providers:** Steve Lontos, Gastroenterologist, Gillian Skardon, Gastroenterology Registrar, Anne Dowling, RN, Diane Crowley, EN  
**Referring Dr:** Gastro Clinic  
**CC Letter to:** Kew General Practice 798 High Street KEW EAST, VIC 3102  
**Medicines:** Midazolam (Hypnovel) 3 mg IV, Fentanyl (Sublimaze) 75 micrograms IV, Lignocaine spray

**Procedure:** After obtaining informed consent, the Endoscope was introduced through the mouth, and advanced to the. The upper GI endoscopy was accomplished without difficulty.

**Findings:**

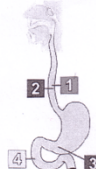
- A large, ulcerating mass with was found in the lower third of the oesophagus. The mass was partially obstructing and circumferential. Biopsies were taken with a cold forceps for histology.
- The entire examined stomach was normal. No biopsies or other specimens were collected for this exam.
- The examined duodenum was normal. No biopsies or other specimens were collected for this exam.

**Complications:**  
**Impression/Preliminary Dx:**

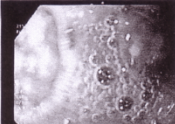
- Partially obstructing, malignant oesophageal tumour was found in the lower third of the oesophagus. This was biopsied.
- Normal stomach.
- Normal examined duodenum.
- No specimens collected.
- No specimens collected.

**Recommendation:** - Refer to a surgeon at appointment to be scheduled.

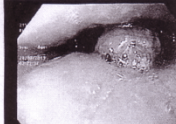
**Images:**



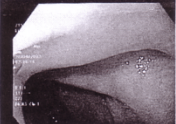
Upper Gastrointestinal Tract



1 Middle Third of the Oesophagus



2 Gastric Antrum



4 2nd Portion of the Duodenum

*A 2/19*

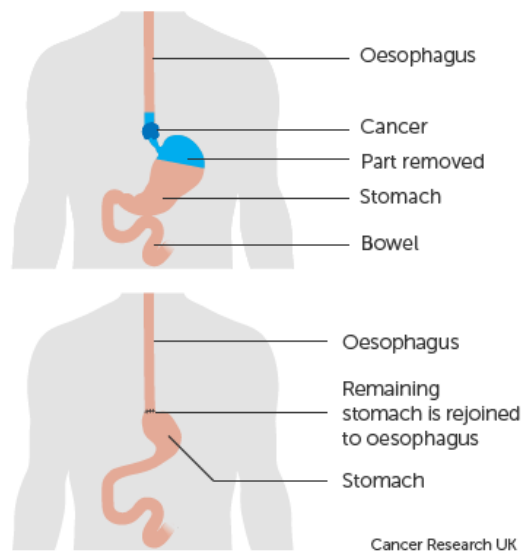
124 SEP 2013

# Bloody Oesophagheal Gastrectomy Operation

## CHAPTER THREE

The December results indicated the tumour had not significantly changed in size but at least it had not grown. Our next challenge was the operation. This involved removing part of the oesophagus and part of the stomach.

The surgeon removes the top third of your stomach and part of your oesophagus if the cancer has grown into your stomach. This is an oesophagus gastrectomy.



To remove cancer of the oesophagus you may have open surgery or keyhole surgery. Most people have Open Surgery.

In Open Surgery the surgeon can make a cut into your neck, chest or abdomen. Then he makes two cuts to reach the oesophagus.

The type of surgery depends on where the cancer is in your oesophagus. It also depends to some extent on which type your surgeon prefers. The types are:

1. trans hiatal esophagectomy, which means having the operation through a cut in your abdomen and neck,

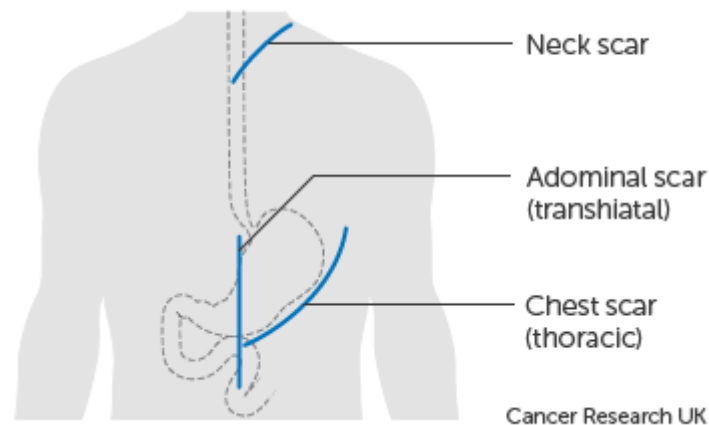
2. trans thoracic esophagectomy, which is when the surgeon makes cuts in your abdomen and chest.

Trans thoracic esophagectomy is sometimes called the Ivor Lewis operation, after the surgeon who first performed this operation.

Depending on which operation you have, you may have a

- scar on your abdomen
- chest scar, on the right or left which goes round towards your back underneath the shoulder blade.
- neck scar

Or you could have a combination of these.



Source: [www.cancerresearch.uk.org](http://www.cancerresearch.uk.org)

I don't remember much of what happened that day in January 2014. At seven in the morning, I was driven to hospital by Philip and met there by my friend



Pat. Both of them waited anxiously all day for the surgeon to give them updates. I was left worrying that I might not make it through the operation. The surgeon had said that if he was to rate how serious and dangerous this operation was out of ten...this was a twelve.

As I slept peacefully, Philip and Pat sat in the waiting room drinking coffee and waiting. Around

4pm, Pat had a bad feeling as if she sensed I was in trouble.

Later the surgeon denied anything had happened, but we did uncover there had been some tense moments. When you think of what they were doing it is not a surprise, seeing it took thirteen hours.

When I awoke, I was uncertain where I was, all I could see was a silhouetted head on top of a strange body. I wondered if I'd entered an episode of Doctor Who and had been captured by robot aliens or was I still dreaming. I asked the silhouette, "Are you human?"

It answered in a female voice. "Yes."

"What are you doing?" I asked.

She replied, "Watching you." That response was not what I wanted to hear, it sent shivers down my spine. Who was she? Why was she watching me?

I must have drifted off to sleep because the next thing I remember was Pat and Philip standing by my bed. I asked them about my watcher and learned it was a nurse peering over the top of a computer monitor on a rostrum. I felt a little easier until the pain started to kick in. Philip and Pat weren't permitted to stay long, and they stepped aside so Bob and my mother could visit. Still sedated, I remember very little of either visit but I had survived. Hopefully, this would be the end of my cancer journey.

I spent the next six weeks in the Austin Hospital in horrendous pain and found the hospital inferior in every way to the Olivier Newton John Centre. For the first few weeks, I was hooked up to tubes that extended up my nose, into my stomach and bowel. I had an IV feed and was only able to suck on ice. My throat felt red raw and it was later discovered that the tube in my throat had a kink in it, something they had missed despite my complaining of the pain when I swallowed. Why didn't anyone notice? In addition, I had my stomach contents, a yucky green bile, drained into a bag for analysis. Being anxious to get these tubes removed and being promised I could if I put on weight; I started filling my pockets with rocks and crystals. They never caught me, and I had the tubes removed.

During the day I had a fantastic nurse, but her assistants all seemed to be trainees who knew very little. In many respects this nurse seemed to know more than the doctors who were hardly ever seen.

One visit by the doctor, with a few of his associates, they were discussing my operation, referring to me as Bed No 3, as if I wasn't there. I interrupted and informed them my name was Gail. It took them aback but from that point they referred to me as 'Gail'. One nurse, unseen by the doctors, gave me the thumbs up.

To relieve the pain, I was put on ketamine, one of the side effects was to make me paranoid. I was sure the night shift nurses were going to kill me. It was only when I tried to explain my fears to visitors the next day that I realised what I was saying was silly. However, the evening nurses seemed lazy, patient needs appeared to be an inconvenience. Not good enough given I could not do anything without nursing assistance even after my tubes were removed. If I wanted to go to the bathroom this still involved taking my intravenous pumping station and other monitoring equipment with me. After waiting ages for them to come, I would then be left in there for an hour or more before they came back to check on me. They seemed more interested in talking and laughing loudly than attending to patient needs. On the other hand, the day nurses were magnificent, especially the head nurse who constantly demonstrated she knew more about the drugs the doctors were prescribing than they did, while the other staff seemed to be all learning the job.

The other effect of the ketamine drug was I was certain the bed was alive, moving underneath me. I had to have several visitors assure me the bed was not moving but I thought it might be just playing possum. This didn't help my credibility when I commented on the night shift neglect.

My day nurse did tell me a story of a man, high on ketamine who was so determined to escape what he considered was a prison that he climbed into the ceiling seeking an escape until he fell through and landed in reception.

Next to me was an Indian man who'd undergone the same operation. He was a day ahead of me, so I was able to monitor what was likely to happen to me. Opposite me was a guy with sleep apnoea, who snored in the night, would wake himself up or mimic the sounds of other patients in the ward.

As I recovered, I had to relearn how to eat, swallow and cough in a way that did not hurt. I now had a gravity feed digestion system as the sphincter valves that regulate the flow of food through the stomach had been removed. So, if I got up too quickly or ate too fast my stomach tossed it all back at me. I would be carrying 'vomit bags' with me at all times.

Finally, my ordeal was over and I was released. I could go home. I still had several months of chemo ahead of me, precautionary to kill off any cancer seeds floating around my system, but I was on the road to recovery.

It was time to start fulfilling my life goals and find that dream house.

# My Friend Bob

## CHAPTER FOUR



On the morning of Saturday 8th March 2014, I went house hunting with my friend Ann. We spent the morning looking at display homes at the new Coburg Hill Estate where they were redeveloping the old Kodak factory site. I felt very excited because so many of them looked so wonderful, but I needed to get some straight answers from someone who knew the tricks of the building trade. So, after lunch, we went to my friend, Bob's house. I know, "Bob the Builder" but Bob was so much more, he was one of those old-fashioned guys who was a carpenter, plumber, electrician and all round handyman and professional builder.

When we reached his house, I detected a bad smell in the front yard, like off meat. I knocked on the door but there was no answer, so I let myself in. By this time, I was becoming anxious. The smell inside was worse, almost unbearable. His bedroom was just inside the door, so I entered and found him still in bed. What I saw I will never forget.

I'd always been afraid of dead things and Bob was dead. Two days in a hot house had left him bloated and almost unrecognisable. Both Ann and I fled the house and I called Philip who came straight over. He arrived shortly after the police and braved the smell to retrieve Bob's mobile. We then left him to the Coroner and the police to handle while we returned home to ring everyone on his contact list. We all felt stunned.

The last time I saw Bob was the Thursday night before. He often joined me for dinner and that night he cooked me an omelette. Bob's omelettes were great; he put garlic, ham and cheese in them. I only ate about half. He finished the rest. We watched some tele until about 10.30 after which he said he had to go home; he had



a 6.30 start in the morning. He always asked if I needed him to stay the night in case, I was not well enough to be alone. I told him I was okay. Before he left, I called him back to the door, mainly to mischievously annoy him. “Bye Bobbie,” I said, and he replied. “I’ll see you tomorrow.” That moment will forever be frozen in my memory as the last time I saw him.

When he didn’t call me the next day, despite my starting my new round of chemo visits, I was a bit worried. It was not like him, but I dismissed it as him being busy. He never appeared at work that day, so we believe he passed away from an aneurism, after leaving that Thursday night.

I cannot look at my front door without seeing him there. If that door rattles, I still think it’s him. I still say to myself, twenty times a day, ‘I must ask Bob about that.’ Then pull myself up. He’s gone and I’ll never see him again. Would it have been different if I’d asked him to stay? I will never know.

I met Bob twenty-six years ago. We were in a relationship for about eight of those years. I don’t remember when it changed into a deep and lasting friendship but that was what it became. We were the best of friends for all that time and always will be.

There are many Bob stories, and they all represent some of my fondest memories. Among them was our time at the Imperial Hotel in Melbourne, I worked as a bar maid, Bob was the manager. He knew everybody in town, it was his town. We would have dinner in many restaurants where Bob knew the owner and was a respected guest, then we would wander the laneways of Melbourne to find all the hidden jazz clubs and treasures, but you had to know they were there to find them.

John, Bob and I would spend many an enjoyable evening cruising places around Melbourne. One night we ran into a friend of John’s with connections to the underworld. He told us there was a contract out on him. All through that meal I felt like a target, expecting a bullet to miss John’s friend and hit me.

One particular restaurant in Melbourne would never let us order off the menu. He would prepare his latest exotic delicacy especially for us. Bob had a very expansive palette; he would try anything. I, on the other hand, have very simple tastes. Occasionally, these meals terrified me as the meal presented on the plate was unrecognisable as any food I was familiar with. I would be tugging on Bob’s jacket whispering, “No, no, no...!” He would tell me, “Try it. You’ll like it. We can’t insult

the owner.” The owner caught on and after that night he made me lemon chicken and the horrible exotic dishes were for the boys.

Bob was a great cook but he hated soup. I was his taste test dummy for the hundreds of soups that he has made for others over the years, particularly his pumpkin soup. As a child he’d got sick and been fed soup exclusively for months. Fifty years later he would still not even ‘taste’ soup. He would make it in my kitchen, and I would find bits of pumpkin soup everywhere, even on the ceiling. He was not the cleanest of cooks.



The one project that Bob and I did together was my back fence. He drilled, I picked up the bits as they rolled down the hill and handed him the screws. We were very proud of that fence and very angry when the graffiti was added.

Later when I fell sick, he made me all types of meals, came every day and made me eat them. He put them in little containers, so I didn’t get overwhelmed by a full meal. He never tired of creating new things for me to try. I watched the pain in his face one day, knowing that it was painful for me to eat as it often resulted in nausea and my vomiting back up his meal. If he could have taken the pain from me - he would have. He could fix anything around the house, but he couldn’t fix me.

It’s hard to come to grips with the fact that I will never see him again, never to chat again and never again be able to ask his advice. Time does not heal the pain of loss, it may lessen the impact, it certainly hardens the tender spots a little, but I still miss my best friend.

As I write this chapter it is twelve months yesterday since I lost him and I’m in hospital again. I wish I could visit the place where we said our last goodbye, that beach in McCrae where we returned you to the elements. But I can’t. I wish I could be around your many friends sharing the experiences we had by having you in our lives. But I can’t. I’m trapped in hospital saving my own life. It is only here in hospital that I have had the chance to take a breath and think about my cancer experience. This has been the most profound time of my life.

Early on, I had twice considered leaving all this behind. How easy it would have been to just step away from all the pain and stress. How peaceful to just drift away from this everyday drama; to escape the anxiety attacks caused by the chemo and other drugs. To escape being overwhelmed by the quick and permanent changes occurring to me every two weeks.

I felt propelled towards an uncertain precipice, only to be pulled back. Maybe the edge is the only place able to really scare me enough into facing things eyeball to eyeball, toe to toe. But I decided to stay and fight for my life, and I'm winning. I've developed by life saving manifesto:

- I talk to my liver about the job ahead; give it the love and attention it needs to heal. I had to realise my body was always working to heal despite the abuse I inflicted. Cancer was the warning to stop smoking, start exercising and improve my diet, so my body can heal.
- I must visualise a positive outcome and believe it. Fuck it! I'm here to live!
- Clear the deck of negative people and things, plan for the future. Imagine living in your dream home, not just what it would be like. Feel it, have it light, white, airy, fresh and new.
- Meditate to take your mind to positive places. Feel the energy.
- Find a purpose for being present in the world, shine a light into the darkness and find a new path ahead.

I have always believed that there are lessons you are supposed to learn in life. That life is a testing ground for the spirit, but we have to work out what those lessons are. I'm supposed to learn something from this cancer and from the loss of my friend; I wish I knew what it was? Maybe I'm just a slow learner.

I'm determined to survive cancer. I've learned to appreciate the time and effort that people who step up are prepared to give me - to help encourage me. I have much to learn. I must recognise that my body has been good to me and now it needs my help. My mind and my body must work in harmony to bring back health. I must become committed to fulfilling my purpose on this Earth – whatever that is!

“But I cannot reconcile losing you from my life, Bob, no matter how I try. It just hurts.” There is nothing I can see serves any higher purpose, it just leaves a

hole, an emptiness, a void filled with anger. Having had time to adjust and reflect and chat with Bobbie's spirit when I'm alone, I know how much he loved and cared for me. Although he has left a gap in my life, I know I can bask in the treasured memories of him and learn to accept. I suspect I'll always, as a first reaction, say, "I must ask Bob about that."

So, my friend, I miss you and wonder how my life would be different if you were still in it. But mostly I just miss you every day in many, many ways.

I love you and I miss you, Bob.

PS: Don't forget to come get me when the time comes. I will be expecting you.

PPS: Bring my dogs Leah and Danni, I miss them too.

# The Bloody Doctors

## CHAPTER FIVE

**March 2014 to January 2015**

After Bob's death, I relied a lot more on Philip and my mother for support. I now faced several months of chemotherapy which was expected to end around my birthday on 23<sup>rd</sup> May, which also represented one year down the cancer track. After that I was going to be cured. Of course, they warn you that it can come back but that wasn't going to happen. I was going to start a new life beginning on my birthday and build that dream home.

In May, as I had hoped the doctors declared me cancer free but suggested I return every three months for checkups as insurance. All seemed reasonable but my attention was now focused on getting on with my life.



Philip and I had merged our accounting businesses a few years before and now an opportunity arose to purchase Harlequin; an accounting business that specialised in providing advice to Public Schools in managing their budgets and government funding.

The current owner was also suffering from cancer and his health prevented him continuing. On 1<sup>st</sup> August we took possession of the business and designed our new business cards.

When I went for my three month check up in August, I discovered there was an additional test to the CA19-9 test I'd previously been advised about. This was the carcinoembryonic antigen (CEA) test, which like the other is a tumour marker test used to obtain an indication of colorectal malignancies. The antigens detected in the blood are either being produced by the tumour or are being produced by the body in reaction to the tumour. With CEA a score of 10 is high, my level was 27

but I was given no comparison as to what it had been earlier in the year. This was when I began doing my own research as I was finding it difficult to get answers from the doctors. They seemed to only give you part of the picture. It didn't help that the Oncology Department at the Olivia Newton–John Hospital had us seeing a different oncologist every time we visited. In addition, we'd wait up to two hours for our appointment; the new doctor would review the file in just a few minutes, make his comments and dismiss us. I began to realise he had no idea of my history. They were cold and detached, determined to give childish explanations that were not asked for and when asked to move on they insisted on giving their spiel instead of answering our questions.

At this stage I was told not to worry as CEA elevations occur in 15-30% of benign diseases of the intestine, pancreas, liver and lungs such as liver cirrhosis, chronic hepatitis, pancreatitis, ulcerative colitis, Crohn's disease, and emphysema. Smokers also have elevated CEA, as a retired smoker they believed there was low risk of that being a factor, however they decided to put me on a treatment of chemo just in case. Again, all seemed reasonable so I commenced another round of chemo while Philip and I searched for a house to renovate into my dream home.

On 29th November 2014, we purchased a property in Reservoir with a view to pulling it down and building one of the display homes that we'd been looking at. We had also done a lot of research on builders and the traps of building. I often thought what an asset Bob would have been to advise us.

On 18<sup>th</sup> December, we had our next appointment with the Oncologist. Philip



attended and we both found the doctor evasive in answering our questions. He told us that my CEA had risen to 72; my CA19-9 was unchanged. They had however found a metastasis in the back of the abdominal cavity within the lymph nodes near the splenic artery, its position near one of the main arteries that supplies blood to the spleen as well as large parts of the stomach and pancreas made it inoperable. He wanted to start a new series of treatments in January.

We told him we were going to Queensland for Christmas and New Year. “Take your holiday and enjoy it,” he said while placing his hand sympathetically on my

shoulder. Those words haunted me the whole time we were away. When we returned, we were told that I would not see Easter that year.

With no other option I commenced the new ‘experimental’ treatment. Their whole attitude of the hospital towards me changed, I was now a guinea pig not a patient. There was no plan to save me; it was all about monitoring reactions to their treatment. These reactions included nerve damage. Now I would remind you that this was summer but if I were standing in the wind my hands felt like they were suffering frost bite and I felt cold all the time. Other possible symptoms were shaking, vomiting, stroke, pain, breathing difficulties and swelling.

This was compounded by a relief nurse who forgot about me, left me on the drip for two hours then in a hurry to get home ripped the IV out of my arm which not only hurt but caused me to bleed badly resulting in severe bruising.

The final straw was when during treatment I couldn’t breathe. There were fourteen doctors and nurses gathered around plus my mother. All were observers – nobody did anything. My chemo nurse was telling them I was having a panic attack, but I was calm enough to count the people peering at me and to see the look of horror on my mother’s face. It was not until the ambulance guys came that they gave me oxygen and brought me back.

Ordinarily one has your system flushed with saline before and after chemo. I was taken to casualty without having the chemo flushed out and when Philip joined me there, he noticed the saline flush was there but not connected. No one would listen and no one would reconnect because they weren’t trained in that procedure.

A ‘bright red haired’ woman doctor came to see me, who wasn’t all that bright mentally, had an argument with the duty nurse over moving me to a bed for observation. Philip and I spent two hours waiting for a decision before being told I was being kept in. Philip went home and then I was released into the night. I had to catch a taxi home and surprised Philip when I walked in.

On my next visit I complained and was told that I had had no reaction to the chemo, and they were going to continue treatments. At this point I might remind you one of the side effects mentioned at the start was breathlessness. They denied I’d not been flushed out after treatment, denied any mistakes had been made and were obviously covering their arse.

So here I was, I had been given my death sentence and I felt defeated. I had nowhere to go, no one to turn to. I could not connect to anything and my mood was sabotaging my will to go on. I started smoking again which makes me sick but I still do it. My eyes were hurting and I felt detached from myself and the universe which I was convinced was plotting against me. I know that it's all in my mind, my creation but I can't seem to pick myself up. Negative feeds negative.

My future consisted of three months of experimental chemotherapy, which if that didn't kill me the cancer would. It all seemed very bleak.

It wasn't until Philip said to me, "If we have to go meditate in the Himalayas to get you well then that's where we'll go." It somehow gave me the freedom to pursue other options. I began to research alternative treatments locally and overseas. That research indicated that Germany and China were the world leaders in cancer research. China was more suited to my form of cancer and the Renkang Hospital seemed the best. I rang a few people who'd been patients there and got good references. We decided to go, the only obstacle was money. I decided to sell my interest in a property in Armadale that I owned with my sister but that would take months, time I didn't have. It was Philip's family that came to the rescue and offered to provide the money to pay my medical bills and costs for us both to go to China.

Already totally disillusioned with the Australian medical system, at least in respect to cancer treatment, I was dealt another blow when the Hospital refused to supply a copy of my medical records to take to China stating as I was on the public health system, they were not my property. So, I went to China with nothing and no time to argue with the hospital.

I was sick and tired of doctors not caring. One doctor, in the early days had left us hanging for over thirty minutes to take a phone call after his opening remarks, "Your situation is quite serious!" I'd had a year of being stuffed around by doctors but only when looking back could I see it. One tends to have faith in doctors, but I found they lack the ability to diagnose, they only know how to read test results. In fact, one visit I asked how many tumours were there in the PET scan. The report didn't say, I asked to see the scans but the doctor didn't know how to read them. I took over and navigated through the scan identifying the tumours for him as I'd



been getting the labs to send me electronic copies of the scan results and I had been studying them on my computer.

On another visit I mentioned I had a pain in the chest, they took X-Rays and CAT scans but found nothing. When I mentioned it hurt when I coughed, they said it was maybe a cracked rib but why had no one noticed it on the X-Rays? It seems these analysts have narrow vision when examining results and doctors only read the report. This pain persisted and later I found there was a gap in my back, I think they removed a rib during the operation but no one ever told me.

As you know I had previously endured an Ivor Lewis thirteen-hour operation for oesophageal cancer ten months before, leaving me with a shortened oesophagus and many problems related to eating. No advice was offered to relieve that problem until I discovered, twelve months later, that if I sat at a 45 degree angle and ate slowly it relieved the problem. I was told this in China, why not in Australia? Unfortunately, I was like all the other patients at Renkang we had left effective and non invasive treatments overseas as the last option. Only when faced with dying and nothing to lose do you look elsewhere. It's common to trust what you know – western medicine – they are the doctors, they know best, they are 'god', they will save your life then you realise they are working with only a tiny bag of tools and the real effective, non-invasive cancer treatments are either not in their reality or not part of Western medicines approved cancer treatment which is poison, cut or burn. That is all they have available.

If you hold the power of life and death in your hands, I feel you are morally, ethically and just plain humanly obliged to be up to date (and open to new ideas). People look to you in desperation, seeking help; they trust you like babies trust their mothers. They are scared, shocked and facing their own mortality and yet doctors only offer the treatments that western medicine and money-making pharmaceutical companies tell us you can have. They are untested – in Australia! But often these treatments have been used overseas for years or even decades. You don't and won't even suggest there might be other options. One doctor admitted to me that the results of my treatments in China were miraculous, but she dared not recommend them to her other patients because she could be prosecuted and struck off the medical register. How does she sleep at night?

If you DO NOT know about other treatments, you should, if you are to keep abreast of your trade. You are in the business of saving lives. If you DO NOT want to suggest them, or are afraid to suggest them, then shame on you. Shame! Shame!

If you DO NOT believe alternative therapies work, look at the stats for god sake... educate yourself! Sure, there quacksout there, always have been but telling patients that going to China is chasing false hope, that it's not true science practiced over there. Chinese medicine is older than Western medicine and they combine the best of both to get better results. What is wrong with giving hope? Hope drives us to force our bodies to heal; lack of hope is a death sentence pushing us down the path of anger and despair.

What is it with you Western doctors? Scared of mainstream repercussions? Need another holiday house? As doctors you are morally obliged to help in any way you can or the following Oath, known as the 'Hippocratic Oath', is just plain nonsense. Maybe it should be renamed the 'Hypocritical Oath' which states:

I swear to fulfil, to the best of my ability and judgment, this covenant:

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow.

I will apply, for the benefit of the sick, all measures which are required, avoiding those twin traps of over treatment and [therapeutic nihilism](#).

I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug.

I will not be ashamed to say, "I know not," nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient's recovery.

I will respect the privacy of my patients, for their problems are not disclosed to me that the world may know. Most especially must I tread with care in matters of life and death. Above all, I must not play at God.

I will remember that I do not treat a fever chart, a cancerous growth, but a sick human being, whose illness may affect the person's family and economic stability.

My responsibility includes these related problems if I am to care adequately for the sick.

I will prevent disease whenever I can, but I will always look for a path to a cure for all diseases.

I will remember that I remain a member of society, with special obligations to all my fellow human beings, those sound of mind and body as well as the infirm.

If I do not violate this oath, may I enjoy life and art, respected while I live and remembered with affection thereafter. May I always act so as to preserve the finest traditions of my calling and may I long experience the joy of healing those who seek my help.

The so called “Do no harm” phrase often quoted is not actually in the Oath but is implied. However, I would suggest that doing nothing except chemo, radiation or surgery is doing harm and so is remaining ignorant of other overseas treatments.

Cancer A does not always need Treatment B. Patients and Cancers are all different but this seems to be the method of prescription, like checking a chart.

An inoperable cancer does not mean go off and die. One of our chemo treatments may prolong your life. The chemo we have might be worse than the cancer but it’s all we’ve got. I have witnessed and been included in some of the most appalling lack of concern for human life by oncologists in Australia.

“What month is your birthday? You’ll make that but not the next.”

“I won’t treat you unless you’re insured”.

“No, a PET scan is not cost effective” The answer given to a patient with a 12cm tumour in her liver. After taking cannabis oil and going to China they gave her a PET scan and found the tumour had shrivelled up and gone, eaten up from the inside by the cannabis oil. Her medical people in Australia had chased the cancer for nine years and given up.

One needs to consider holistic treatments not just fire fighting the outbreaks. Treatments in Australia are usually just that. Once you have metastasised, the cancer load is far greater and treatment longer. Fundamentally an ongoing patient is a return customer. The human body is not worth much to the medical profession when it’s healthy. I know this sounds cynical but read the information, get self

informed, so you can make better choices for your own health because there's a good chance your doctor won't. They might be a really nice person but that does not excuse ignorance when your life hangs in the balance.

But now I'm off to China to find the cure. On 30th January 2015, we settled on our house in Reservoir and next day we boarded a plane to China.

# First Impressions

## CHAPTER SIX

February 2015

I am writing this sitting in my hospital suite at the Renkang Hospital in Houjie Town, China. It has become my sanctuary, my home – though it is also my prison. I arrived on the 31st January 2015 and apart from a few breaks expect to be here for at least three months.



This part of my journey started with us boarding a plane to China to begin a nine-hour flight to save my life. My diagnosis was ‘multiple metastases’ demonstrated in the liver having increased in size. A centrally necrotic lymph node demonstrated in the aorta caval region below the left renal vein with a second enlarged and critically necrosing lymph node demonstrated at the porta hepatis.

Our arrival at 3.15pm didn’t start well. We seemed to have been abandoned at the airport; there was no sign of our driver at the exit from the International Customs Area. After thirty minutes, a coffee from Starbucks and some debate on what we should do, we started to worry. We had no mobile and one woman we approached told us that the Hong Kong phone network didn’t extend into China, so we needed to find someone who had a Mainland China service provider.

While I approached people for a phone, Philip went further a field in the airport and found there was an Exit B; we were at Exit A but still no driver. By the time Philip returned I had managed to borrow a phone and ring the hospital, who had rung the driver and been told he was at Exit B. We picked up our luggage and trundled over to Exit B but... still no driver.

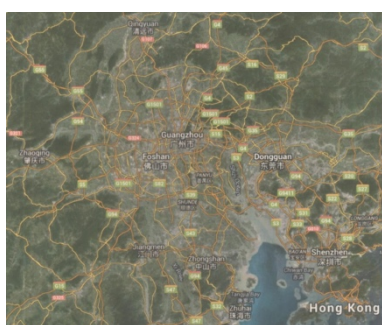
Within a few minutes, in which we started to get really worried, the driver arrived waving a board that said “Gail”. Apparently, he had given up waiting and returned to his car when he got the call from the hospital.

He was quite a talkative, energetic guy who kept welcoming us to China as he took our trolley full of suitcases and led the way. We departed the Airport Terminal on foot, entered a bus terminal, walked through the buses to a car park where he led us to a minibus that seated eight. We were the only passengers. We climbed aboard as he loaded our bags then we started our journey through Hong Kong to the border.

As we drove, he asked us about why we had come to China. He failed to boost our confidence by telling us about all the medical scams here in China. This only served to feed that little seed of doubt planted by many in Australia, mainly members of the medical profession but also family and friends.

An hour later at the border, he got us to get out, take our luggage and go through customs on foot. He said it was quicker. If we were in his car, they would search it and our luggage whereas entering on foot they would probably just pass us through. He was right and we met up with him on the other side. Now we were in China.

Once we were on the road, Philip mentioned that he’d been to Hong Kong on his honeymoon in 1977, entry into China then was forbidden and they had driven to the border. All he could see was open fields. Now it was wall to wall buildings, the driver confirmed this area had all been rural back then.



We drove on and apparently passed through three cities, Hong Kong, Shenzhen and Dongguan in the Province of Guangdong. Where one started and the other finished was uncertain. It was like driving from Melbourne to Ballarat and then to Bendigo without actually leaving a built-up area. Some of these structures were magnificent; others were rundown housing commission like buildings that went on for miles. As we approached Houjie, a suburb of Dongguan the area looked more and more third world. Badly surfaced roads run down dirty shops, unpleasant smells, low rise buildings. In addition, the route taken turned into a pot holed half constructed road

that gave us quite a bumpy ride. The driver told us they were building a national railway system that passed through this area, a fifty-year plan that was only ten years in. That was the reason for the bad roads.

This ‘adventure’ was made worse by the driver declaring he was lost. He could not find the hospital, so we pulled over while he rang them up. Where he stopped was a busy side street of run-down shops in what can only be described as a slum area. We both looked at each other and began to wonder if we’d made a big mistake. I said to Philip I wanted to go home. The neighbourhood, the shops, the people, the smells and the drivers comments on scams, made me feel we were headed to a back street clinic for the desperate, or maybe we’d never be heard of again and our organs sold on the black market.



The driver got his directions and drove on eventually pulling into the drive of a full sized major modern looking hospital. It was not surrounded by grass as the pamphlet photos indicated but it was opposite a major development of exhibition buildings, six of them the size of Melbourne’s Exhibition Buildings, affectionately known in Australia as “Jeff’s Shed”, named after the state premier who had it built.

Standing outside were a number of doctors and nurses. We didn’t realise until we got out that the entire staff of the VIP Cancer Ward had come down to meet us. They took our luggage and led us through the lobby to the ninth floor via a lift treating us like hotel guests rather than patients.

We were given the option of a small poky room or a larger room. We took the larger room and were left to settle but told the doctors wanted to speak to us before we retired for the night. At this stage it was about 7.30pm but that didn’t seem to worry them.





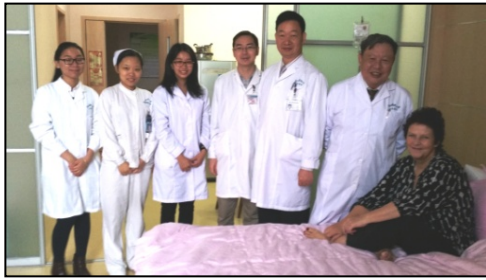
We went to the briefing room and found they had all the medical records we'd sent, in front of them. My doctors were Dr Lu and, Dr Li. They were fully briefed but had questions. We spent the next two hours with them discussing symptoms and treatments. They then let us go; informing us they would spend the next few days doing their own tests before coming up with their recommended course of treatment.

Life at the Renkang hospital is strange, all the more so because it's more like a hotel. Like hospitals in many other parts of the world, patients (or their families) provide their own food. The first impression of the nurses is they are like talking dolls - they are so quiet and attentive to the needs of patients - but they know exactly what they are doing. They don't jab around for a vein, they get it painlessly first time, they are very helpful, and the trainees are always supervised and not left to fend for themselves like nurses are in Australia. Thank God for the other patients, the ones who had travelled the path less travelled. They helped me settle in and feel at home and undertake the daunting experience of stepping out of my normal life to spend months in a hospital.



It takes a bit of getting used to. The hospital has three translators: Clare, Sammy and Polly, who go shopping with you and are always there to help. They are wonderful transition aides because the language is a barrier at first. One example comes to mind. Six nurses came into my room and said what we thought was 'sheet change', so Philip and I got off the beds and sat on the couch. We then began to smile idiotically at the nurses, who smiled back. We smiled at each other for a while until the nurses waved goodbye and left. We learned later that nurses come twice a day to announce 'Shift Change', so you know which nurses are in charge.





All medical treatment is at the bedside in your room. I checked every time what they were giving me – while I was talking to them. They always gave me full answers rather than avoid the question as done in Australia. It just felt so casual and

comfortable, but it was still a hospital sticking to protocols (not tied into knots by them). If you were out in the lounge, they'd come to you there to do a finger prick blood test or change your IV. We would often say "Look out they found us!" or "I think she's coming for you" or "Bugger, you found me!" No good feeling squeamish – all in the same boat.

People help each other here; we all have a common bond 'cancer' or being here to support a loved one with life threatening cancer. Everyone is out of their comfort zone, so we relax and talk openly about our illnesses, all barriers removed. We are all knocked out of our complacency. Adjustment must be made for survival, not all bad but forced just the same.



Day Two was a Sunday, in the morning they took the usual, blood, shit and urine samples that I was used to giving in Australia. We also learned early that the cleaners, who came daily, had no concept of knocking. They'd just enter and often caught us half dressed or even still asleep. At 9.30am, I was taken for an Ultrasound and despite the queue we were placed to the front as VIP patients. Unfortunately, the scan confirmed the tumour was spreading.



With the afternoon off we decided to go exploring. As we headed for the door the staff were concerned about us wanting to know where we were going. They handed us a 'getting lost card' which stated in Chinese where the hospital was so we could hand it to anyone, and they'd bring us back.

Up the road we found the "Well Garden Hotel". It had a several dining rooms; one Chinese, another European. We noted them for future reference because no food was served in the hospital. You had your own kitchen and had to cook your own meals. We went upstairs to check it out and found the hotel was very long and narrow; standing in the corridor reminded me of that scene in "The Shining" with the long corridor stretching off into infinity.

We returned to the hospital and discovered some of the other patients were headed at 2.30 pm to the "Arty Mart" to get supplies, so we joined them. Thank God for the Aussie patients, there are always some and they are always very helpful.

We shopped up big, finding the RT Mart, its real name, was a large modern shopping centre. The hospital translators were assigned to patients to accompany them when necessary to overcome language barriers. Sammy joined us that day and helped us get our mobiles operating. Foreigners could not get one without a local referee. The Mart was quite an experience, not from the viewpoint of what was sold but how it was sold. You could select your chicken wings from a tray like you'd select your fruit or buy your chicken still alive. Live fish, turtles, eels were also available. No packaged meat, everything was 'select your own'. There was a huge range of grains and flours, but all labelled in Chinese and we could not find self raising flour.



On returning to the hospital, we tried to get our internet operating. They had WIFI in the room but Chinese law restricted internet access to certain foreign sites. We also had difficulties getting Skype operating but with Claire's help we got a limited service running. Not enough for us to be able email the office restricting our ability to run the business from China. Fortunately, we had left it in the hands of Philips son and daughter.

On Day Three, I was taken away for CT and CAT scans, this involved a two-hour drive to another hospital, a military hospital in Guangzhou that had the equipment. Being more of a public hospital the treatment there was a bit rougher, the toilets were squat holes, no loo paper but the most disturbing aspect was that when you lay down to be scanned, they did not change the sheet from the previous patient. I survived it but I was wondering what diseases I might pick up.

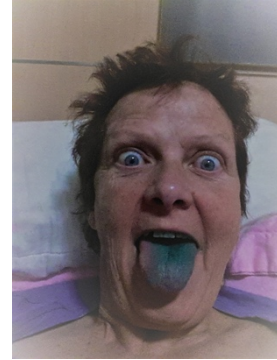


knowing tomorrow was the big day.

That evening we met Peter, who had returned briefly for treatment for his lung cancer. He was then going surfing somewhere in Southern China on his way home. He gave us a few clues on places to go. We settled in for the night,

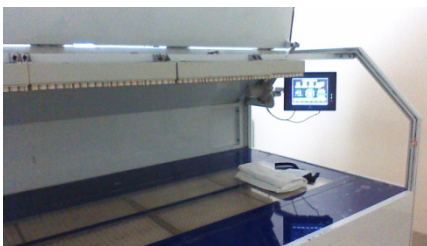
Day Four, Tuesday they had the scan results. They scheduled a meeting for that afternoon, so we went into Houji town and had lunch at the Sheridan Hotel. Houji takes a bit of getting used to, the homeless are literally in rags walking among shoppers that could be in any shopping strip in the world. These shoppers are dressed as westerners, act like westerners, the shops are recognisable as western shops with western goods and western fashions. We had some difficulty communicating with shop keepers and waiters, but we got by, it was the young kids who would approach us and speak to us in English while their parents stood by proudly watching but not understanding a word. We also discovered that although Starbucks had the worst coffee in Australia, it had the best coffee in China.

The test results were published in a full colour magazine size booklet. We were told my tumour had grown 1cm in diameter since December and was inoperable due to its position. It was recommended that I begin with a cycle of SPDT (Sono-Photo Dynamic Therapy) which involved placing two drops of this sensitising green goo every few minutes until I finished two bottles on Day 1 and two bottles on Day 2, which were about the size of a small glue stick. The result would make my skin very light sensitive and my tongue go green but would also enhance the Chemo effect. They had also referred to a genetic test that I'd had in Australia which was ignored by the Aussie doctors that showed which chemotherapy best suited my genetic makeup. They would also insert radioactive seeds around the tumour and simultaneously get a combination of chemo, red light and heat therapy over the next two weeks then have a week off.



We both left impressed, we were so used to the defeatist attitude of the Australian doctors that this optimistic approach encouraged us. Australia said I'd be dead by Easter, 'they' were hoping to destroy the tumour by Easter.

During that period, Doctor Wang, the head of the department and a senior member of the hospital came to visit me personally. He'd had thirty-six years of clinical experience in oncology and was the inventor of the SPDT treatment and accompanying technologies. He came with an entourage of nurses and other doctors every Monday and Thursday to discuss my progress and that of every patient on the floor. Dr Wang spoke English and insisted on explaining everything himself. He is very logical and gentle, giving off a relaxed and calming energy which inspires you to feel comfortable around him, unlike the 'Dr Deaths' of Australia. Where in Australia does the head of the department visit at your bedside and give progress reports?

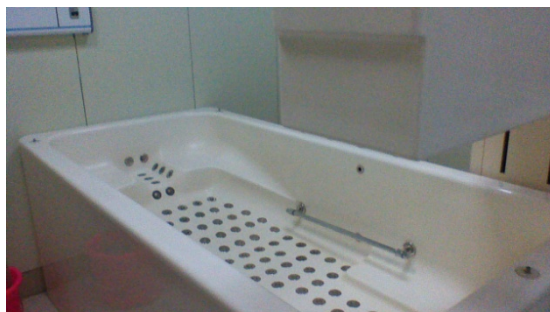


Dr Lui is my main doctor. He looks about twenty years old but is actually thirty-eight, fully trained and constantly updating his skills. He understands English well but is hesitant in speaking - he needs thinking time to

put words together. He appears very serious, switched on and agreeable. He has taken great care of me, as have all the staff.

Side effects are not tolerated, if you suffer nausea or pain the doctor will alleviate your symptoms, usually with intravenous therapy (IV) of some kind. The Chinese seem to be big on IV; it is the quickest way to get well they say. One of things that intrigued me at first was the number of IV bags, they would use. There seemed to be an endless stream of them, when I ask, “How many bags?” Is always get the same answer “Last one” which is to be taken as the last one of this batch or type of drip, it took three different attempts to realise that was the meaning.

‘Om’ was my SPDT nurse, she spoke a little English and was very pleasant, she guided me through the Red Light and Ultrasound Bath. The Red Light involves my lying down within a coffin sized box with the only opening at the top end near my head. Being claustrophobic I find it quite unsettling, but Philip read to me and that helped calm me down. To do this he needed to wear special glasses, so his eyes are not damaged by the light.



The

sound bath is barely tolerable; I find them long and laborious. It is like having a spa bath in a concrete bathtub with uncomfortable curves. The temperature rises slowly; you start to hear your heartbeat throbbing in your ears and feel faint with the heat. After, you feel like a boiled lobster, the heat is supposed to affect the cancer which does not like heat higher than body temperature and helps flushing out the chemo in sweat. You must take your head somewhere else or go crazy lying there. Rock on results day!

My wish is that people choose SPDT to eradicate cancer at earlier stages of their treatment when it is more effective. Don't wait for a greater cancer load, more treatment more cost. Do it sooner, look at options before surgery. Oesophageal cancer is an easy fix at Renkang. I regret not knowing sooner before I re-arranged



my insides and created eating discomfort for myself every day. This is the way it is till something changes, until awareness steps in and money steps out.

The biggest lesson for me was to realise I was blessed to have someone in my life prepared to step away from their life to support me and have benefactors prepared to assist me financially in order to save my life. As I said earlier if my friend, Philip hadn't said "If we have to go down tools and sit in the Himalayas with the Dali Lama to save your life then we'll do it." That gave me permission to go for it.

It is very easy to get lost in the blinkered advice of professionals who make you afraid to seek alternatives. It was an enormous decision to travel to China driven by desperation and fear rather than medical advice. Without the support to make that decision I would not be here to share my story with others who might make that leap of faith earlier.

To those people who encouraged and supported me I am very grateful. I



found that cancer has a way of drawing good people together in the most unexpected ways. Even the little things help and among the patients at Renkang, cancer was not a forbidden topic. It was 'the topic' and we all shared our experiences, researched our symptoms and discussed our research with the doctors in the hospital, who were more than willing to try things we uncovered after carefully doing their own research. We were not guinea pigs, we were patients, and they were prepared to try anything that could help, unrestricted by government

restrictions and pharmaceutical company politics. I think back to that doctor who was afraid of losing their licence if they recommended the treatments I was now undergoing.

How can Australian doctors remain blind to the advances overseas in places like Germany and China and now Mexico - notably in countries not dominated by pharmaceutical companies – where ground breaking research is being done unrestricted by local politics and laws that require we spend five years in Australia testing a drug or treatment that already has a track record overseas.

Meanwhile - people die.

# The Bloody Chinese Border

## CHAPTER SEVEN

10<sup>th</sup> February 2015



### Ebony in nappies

*After nearly two weeks in China, we were beginning to settle in to a routine of treatments, days off and visits to the local market to buy food. Then we got a call from Philip's sister Kathy that our dog "Ebony" was at deaths door. She was nearly seventeen years old which is quite advanced for a golden Labrador.*

*Her symptoms were, she'd become incontinent, was very lethargic and unresponsive. She also wasn't eating and losing weight.*

*Philip was sceptical, Ebony was quite a sensitive dog and he felt that she was simply pining over our disappearance and being forced to live with Kathy in unfamiliar surroundings. She had reacted this way when we had lost our other dog, Leah. Talk of putting her down alarmed us so Philip decided he'd return to Melbourne to sort it out. He didn't expect the drama he describes in this chapter that followed.*

I set off for Melbourne at 6.30 in the morning for the two-hour taxi ride to Hong Kong Airport, arriving at around 8.45. I carried my bag through the terminal to Aisle G to check in at the Cathay Pacific Desk. I found a very nice girl at the counter who could not find any record of my booking. I handed over the computer confirmation printout only to discover that the credit card payment had been declined and the booking cancelled. No notice had been received by me as the booking had been done by the hospital and they had not forwarded the response. I was also informed that there were no seats free on any flights that day; my only

option was to wait on 'standby'. Given that the credit card had bounced, and I only had a small amount of cash - that was not an option. I decided I didn't really want to go home and took this as a sign that I wasn't meant to go back so I decided return to the Hospital and deal with Ebony by phone.

So, grabbing my luggage and feeling a little annoyed but philosophical, I turned my attention to how to get back. My taxi had left and local taxis only went to the border. I noticed a sign showing shuttle buses to hotels in Mainland China. Enquiries confirmed that a shuttle went to a hotel near the hospital where I expected I could use my phone, which only worked in China, to get the hospital to send a car.

I caught the shuttle, paid my fare and set off for the border oblivious of the trauma that lay one hour up the road. The shuttle was not big; it managed to seat five in the back, one in the passenger seat plus the driver. Everyone was speaking Chinese so there was not much opportunity for communication. So, I stared out the window and watched the city of Hong Kong go by, as I crossed the world's longest suspension bridge connecting the islands that made up Hong Kong with the mainland to finally arrive at the border. The driver took the passengers passports and arrival coupons and handed them to the border guard who disappeared for some time. When he returned, he had the shuttle pull out of the queue and park. He collected me and through a translator informed me my Visa had expired. I told them that was ridiculous, I had a three-month visa and only been in China less than two weeks. Language was proving a barrier until one passenger, an American Chinese visiting relatives, explained to me that although my visa was for three months, I only had permission for one entry and one exit.

It was at this point I became worried. I could see myself trapped in Hong Kong with no way of getting back to the hospital. Getting that Visa in Melbourne had taken several days and about A\$300. In addition, I'd need a letter of Invitation from the hospital to get that Visa, as you cannot just go to China, someone must invite you. As my phone didn't work in Hong Kong, even at the border, I could not get this Invitation and no one would give me access to a phone. Arguing with the Border Guard was futile, he didn't understand a word I said and even if he did, I'd found in the past in Australia they tended to throw their weight around and demand



immediate obedience or you'd be arrested. They are bad enough in Australia - they had to be worse in China!

I was then led away by the guard; the bus was released much to the relief of passengers but I began to picture life in a Chinese prison. I was seated in the foyer of an office building that resembled the booking point in a police station, for about twenty minutes, while they held my luggage and passport.

Finally, a border guard approached, handed me my passport and a set of instructions including a map that redirected me to a Visa Booth at a train station in Shenzhen called "Lo Wu". The guard stated in rough English, if I wanted to enter China today, I'd have to go here. At least he had given me hope of getting back today so I set off, with some relief now free and armed with a plan. It was now 11.46 am.

Emerging from the Border Guard Station I found myself in a car park with rows of buses loading up passengers and having luggage checked. I walked passed these looking for a taxi rank and finally found one. There were apparently two flavours of taxi, green and red. I never worked out the difference but got the impression that different colours had different territories. I went to the first taxi in the rank and shoved the map and destination marked in both English and Chinese and asked him to take me there. The taxi driver said he could not go there and left me standing at the taxi rank. If the taxi didn't go there how was I supposed to get there? The plan of action had fallen apart at the first roadblock.

It was then I spotted a policewoman and asked if she spoke English. Luckily, she did and I explained the situation. She said all the taxis could go there and took me over to one, directed the driver on where I needed to go. No problem apparently, I got in, thanked the policewoman and set off.

On arrival at the train station, I offered my credit card and discovered they only accepted cash. I had insufficient cash to pay the fare, so I suggested the driver take me to an ATM. He didn't seem to understand and proceeded to call for a policeman standing outside the station. Maybe I was going to spend my days in a Chinese jail after all.

Luckily, the copper understood enough English to realise I wasn't trying to avoid paying and directed me to an ATM up the stairs to the station while holding my luggage ransom.

After paying the fare I had \$20HK in cash and proceeded into the station only to discover it was the wrong train station. This was discovered when I approached a ticket booth asking directions for the Visa Booth. That train was one stop further on, I was told. I bought a ticket which took most of the \$20HK and proceeded to the train. It was now about 12.30 – lunch time. A bit frustrated but feeling at least the plan was back on track, I relaxed as the train arrived at the correct station and I proceeded to the Visa Booth without incident. There was only one problem. It was closed!

A notice on the door advised anyone wanting attention to ring the number provided. I was however still in Hong Kong with a phone that only worked in Mainland China. Things were starting to get frustrating again. It seemed that I was being blocked at every turn. Approaching the Information desk, they said they could not supply access to a phone and there were no public phones. I'd have to wait for them to return. Looking around for a seat I found there were none and every ten minutes a train would arrive and '10,000 Chinese' would emerge like a stampede rushing through the station and trampling anyone in their wake. There was no café, no food and if I left the station, I'd not get back in without buying another ticket.

Squatting in a corner jammed between a wall and the Fire Hose box I managed to avoid being trampled while I waited. With legs going to sleep and back aching from the awkward position I finally saw the attendant arrive and fronted at the counter. After explaining the situation to the woman behind the counter she stated she couldn't do anything without a letter of invitation. I requested that she send an email to the hospital requesting this letter, but she said that wasn't possible. Another brick wall, the action plan was dead in the water – again! And I was trapped on the wrong side of the border with no means of communicating with anyone. Mild frustration turned to anger. "Bloody Chinese Border!!!"

Walking down the corridor between the two train platforms, dodging stampedes, I saw an Emergency Phone and rang. The guy on the other end said the phone was for emergencies. I replied, "I am stuck in a train station with no means of communication, no money trying to get back to my partner in hospital in Mainland China. I can't speak Chinese and no one speaks English! This is an Emergency!"

The security guard took sympathy on me and came down. We both returned to the Visa Booth, the guard spoke to the woman behind the counter and she became more co-operative. The security guard then escorted me to the other side of the border to access a public phone in China to ring the hospital as the mobile continued not to operate – too close to the border. Using the last of my change from the taxi fare I made contact with Clare, one of the translators at the hospital.

Clare at first had difficulty understanding my problem as I was becoming a little hysterical by this time, but eventually I got through to her what was needed. She then wanted the email of the Visa Booth, which of course was on the other side of the border. I had to hope I could get the Visa Booth woman to send it. We returned to the Booth, sent the email and waited. It was now 1.30pm.

About 2pm the email came through with the Letter of Invitation. They took my photo, asked me to fill in the application, took my passport and then requested \$1200HK as the Visa Fee. No problem, but they don't take credit card. So, I proceeded around the corner to the only two shops, a milk bar and a money exchanger ATM. I inserted the credit card requested \$1200HK and told insufficient funds. Requested \$1000HK – told insufficient funds. Requested \$800HK – told insufficient funds. Panic starts to settle in. Request \$600HK and cash appears. How do I get the rest? In my wallet I found a 100 Yuan note I'd kept as souvenir, as it was brand new, and two one-hundred-dollar Australian notes. Going to the counter I converted these and managed to scrape up the \$1200HK. Returning to the Visa Booth I paid the money and I'm told to return around 5pm. It was now going on to 2.30pm. What was I going to do trapped in 'Stampede Way' for another two and half hours?

Retreating to the crevasse between the wall and the fire hose box, I sat on the ground and read my book, watching the rush of people every ten minutes. It was around now that hunger began to strike. I'd left so early I'd not had any breakfast expecting to eat on the plane. I'd been fighting to cross the border over lunch and now I didn't have enough cash to even buy a chocolate bar. So, I had to just wait and read while my tummy rumbled.

At 5pm, I returned to the Visa Booth and found it closed. Luckily, the woman returned soon after and said the Visa had not come back yet - I'd have to

wait. The station was now in peak hour, so the stampede of passengers had doubled in size and intensity.

Again, I waited.

At around 5.45pm, I was told I could proceed to customs, the passport and Visa could be collected at the other side and I was given another map showing how to get there. No problem I thought - the home stretch!

On reaching the turnstile it would not let me through, my ticket had expired being at the station for so long. The Visa Booth woman seeing the predicament took sympathy – at last! And let me through the security gate. Customs was no problem – one piece of luck at last. Then it was the search for the Visa Office, difficult when your map is in English and the signs in Chinese. Finally, I found it, lugged my bags up a huge flight of stairs to a lounge area and presented my note. I was told to sit. Another half hour passes until I am called and finally receive my passport and visa. I then proceeded to the final barrier; the final customs check where they check the visa and let me in. At which point I am informed it is only a one entry, one exit visa expiring in a month. I expected to be staying in China longer but decided to cross that bridge when I got to it.

I got through the gate and escaped into Mainland China. It was like being released from prison. But where was I? I was underground outside a row of restaurants, starving hungry with no money. Picking out some landmarks I rang the hospital and asked them to send a car giving them the best directions possible. It



Orange Building in distance was customs Building. View from Shangri-La Hotel across the Plaza.

was now 7pm. It would be at least an hour before they arrived. With the smell of food wafting in the wind, I waited with aching legs, back pain and no seating available, standing in front of this huge screen advertising some kind of food that I never was able to identify despite an hour of watching it over and over and over again.

Drawing closer I could see buses parked underneath – maybe this was the hotel? But the entrance was on a higher level. Nearby were steps leading to a bridge

that seemed to go to this building. As I crossed the bridge, I saw at the far end of the plaza a tall building with “Shangri-La Hotel” written in gold lettering on an illuminated sign. Wasting no further time, I headed towards it across the plaza that was a least two blocks long as I texted the driver that I’d found the Hotel.

But the disaster fairy had not finished with me yet. As I approached the hotel, I found this massive chasm of a roadway provided an effective barrier between me and the hotel. The barrier was not just a heavy stream of cars but an actual wire fence blocking access to the road. Wondering where to go next and not knowing there was an underground pathway, I went in search of a crossing which I found around the corner and crossed to the hotel. Now to find the car! Where could it be? A man grabbed my arm and asked, “You going to Renkang Hospital?” I looked at the man, assumed he must be the driver and that my non-Chinese appearance had given me away as his expected passenger. Checking the number plate against the text, I climbed aboard and collapsed. It was now approaching 8.30pm. The drive to the hospital was a blur and on arrival I had to send for Gail to bring money.

*I had heard of Philip’s plight from Clare around midday and been worried all afternoon. I met him in the foyer - he was dragging his bag behind him in a dazed exhausted state. He was greeted by the concerned guests who had been following the drama and were eager to hear the full story. “Bloody Chinese Border”*

*As for Ebony, he was fine; he lived another six months passing away in his sleep during one of our visits back to Melbourne.*

# Massage with Happy Ending

## CHAPTER EIGHT

22<sup>nd</sup> February – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015



I am sitting in the Lobby Lounge of the Shangri-La Hotel, a five-star hotel in Shenzhen, China. We are here as it the only place we can eat without getting diarrhoea. China is the most unhygienic country I have ever travelled to. Given my immune system is comprised I have been rather sensitive to any pollutant. The water is undrinkable, and I have given up meat as it is unrecognisable, more a black colour than having that fresh red meat appearance. Even the fruit is polluted with sprays and grown in sewage, its major side effect – diarrhoea. We must soak the fruit in water and vinegar at the hospital to sterilise it. We can't do that in the hotel, so we do without.

We had two weeks off from Round One of my treatment,so we decided to take in the sights for Chinese New Year. We had begun this journey several days earlier on the eighteenth. Results had been unclear, the tumour appeared to have shrunk but test results were inconclusive. They wanted to do a second round at a cost of A\$20,000. No choice so we went off to enjoy ourselves.

Yesterday, we went to 'Window to the World' – China's answer to Disney World. We took a taxi to get there only to arrive in the most crowded place my mind could imagine, I had pictured a little backwash amusement park offering curiosities to the traveller. Instead, the place was teeming with people. Given it was the major Chinese New Year holiday period this probably made sense, but I just wasn't prepared for the seething masses.

The cost to enter the theme park was 180 Yuan about \$45 each but the wait to get inside was several hours. So, we decided the monorail would be the way to go, given super crowded theme parks were not really that enticing. We went up the stairs to be squashed in the waiting area and told there was a two hour wait for monorail as well. This whole experience was becoming too hard, so we strolled along to the intercontinental hotel which had a life size bow of a mariner's ship



sticking out of the roof. Despite not getting into the theme park, we could see over the fence the tops of replicas of the Eiffel Tower and other wonders of the world.

We had booked ourselves into the Zense Hotel. Very disappointing, not as advertised, and I developed diarrhoea from the hotel food. After that we stuck to McDonalds or Pizza Hut. One advantage of our location was the main street was set up as a market to celebrate the New Year. There were flowers, food of all kinds, kids wearing masks and fireworks. We tried to get a good view of the fireworks, but we were surrounded by tall building that blocked our view.

Next day we settled on Pizza Hut for lunch, but the service was so bad that we decided not to go there again. Besides, we'd had a lovely view of a mother allowing her child to shit in the street just below us. So, we went to the border where Philip revisited the scene of his nightmare experience. We decided to change hotels and moved into the Shangri-la Hotel where Philip had eventually been picked up and taken home to Renkang Hospital. Unfortunately, we lost our deposit on the old hotel. We spent the day walking around Shenzhen shops, most were closed but those who were open would approach you, give you their card and try to escort you to their shop. It was often hard not to resist.

Tired after wandering around and finding nothing of great interest we decided to return to the hotel and rest. Resting was what I was supposed to be doing anyway but we were not happy to hang



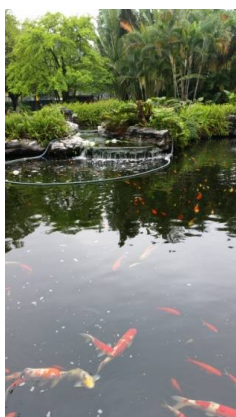
around the hotel resting. Feeling guilty in a foreign country and not getting around seeing everything there is to see is over for me. Firstly, there is nothing I want to see in this country except maybe Shanghai, the terracotta army and the Great Wall otherwise it's just too hard to travel in this country. You can't even guess signs mostly not English, playing charades, which works around the world in my experience, did not work in China.

So, we retired to our room, I was not feeling well, so we settled down to an evening of eating fruit and watching TV. Then we realised we had no milk for coffee. We had noticed a 711 store next door so Philip went down to get some. As he left the hotel, he was approached by four women offering their business cards and trying to get him to follow her. As the store was literally next door having four women approach him seemed a bit excessive, so he told the last one, a middle-aged woman he was getting milk and was not interested. When he emerged with the milk, she was still waiting so he decided to go see what she was offering in her store. When she led him down a dark alley, he began to think of the organ trade in Shenzhen and about people disappearing. His alarm bells got louder when he was led to a door with a guard outside. He started to back away but the woman who was luring him in handed him a phone.

The guy on the other end asked, "What do you want?"

"What are you offering?" asked Philip.

"Massage with happy ending," was the reply. With that Philip was gone and returned to the hotel with his milk and his organs intact.



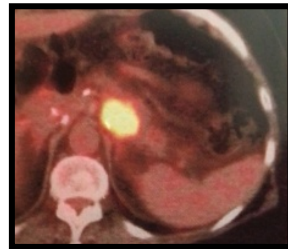
Next day we returned to Donggong but not the hospital, deciding to stay in the Well Garden Hotel. There we had a very relaxing time, with spas, pools, gym and a very peaceful garden with coloured fish. At the back we found a small milk bar like shop run by a family, the only one who spoke English was the five-year-old daughter who served us.



On returning to the hospital, we were shown these pictures demonstrating a marked decrease in size of the tumour. Their recommendation - continue with existing treatment.



So, we proceeded with Round Two of treatments. The sound bath is not as relaxing as expected, by the end of the hour you are wishing it was over. The last ten minutes seem to last forever. I did have an episode on the second bath because it was too hot. When I got out, I felt faint and had trouble breathing. I figured it would take a few of them to pick me up if I fainted, providing I didn't



squash any of them flat when I fell over. The nurses and doctors got me into a wheelchair and were quite alarmed. This reaction was due to the overheating, although it doesn't feel hot it can make you feel weak and the additional atmospheric heat really adds to the heat factor, raising your body core temperature. We now make the bath nearly cold and when the Sonar is on it heats up anyway so its better this way.

I sometimes feel the tumour hurting, the doctors say this is good, it shows it is reacting to the treatment – suffer you bastard is all I have to say. Then again all my training indicates I should love my tumour as the stress only strengthens it.

My days are becoming repetitive, treatments, drip bags, needles, tablets and the occasional walk. I'm beginning to hate needles. We are watching too much TV but at lease we can escape in the evenings, the patients all gather around and chat and every Friday we cook and eat together in the community kitchen on our floor. The monotony is beginning to drain both of us of our energy. We are becoming couch potatoes or in this case bed potatoes. It was Philip's birthday on March 5<sup>th</sup> and the hospital provided a birthday cake at their expense and the whole floor celebrated.

On March 2<sup>nd</sup>, Professor Wang told us the tumour markers were up which could mean it has grown or has started breaking up, both results raise markers as they show raised cancer cells in the blood. My current round was due to be

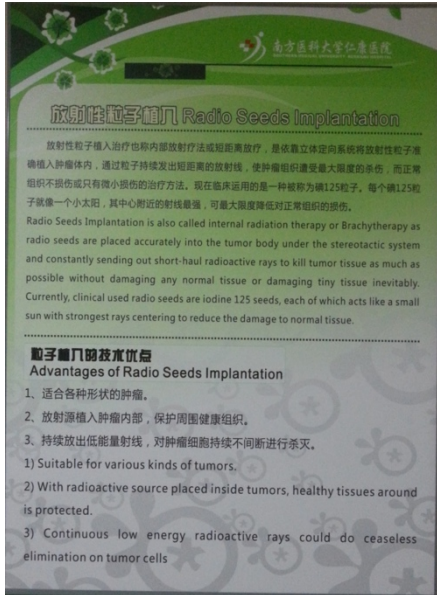
completed on 10<sup>th</sup> March, so I was told to wait and see. Other patients are getting good test results and the doctors tell us this is the year of “Good Health” - a good omen. He also reported my white blood cell count was down which is a side effect of the chemo, but they had a drip that would fix that and it did. What still amazes me is that I have had no nausea from the chemo or other side effects from the chemo despite it being the same stuff I had in Australia. There I suffered numbness in the hands, vomiting and nausea, headaches and issues with breathing.

Results at this stage were a bit depressing in that Round Two showed no improvement but they were not getting worse – not going to kill me by Easter. He recommended my next step was to have the tumour seeded. That meant planting radioactive seeds inside the cancer to radiate from within rather than radiation treatment from outside which can burn the tissue.

On the bright side I no longer smoked, I was 30 kg lighter; I was learning to eat differently. When I regain my strength, I’m sure I’ll be glad, right now I’m as weak as a kitten (lounging around all day watching TV) and I realise that I have a long road back to regain my health and strength and a lifetime of maintenance, but I have a life - a lot more than I had before I went to China. It is humbling to say the least, it helps you feel confident and worthy, it shines a strong light in that very dark and scary place that is Cancer.

It never fails to amaze me how people help people here, all the Aussies before us have left a legacy to the newcomers, we all have a common bond ‘cancer’ or being a carer for a loved one with cancer, which of itself is a big responsibility. It forces you out of your comfort zone. It teaches you to appreciate all the small things in life, those everyday things, fresh air, fresh food, sunshine, health, feeling well, living the life you choose, not having to make constant adjustments just to get through the day. Adjustments must be made for survival; they are not all bad but they are forced upon you just the same.

On 12<sup>th</sup> March, Philip returned to Australia for a brief visit to check on the business and the health of our dogs. For awhile I was alone until my sister joined me and we went to Macau for a few days before we both returned to Australia on March 19<sup>th</sup> for a break before starting Round 3.



It was good to be home, to talk to family and friends of my experiences - to share the horror stories of Australian medicine. Philip's sister Kathy was also suffering from cancer. She was reluctant to go the same route as I had gone but I did convince her to be my carer when I returned to China on 24<sup>th</sup> March. This gave Philip a chance to keep our business alive in Australia, including discussing the plans for renovating my house into the House I'd always dreamed of having. We had agreed on the plan, but the builder wanted to 'improve'

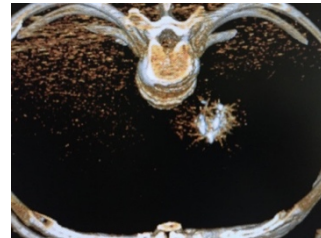
it which was causing frustrating delays.

My seeding operation took place on 28<sup>th</sup> March. This involved placing radioactive seeds around the tumour directing the radiation at the tumour. This did have the effect of my having to wear a lead lined jacket to prevent anyone sitting close to me from getting a dose of harmful rays.

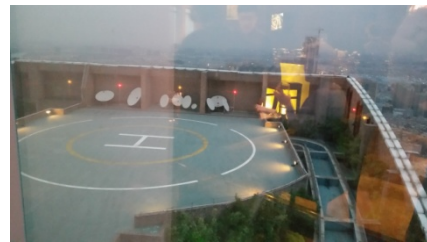
After the operation, I was given a collection of photos which I describe as being my inner self - the tumour being the glowing star near the spine. Looking at these photos I feel like they cut me into pieces and stuck me back together.



That night, Kathy stayed with me, monitoring my vitals to ensure I did not fall below certain levels which could be dangerous. I was pretty much out of it. The operation had involved keyhole surgery, so I only had a bandaid over my 'surgery wound'. So, when I woke up I required no recuperation time.



That night Kathy and I with a few friends from the hospital went out to dinner to this rotating restaurant at the top of a hotel with a helipad. The helipad looked very small and I wondered how a helicopter would land on it. We did have a spectacular view.



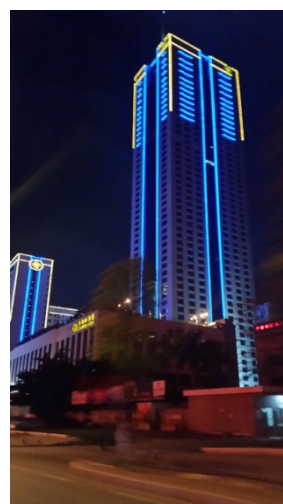
Kathy returned to Australia and Philip rejoined me on 19<sup>th</sup> April. Unfortunately, she had been so effectively brainwashed by her Australian doctors and closed minded relatives that she refused to have her cancer evaluated while in China. Her father offered to pay the costs of an assessment which would have cost very little while she was my live-in carer. They could have advised her of possible treatments. She wouldn't do it and by December we had lost her - another victim to doctor ignorance in Australia.



Our first task on Philip's arrival was to return to the military hospital for a new CT and PET scan to verify the progress of the treatment. Within twenty-four hours we had a second book with colour pictures comparing the current results with those from February. The results were disappointing, the original tumour had shrunk but new tumours had formed in the liver. They felt these could be disposed

of by seeding and they were confident these were curable. As the SPDT treatment hadn't worked that well after all they decided seeding and chemo was best course.

That night we went to dinner in what we called the holographic building, as it was outlined in lights that gave it the illusion of not being real. We were joined by a New Zealand couple who were over for treatment. Next day the hospital sent me for an Ultrasound. While we were waiting a public patient collapsed with a heart attack. Doctors and nurses dropped everything to go to his aid. It reminded me of my adverse reaction to the chemo in the Olivia Newton John Centre where everyone just looked on helplessly, afraid to do anything until the ambulance guys arrived. Just



across the corridor, a team of oncologists never left their consulting suites. There are too many rules, procedures and protocols in Australia that actually paralyse medicos from doing their job.

Professor Wang came to visit on 23<sup>rd</sup> April. He told us that I had a resistance gene that was reducing the effect of the chemo. My tumours also spread slowly but grew fast, so I needed a holistic approach to stop the spread. This could be achieved by seeding the liver spots plus chemo in tablet form backed up by hyper-therapy. They'd do monthly cancer marker checks.

It is now ANZAC Day, but I will miss the ex-pat celebration at Irene's Bar as I'm going in to have my second seeding operation. They may have overdosed me as they had trouble waking me up after the procedure. The worst part is staying awake for 3 hours afterwards so they can monitor your vitals then I spent the next four hours having my life signs being monitored by Philip and being kept awake again fighting tiredness. That was after they dropped me transferring me from gurney to bed. Philip was helping and I just moved at the wrong time and they lost their grip. No harm done I just ended up face down on the bed. While recovering I had no pain and compared to what I have been through with the esophagectomy which was excruciating for weeks, this was nothing.

For the next three days I had to rest and recuperate before my final consultation with Professor Wang before heading home to Australia. They were very simple; I had to wear a lead lined vest on the plane home to protect anyone



sitting near me from the radiation I was emitting from the seeds. I was to have a PET scan in Australia in three months and send results to China for evaluation. I was recommended to a doctor in Melbourne who was sympathetic to China treatments and who would supply necessary supplements to boost my immune system.

That night Philip and I went to Irene's Bar to check it out since we'd missed the ANZAC Day party there. We felt very welcome had a few drinks and then went to dinner at the HJ International Hotel. Given it was nearly eighteen months since my esophageus operation, I found it incredible that I had to come to China to be told that given my 'new' digestive system was gravity fed it meant sitting at a 45-degree angle so the food didn't hit the stomach in one hit and cause me to vomit it back up, then wait twenty minutes before getting up. None of this had been told to me in Australia. Despite this I think I over did it as on the way home I developed a rapid heart rate, shallow breathing, light headedness and upset stomach.

It was now time to head home but not before we had a holiday. We started with a pancake breakfast with the other patients all wishing us well. All the hospital staff came down to see us off, there were hugs all round and then we were gone, our next stop Kowloon.

We were now quite comfortable moving around China, so we took a bus to the Hong Kong Airport which was cheaper than the taxi. By late afternoon of the



30<sup>th</sup> April we were checking in at the BP international Hotel in Kowloon. That night we went for a walk down Nathan Street to orientate ourselves. Ran into a guy in the street, saw we were foreigners, stopped to welcome us, didn't want anything, wasn't trying to sell us anything, he just wanted to welcome us and was very helpful in giving us directions.

*Around the next corner Gail saw this statue of two hands clasping we took a photo. (photo to left)*

Next day we went further a field down Nathan Street and visited the Museum of the Arts, the Space Museum (boring) and went to the walkway along the docks and saw the statue of Bruce Lee (to right). That evening we went to Temple Street Market where we found the first salt shakers on sale in China. We bought a set for Philip's Mum who collected salt shakers. Exhausted we returned to our room and pigged out on snacks.



Again, I think I over did it because next morning I felt tired and nauseas. By afternoon I felt better, and we visited the Ocean Terminal Shopping Complex and checked out where to catch the Star Ferry. Not well sign posted but we found it eventually, stopped for pizza (worst ever) and had dinner in the 'Flamingo Lounge' in the hotel where a nice couple played gentle relaxing music.

Next morning, we took the Star Ferry to Hong Kong and spent two hours waiting to get on Perk Tram to top of Hong Kong Mountains. Spectacular view but we were exhausted by the time we got there. On the way to the Stanley Street Market, we had quite a passionate taxi driver. We had noticed protesters in the street. Apparently, the University students were doing a sit in to demonstrate against police breaking up mass gatherings. They had done street art (not graffiti) and were protecting them from being removed. He also went on to say that since 1997 takeover the Chinese government had been bleeding Hong Kong dry while printing money to buy property in Hong Kong and overseas. This was how they could afford to pay top dollar for properties, and foreign governments were too stupid to see that China was gaining an international short-term impression that the Chinese economy was strong, supported by overseas assets but this was an illusion.

At the market, we saw a T-Shirt with the US President in Chinese uniform. Tempted to buy but thought a bit too politically incorrect. Exhausted we returned to our hotel in Kowloon.



Our next stop was Macau, with four suitcases, four pieces of hand luggage in 29-degree heat with 78 percent humidity, on the Turbo Jet Ferry. Macau was a Portuguese colony, so we found a lot of signs in Portuguese. We arrived at the Grand Colaine Hotel overlooking the ocean and a nearby beach. Over the next few days, we visited the Casino's which are unbelievably magnificent, even more spectacular than those I saw years ago in Las Vegas. In the Venetian

Hotel Complex they have an entire shopping centre set up like a street in Venice, indoors but with a realistic sky ceiling and real gondola rides, see me above in gondola. Everything here is just massive. Finally, we went to 'City of Dreams' where we saw a spectacular show "Dancing Waters. We later ran into a member of the crew on the bus home and later in the year we returned and watched the show from the control booth and met the cast backstage afterwards. (See picture above)



On our final night, we took up the offer of buy a cocktail and get one free. Unfortunately, we didn't stop at one, nor at two, three or four. I don't remember much after that. Philip tells me he had to 'pour me' into a taxi, he wasn't that steady on his feet himself and we staggered back to the hotel.

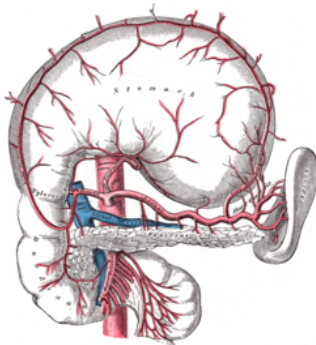
Next morning, we were on the plane back to Australia.



# Bloody Australian Doctors!

## CHAPTER NINE

**April 2015 – July 2015**



On 16<sup>th</sup> May 2013, I had my first symptoms. It took the Australian system until 20<sup>th</sup> September to diagnose me with oesophageal cancer. In January 2014, I had the Ivor Lewis operation to remove the cancerous part of the oesophagus. In May 2014 I was given the all clear to restart my life. In November 2014, a lump measuring 32 x 27 x 22 mm was found in the left anterior side of the oesophageal hiatus. This placed the tumour in the cavity near the splenic artery making it inoperable. The diagnosis was not positive, I would not see Easter. Treatment commenced with two rounds of FOLFOX6 during which I had difficulty breathing and extremely cold sensitive. It was then I decided I was just a guinea pig for experimental treatments. Now I have dodged a bullet, a bullet that would have killed me within a matter of months.

I have just returned from three months in China, spend over \$100,000, after having successfully eliminated my death defying five cm tumour on the splenic artery which is the blood vessel (in blue in picture above compliments of Wikipedia) that supplies oxygenated blood to the spleen. So, I won't be dead by Easter as predicted by the Olivia Newton John Centre.

The whole experience of China was an eye opener. China is definitely not a 'nanny state' like Victoria. There are no obvious road rules, no bike helmets, no police lurking around the corner trying to book you, no obvious CCTV watching your every move. No regulations stopping you doing everyday things like walk the dog. Victorian bike riders, who believe they are an endangered species, wouldn't last five seconds on China's roads. Cars, pedestrians and bikes compete for space on the road, cars use horns like we use indicators – one blast a warning I'm coming

through, two blasts look out, three get out of the way – you idiot! Common sense prevails and if the other is bigger you give way. People go about their business and hardly react to the blasts. In Australia they would trigger a road rage incident.

The people in China found us a novelty but we didn't feel like foreigners. We were welcomed everywhere; kids would practice their English on us and adults would try to help even if they didn't understand. I have gone into certain parts of Melbourne and felt like I was the foreigner in my own country. Not so in China.

We were in Donggong, a city of ten million people, an hour's drive from Hong Kong China border. We drove through three cities to get there but never saw the boundaries between them. There were no chaotic traffic jams and they have a fifty-year infrastructure plan. In Australia, we are 'lucky' to have a one-year infrastructure plan that outlasts the next election.

This may seem like a dream state but behind the scenes the long-term communist controls are in place. You can't get a mobile SIM card without local ID and it cannot phone outside China. There is no Google, no Facebook, no Skype. These are forbidden. Even our gmail account was not accessible, though if you configure your computer outside of China you can get around these restrictions.

We never saw a house; the place was a continuous line of plain concrete multi storey apartment blocks with washing hanging over the balcony to dry. Is this the future of Melbourne as the inner city goes skyward instead of out towards the country? I wonder if we really want population growth. Aren't we big enough? Do we want our city to become a sea high rise apartments?

China may not be the perfect place I'm painting; we were a bit sheltered in our experience but there is a lot we could learn from them including passion for the sick placed before profits.

Regarding SPDT treatment, I have seen the most spectacular results with my own eyes. That is the part of the Chinese experience that treats the body holistically in removing tumours accompanied by some life changes in regard to food and supplements and exercise to prevent the recurrence of cancer.

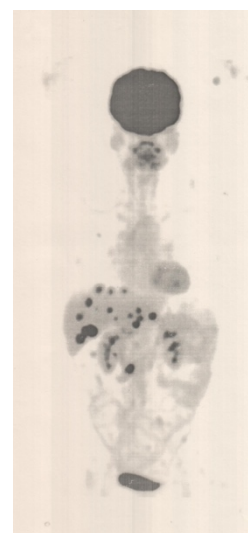
SPDT usually involves a small amount of Chemo which is enhanced by the light and sound treatment to reduce damage to your immune system.

I had previously endured Chemo, four times in Australia, had the whole bald, nauseous, mouth ulcers, nerve damage catastrophe. I wore a bottle around my

neck for months, had a feeding tube hanging out of my stomach and yet the second I stopped chemo treatment the cancer returned, usually in a new location. After chasing it around my body they wrote me off. In China they treated the whole body and kept boosting my immune system to enable my body to fight.

Doctors don't like using the word 'cure' and China is wary of it as well but I now feel that I am cured. I've been sent home with strict instructions on what treatments I must take and how to monitor myself. They have asked for my test results in Australia to be sent over to them so they can also monitor my progress, neither of us having faith in the local doctors to monitor effectively.

So, I have headed back to Western Medicine in Australia. After the Olivia Newton John Centre (ONJ) refused to follow the China protocol, I went to a private oncologist costing \$28 a minute \$280 for 10 minutes. The Hospital had refused to do any scans, it was not cost effective I was just the 'walking dead' but this doctor got a scan done. When I tried to get a copy to send to China, I got the black and white photo to the right of page. Compared to the coloured booklet we got in China I was unimpressed, especially since this oncologist refused to look at my China results, working solely on the January test results supplied by the ONJ Centre. It was now



July and I'd been back in Melbourne since early May and no one would give me the medicines prescribed by China to ensure non recurrence of the cancer.

After our China experience the most frustrating thing was waiting for results and even getting appointments. In China we got results the same day, in Australia you could wait a week or more. But if you pay exorbitant amounts of money then you get things to happen. So, I decided to supplement my recovery with nutrient IV treatments, as China had told me this was the most direct way of absorbing the supplements you need.

Unfortunately, this had become very trendy in Australia, thus expensive, as it had many health benefits, mine was simply to try and remain cancer free. The first red flag was when I asked my naturopath doctor how much treatment would I need, he answered how much money do you have? Two to three IV treatments a week at \$130-150 a pop was the short answer, Hyperthermia treatments at \$250 a pop with

copious amounts of supplements. When I got my first bill it was for \$200, I reminded the receptionist that I'd been quoted treatments would be \$130 - \$150. She replied "Oh! We just put the prices up." And looks at me, tilts her head on the side and waits for me to say, "That's just fine!" I don't mind another \$70 a pop because you just put the prices up.

They were then silly enough to give an itemized bill which showed the actual elements used cost \$15, \$5 and \$60 leaving a whopping \$120 for the nurse to just put the IV line into my port taking about one minute. Great money if you can get it! That's more than the private oncologist! All this and they promote that they are the caring option that helps their patients get through the tough times.

I was also anxiously awaiting CTC (Circulating Tumour Cells) results a sure way of knowing if cancer is wandering around your body looking for a home, the results that would be sent to the clinic, usually these take ten to fourteen days. When I called the clinic to see if they had them, "No," she says. "They can take up to four weeks, I informed her that they actually take only ten days as I had used that lab many times before, but she is positive they have not arrived.

I wait another week, I have a doctor's appointment looming, so I need these results, I ring the lab myself and am told they sent them out three weeks ago, meaning they have been sitting at the clinic for two weeks. Remember my tumours were notoriously rapid growing. No hurry then!

I ring again and she informs me that sometimes they send them to the Doctors; do I want her to check? I resist the urge to say, "No, I like spending \$600 for fun and not find out anything results. Of course, I would like her to check!" While I'm contemplating my response she says, "Oh! Here they are, do you want to come in and get them?" "No," I say. "Send them to me so I can have them at my doctor's appointment. "Oh", she says" I guess we can do that." So, all faith lost in that clinic, people taking IV treatment for a cold are considered patients, taking IV treatment to stay alive seems to have no more importance, so no rush.

Meanwhile I'm still trying to get my Australian doctors to prescribe the chemo recommended by China. Most simply discarded China's advice and consulted their own charts. It was not common practice to have two chemos acting at the same time plus a curcumin drip which is what China prescribed. The drip was not available in Australia and could only be ordered by a doctor and

administered by a registered nurse with the right qualification. As for having two different chemo treatments at the same time, that was not going to happen despite China saying they worked better together in their experience – but where was the research? So, time moved on. I left China knowing I had slow moving cancer cells but rapid growth once they settled into their new home. My holistic treatment was being frustrated by Australian medical practice and the clock was ticking.

Then I got my shocking picture, the black and white, single sheet of paper that implied I was riddled with cancer. No coloured book, no written reports just a picture and I had to fight the system to get that. The Australian solution - more chemo, more experimental therapy, more of being a guinea pig. I had only one choice – return to China for a more promising treatment by doctors seeking a solution other than palliative care. But Australia had now put my life in jeopardy yet again by refusing to follow the treatment that had already reversed my cancer and not killed me by Easter.

# The Great Marijuana Mishap

## CHAPTER TEN

9<sup>th</sup> July 2015



While I was doing battle with the Australian Medical profession to get the treatment I needed, I got word from a patient in China that Cannabis Oil was an effective treatment for cancer. This patient had been using cannabis oil for her tumour, after being written off in Australia. They had refused to do any more PET scans – waste of money – so she'd gone to China. They found that her tumour had been attacked from within and was an empty husk.

Being innovative doctors in China they decided to experiment with cannabis oil on other patients. So, I decided to try it as a preventative measure to stop my cancer returning. Through a friend of a friend, we obtained a bag of marijuana, I believe that was an ounce worth. He dropped around to the house one night, we exchanged cash for the stuff, our dog didn't like him and he left.

I had obtained a copy of the instructions on what to do from the internet, so Philip and I decided we'd give it try. Our first step was to secure the equipment; it was recommended that we use latex gloves, heat mittens, safety glasses with odour respirator mask. This was all to prevent us inhaling the fumes or absorbing the oil through the skin. We decided this was overkill, so we ignored these instructions, ensured the room was well ventilated but we did use latex gloves.

Next, we had to place the plants into a solvent; we used 100% alcohol, enough to immerse the material. Apparently, it was important the plant be bone dry which it was. The alcohol had the dual effect of dissolving the plant and stripping away the cannabinoids which have psychoactive side effects such as Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) which is one of the 113 cannabinoids.

We placed this material into a metal bowl and when sufficiently saturated we crushed the material with a spoon for about two minutes. This process removes about 80% of its THC and other cannabinoids. After that we drained off the alcohol using coffee filters – you now have a cannabis plant mix and a solvent oil mix.

The remaining plant material is like a paste, add more alcohol, enough to cover the material and crush it again further reducing any THC and other cannabinoids. Repeat the filtering process and then add this solvent oil mix to the first batch and filter again to remove any plant material.

This was going fine, everything was working. We placed the oil mix into a rice cooker, as we were warned an open flame could ignite the fumes which were flammable. Setting the cooker to high or ‘white rice’ we waited. As instructed, we turned on a fan, ensured the area was well ventilated so we didn’t inhale fumes. Occasionally we stirred the mix. It didn’t take long for the alcohol to evaporate leaving a dark brown oil. Given the amount of material we started with, we ended up with a very small amount of oil.

This was poured into a glass container to cool. Not wanting to waste any we used some bread to wipe the bottom of the cooker of any residue and put it aside. Pleased with our work, we went into the lounge and watched TV checking on the oil every so often.

In our younger days neither of had been joint smokers, we knew the smell from being passive smokers at parties, even had the odd drag on the joint being handed around. Neither of us had ever felt any side effects nor been on a high so we decided why not try it so we each had a small piece of the bread we’d used to soak up the residue from the cooker. Nothing happened so we went back to watching TV.

Two hours later, I asked Philip would he like a cup of tea? He said he’d make it and got up; he only made it to the door and staggered back to his seat. His legs felt like jelly and wouldn’t support him. We speculated that maybe we should have taken more precautions, perhaps we had inhaled fumes. We had two dogs that appeared okay, but I was starting to get worried and rang a friend who told us it would wear off. I was scared we might overdose but was assured we’d be okay. So, I went out to make the tea but found I was becoming very panicky and unsteady on my feet so I decided not to make the tea,

Both of us tried to concentrate on the program and wait for it to wear off. I don't remember the program; I only remember that I got more panicky and Philip became more disabled. His jelly legs were now tingling, and he could hardly move them. He then decided that maybe it would be better if he got outside into the fresh air away from any fumes in the house. He ended up crawling outside into the cold night air and felt better but still couldn't use his legs. I couldn't move.

Worried about me, he crawled back inside, tried to get back into his chair but collapsed on to the floor suggesting we should call an ambulance. My head immediately went to being arrested for having cannabis, but Philip convinced me it was better to be safe. He didn't believe there would be any consequences. I called the ambulance that came quite quickly but neither of us could move to open the door. Finally, I managed to struggle to the door, it was like climbing a mountain, every step was an effort. They helped me back inside while our little "Jack Russell" dog went berserk (photo to right). Philip managed to grab him and hold him while our other dog simply sad and observed,



looking concerned. (Photo to left& below)

One of the ambulance guys tended to Philip while the female attendant took me into my bedroom. I was near hysterical according to Philip, who could hear what we were saying, but I don't remember too much after that. I do remember helping them get little Max locked in the kitchen so they could work on Philip while they tried to calm me down.

At no time were we in any danger and I was constantly reassured we'd not be arrested. They took Philip away on a gurney and he told me later they asked if they should take me as well. He had suggested they do so as I was so distressed. However, when they put me in the back of the ambulance with Philip I got claustrophobic. So, they decided to put me in the front seat rather than call another ambulance but I couldn't climb into the cabin and had this guy holding my bum and pushing me in.



One thing I do remember is they brought our calmer dog and showed him we were okay in the ambulance and then settled him back inside before driving off. At the hospital we must have waited a few hours before getting a bed, the ambulance guys staying with us the whole time. It made me think what a waste of their time; they could be out answering another patient's call. Finally, we got a bed in the drug ward and placed under observation.

Next morning, we were fine, they discharged us but on departure one nurse said to us "You've been very naughty." She also recommended we throw away the oil and not mess around with it at all. I tried to explain it was more medicinal purposes, but her eyes glazed over. So, we went home soaked up our oil into a syringe and loaded my capsules with one drop per capsule and inserted them into my bum at night. That way the medicinal effect entered the body with minimal side effects which if at all occurred in my sleep.

When we returned to China, we found the ward smelt of cannabis oil and the nurses who were making up the oil were on a high after doing it. We never made another batch; instead, we imported it from America under the guise of body oils. And of course, when we attempted to return to China, the only time they searched our luggage was the time we had cannabis oil in our luggage. We did have visions of being in a Chinese jail but actually we were in greater risk of that at Australian airports.

So, the hospital ward became a floor of cannabis junkies, all swapping oils and plotting ways to get hold of the plant when we got back to Australia. The husband of one patient was prepared to grow the plant on his farm and distribute to the other patients. By one means or another we all got the stuff and it seemed to help but was not a 'cure'.

# Return to China

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### August – October 2015

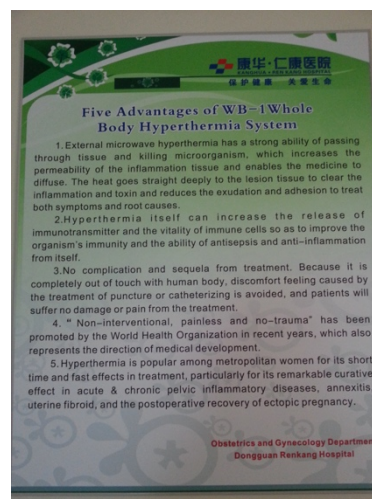


Mum accompanied me to China in August. I must say for an 82-year-old lady, who hasn't travelled much; it was a pretty gutsy move. She was quite lost, in a mild panic and quite stressed the whole time. She dissolved into tears at the slightest thing and if I asked a question, I'd have to repeat it three times. It was quite frustrating for me and I often shouted back at her, then had to talk over her as she was not listening to what I was saying. It made me feel very guilty and ungrateful for her sacrifice. She had done so much for me during my illness and I often shouted at her out of frustration when she started to ramble on and repeat things we'd already discussed.

She had lost all confidence in herself, which happens to her when she is under stress. It started just before she had her knee operation, waiting in pain through endless delays and some idiot that told her quite bluntly the risks included death. I am aware they need to mention possible contingencies but doing so with a bit of compassion and thought wouldn't hurt. Some doctors need to realize the people, particularly older folks, hang off every word that a doctor says and no amount of telling them any different will change that.

The day I was first diagnosed with cancer, the doctor at that time was a lovely man compassionate and kind, he broke the news gently and with feeling, he left the room to give me time to assimilate, unfortunately he left an Indian Student in the room who sat staring at me like I was a bug under glass. He eventually asked if I would like a tissue. Little bit insensitive.

I arrived back at the Hospital on 1<sup>st</sup> August and commenced my fourth round of SPDT plus chemotherapy (Irinotecan 120mg, D3, D10 + Zeloda, 1.5g, Bid, D1-14) together with four treatments of hyperthermia therapy. After chemo I was given the first round of bone marrow suppression to maintain my red and white blood cell count. The tumour markers after this round dropped and my liver ultrasound indicated the metastatic lesion in the liver had shrunk slightly.



Waking in the morning can be an unpleasant experience; the urge to stay asleep is attractive but uncomfortable. The day is not to be denied. The first conscious thought is often “What type of day am I going to have?” That depends on which pain is going to be the most persistent that day. The diarrhoea pain, the tooth ache, the mouse nibbling away at my stomach, the elephant putting pressure on my chest or the knife being twisted in my gut. The first one I feel on waking usually wins. Then there is the nausea. Diarrhoea pain, strangely, is the better one, it can be passed and maybe give me the day off but not the rest. Though things were supposed to be getting better the treatment was wearing me down.

Considering Round Four to have been effective we proceeded to a fifth round of SPDT which they offered to me for free as I’d already paid substantial amounts of money for the previous treatments and they wanted to use me as a test case to prove the effectiveness of the treatment. I couldn’t see any harm in that; it would only encourage them to make it work. So Round five was a repeat of Round 4.

It was now time to return to Australia for a break. My mother had settled down shortly after arrival but after a month she’d had enough and was looking forward to going home. I will never forget the courage it must have taken for her to go on this ‘adventure’ with me. We returned to Australia on 9<sup>th</sup> September knowing I would have to return in two weeks for the next stage in my treatment. Things were looking a lot better than a month ago when the Australian doctors said I was riddled with cancer. I was now down to one large tumour and a few small ones in the liver, my most recent results showed the tumour markers were dropping and CT Scans

indicated liver lesions were stable, my previous treatment was considered to be stabilising the cancer but not eliminating it.

Philip and I returned to China on 20<sup>th</sup> September to be told the cancer was resisting the chemo and shrinking at a decreasing rate. They recommended Transhepatic Arterial Chemotherapy Embolism (TACE) which was injecting 10 mg Mitomycin (chemo) directly into the artery feeding the liver I then commenced targeted therapy of endostatin 15mg, qd, D1-14 plus chemotherapy of Xeloda 1.5g, Bid, D1-14, Q3w. I also was taking Apatinib 750mg, qd.

A few nights later we went to a Karaoke Bar with the nurses and some patients and relaxed, sang a few songs and forgot our troubles. Philip and I continued our old routine of going to the RT Mart for supplies and going to Houji Town for shopping and meals. Watching movies – endlessly watching movies.



On 28<sup>th</sup> September, the hospital took everyone out for a picnic at the Yue Hui Garden in Dau Gau. It was a very pleasant day though it was a bit much for some patients. The gardens are quite beautiful and the statues and history fascinating.

On 9<sup>th</sup> October, we were given time off, so Philip and I returned to Macau and got so drunk with cocktails at the MGM Casino. I do remember having deep and meaningful discussions with Philip about the future and the building of our dream home. We were staying at the Hotel Grand Lapa, just around the corner from the Sands, only a short distance from the MGM Casino but we had to take taxi, neither of us could hardly stand let alone walk.

Next day we went to visit the big hotels at Outer Harbour Wharf, Fisherman's Wharf, the Venetian Hotel and watched the City of Dreams show again but this time from the sound booth before going backstage and meeting the cast. The Australian girl I met on the bus last time had arranged it. She worked backstage



and invited us to this treat. There was this incredible guy who could fold himself to fit into a very small box.

Next morning, I was feeling a little light headed. Philip was due to return to Melbourne that day on his own and didn't want to leave me, but I convinced him I was fine. I am now sitting in a cabana poolside in the Grand Lapa Resort Macau. I usually stay at the Grand Cologne, but I decided to try this place, it's really reasonably priced if you needed a quick trip to Macau which I did. I was also looking forward to joining my sister for girl time travelling in China to visit the Terracotta Warrior Statues.

Wow! It's great listening to the waterfall in the pool.

# Lost in China

## CHAPTER TWELVE

23rd October 2015

Having spent months in a Chinese hospital fighting cancer, I decided a relaxing visit to the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors with my sister, Rosslyn was in order. This was a thing that should not be missed if you are in China.

Well dear sis had done it again, adventure was ordered and adventure we got. With that thought in mind, we waited to get an internet connection at the hospital so we could book our wondrous experience of the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors. Normally with online booking situations you can type the city you want and it comes up in the little box and away you go. We finally got online, found the cheapest flight to Xian, home of the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors, so with that goal in mind, and I wish I could blame my sister; I booked a flight with Shenzhen Airways to Xianfang home of the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors.



Having negotiated a car to Human then the Ferry to Shenzhen Border, we arrived at the airport three hours early. The reason for this is when I was younger and travelling around Europe with my backpack, I'd had an experience that never left me. Having booked in, got my boarding pass for my British Airways Jumbo Jet flight, I foolishly decided I had enough time to nick back to the house I was staying at to get my camera, trusting the London underground to get me back in two hours. Ha...Ha... When I arrived at Heathrow, I heard my name being called and was told that I'd held up the plane's departure. That delays like

that cost the airline £3,000 a minute. Ever since I've been paranoid about being late for a plane.

### **The Bloody Airport**

So there we were, at the Shenzhen airport which is a modern, slick, operation- all excited, boarding pass – no problem – seat allocation good – flight on time – all looking good, soon to be on our way to the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors. It was an edible lunch on board chicken and rice with orange juice. Pushed our luck at coffee, semi cold loaded with sugar, got a gob full, nowhere to spit it out so I had to swallow it.



We started our descent into Xian airport, spy a tin shed and one, count it again - one bus. Lonely Planet calls this airport the hub of domestic Xian international travel with hotel buses, all the modern cons. So, the tin shed below us becomes the first sign of the impending disaster to come. Warning Bells started to ring.

Upon walking the short distance from the plane to the 'Central Hub' of transportation, otherwise known to us as the tin shed, we are having troubling thoughts that this looks a little small to be the 'Central Hub' of all activity. Not a single Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warrior sign anywhere. Nobody seems to have heard of this most visited site in the universe.

Rosslyn needed to go to the toilet, all squat dunnies; warning bell number 2. What international airport has all squat dunnies? And no toilet paper, nothing like a good shake, given our age and physical condition it was itself a challenge. I asked a taxi driver how far to the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors he steps back in horror, our third warning bell. The final point of acceptance, or it should be if you admit defeat easily which I apparently do not.

As you do when you find yourself a little displaced overseas, you get to a town and you pray that at least one person you encounter will speak a little English. So off we go on the one bus into town, still optimistic that we can get to the Spectacular Ancient Chinese Warriors with perhaps an interesting little side trip. We



make a stop at the railway station, but reckon the best option is to hit town and figure out what's going on. Can't be much further? Still reasonably hopeful that we will find the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors soon, we alight the bus in what we figure is the centre of town.

We stumble into a hotel and joy of joys a lobby, looking good. Two concierge girls' good chance of English here. We ask, with lots of dinging and bell pulling, "Where is the bell tower?" The bell tower is the main feature in the centre



of town, it is a famous site and really if we are in the central part of the city, we should have been able to see it, but it is so smoggy and rainy that we just can't make it out. Still hopeful

Not wanting to be responsible but increasingly becoming aware that we are not actually at the home of the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors, still hanging on to the ridiculous hope that we are there, I ask one of the girls in part charade and part loud accented English where are the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors?

I'm met with giggly confusion but then she points outside. In my desperateness not to have flown us to the wrong town, I become animated and excited telling Rosslyn that they are just outside, sort of just a little way off. I really need to be in the right town at this stage of the journey.

Alas not to be.

Next stop KFC surely someone in there must speak a little English. Then we happen upon an angel in the guise of a student with a little working English, bless him. He informs us that **NO** this is not Xianyang which is the home of the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors but some other town, known as Zianfang, home of absolutely bloody nothing.

It is only now, I will with great reluctance admit that I might have got it wrong, we may be a little off-course, but now we can correct this and get on with our adventure. Our angel student informs us that a train will be required if we are indeed going to find the Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors.



He points us in the direction of a policeman, who has a little English, after listening to our tale of woe, he decides that we must be the dumbest western travellers he has ever encountered, and we are obviously in need of his help, so he adopts us as his lost cause for the day.

### **The Bloody Train Station**

The policeman marched us across the station; we are joined by a SWAT member, also bored with the lack of action at the station that day, apparently also deciding that the silly western tourists are in need of his help. In full view and with all eyes agog staring at the wicked westerners as we are marched from one end of the station to the other. We finally reach a counter with some very scary looking Chinese officers behind it, who are soon embroiled in our little drama.

Discussion and more discussions held in Chinese about our dilemma, after lots of hand waving, we decided to ring Clare the translator at the hospital to properly explain our situation. Yes, indeed we are in the wrong city, and even the wrong Province. We ask the guard how long is the trip to the Ancient Chinese Warriors she points at my watch and circles one hour then keeps going around and around and around. I'm becoming dizzy watching her, when she finally finished, we have learnt that the train trip was 6 hours, probably longer.

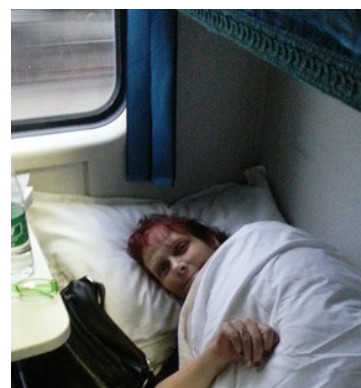
Horror of Horrors do we give up or do we continue?

At this stage we had nothing to lose, except two airfares and two replacement airfares so for better or for worse we decided to take the train to the Bloody Terracotta Warriors. Facing a six-hour train journey one assumes that this train must be pulled along by donkeys, which at this stage would not have surprised me. So, it appears we will soon be on our way this time in the right direction.

We are directed to station No 47 we are at No 7. We can't even see it in the distance, but for 10 RMB you can hire a cart to take you there. So, a cart we hired as it sure beats clawing your way there on hands and knees which is about all the energy we had left at this point. We arrived at station No 47 to discover that our train was to be another three hours wait, on top of the additional six hours, but what the hell; we've made the decision to continue, on to the Bloody Terracotta Chinese Warriors.

After the train arrived and a quick little tap dance of joy, we get to our assigned seat. We have No 005 and 006 an open cubicle; yes, a cubicle of six beds, three stories high. With a sinking heart we both look up and up and up and realize that 005 and 006 are the top deck. With a quick look of despair and knowing that only sisters can share we flung ourselves on the bottom bunks. With our most innocent looks that carried an underlying warning that dared any Chinese person to point out the fact that we are in the wrong bunks.

The beds were clean with a comfy pillow and was quite relaxing soup and peanut vendors were in abundance, with a couple of looks from displaced passengers, we make our way towards our destination. Rosslyn decided to visit the loo, off she heads only to return a good thirty seconds later, she informs me she can suck it up until later.



We had finally, we hoped, arrived at Xianyang railway station, there was no English signs to be found, but we were trusting that we were in the right place. We proceeded to the taxi rank, lots and lots of drivers, not a one with any English. This time however, we are prepared, we have the hotel name in English and in Chinese, so this should be fine sailing.

### **The Bloody Taxi Rank**

One would assume the taxi drivers know their way around Xian, but no, the first taxi driver has never heard of our hotel, so he gets a second taxi driver who also has never heard of our hotel. Via the use of the infernal telephone translators, we discover that at least twenty taxi drivers, don't know the way to our hotel. Yes twenty!! Apparently two lost tourists, in Xian at 1:00 am in the morning is big news.

Amidst lots of head scratching and puzzled expressions, side glances and pitying looks, one bright spark decided he was aware of somebody who might know - so with lots of smiles and reassuring head nodding 'he phones a friend'. At this stage, I am having all sorts of horrible thoughts about, OMG I have done it again, but I am steadfastly refusing to acknowledge them.

Our saviour's friend arrives, he is quite a bit older than his counter parts, looks at the Chinese address he grunts, clears his nose then gestures for us to get in the cab, and we comply. He takes us to a hotel with a completely different name to that is written on our booking form. We try to protest, but he insists we follow him into the hotel. After much discussion in Chinese and finding our booking we are assured that we are at the right hotel. Our research later indicated this hotel had changed its name, changing the signs out the front of the physical building but had neglected to change it online or in any other formal way. Thankfully, this driver remembered the original name.

### **The Bloody Hotel**

Having arrived at the hotel they wanted a retainer in cash immediately to secure our room. After explaining that I could not pull that out of any of my orifice at this time of night, they grudgingly agreed we could pay tomorrow.

We arrived at our room; we are sensing the end of a very trying day is close at hand. There is electricity, always a good sign.

Oh! A TV!

It doesn't work!

Ok! Don't speak Chinese anyway.

That left us with one glass, one milk whitener, two toothbrushes, one tea bag, and two rolls of toilet paper each with only six sheets.

We have been twelve hours on the road a cup of coffee is quickly becoming an obsession, we have our own coffee bags. Hmmm... Robert Timms...One foam cup of instant noodle - we will survive. Our problem now is we only have one glass. We decide this beloved glass will do, so we use our life saving coffee bag for our only cup of coffee all day. Kettle boiled, pour in hot water, smell the coffee, heaven, Clink, Clink, Splat!The glass splits in half, spilling our only coffee attempt for the whole day all over the floor. So close and yet so far! I have become desperate, my life depends on a cup of coffee, I was quickly becoming obsessed. Armed with a perfectly nice picture of a cup on my mobile, I descend downstairs to salvage the day.



I brave the endless phone translations, endless pointing at the picture of a cup on my mobile, the tension is building as I watch her mouth move; I can taste the coffee and victory. In slow motion the girl's mouth forms an O shape then she uses the only bloody English word she knows, "NO!" I repeat. "NO?"

"NO!" she says again, I repeat "NO?" I was in shock. We could have continued this saga all night, so I change tack. How about a fork then? Still "NO", no forks and no cups here, I am stunned into submission. Anyone that has dealt with a Chinese person who is done speaking to you will know what a fantastic way they have of making you seem invisible. So, having lost this round, I trudged back to the room bent low in defeat.

As I entered the room, I caught sight of the six sheets of dunny roll. This had now become personal; I grabbed the rolls, marched back down the stairs, with the offending twelvesheets flapping in the breeze. After a monumental battle, I emerged battered and exhausted, but I had in my possession two mini rolls of dunny paper with at least 22 sheets each. Ah! The spoils of victory!



Our primal focus now became food, we looked at the instant noodles, a quick happy tribal dance, a boil of the kettle and we can consume this poisonous little tidbit, we are practically drooling. (Rosslyn actually was) so here we are we have our luxurious feast all ready to be consumed, but "Oh! No!" No forks, no spoons, no anything, except, two toothbrushes, 44 sheets of dunny roll, and one coffee whitener.

We had another stunning intelligent thought for the day (as if flying for hours the wrong way wasn't enough). Toothbrushes sort of look like chopsticks, so off we go onto the next challenge.

A quick question, have you ever tried to eat slippery little sucker noodles with two toothbrushes? Have a shower handy and be prepared to stay hungry. We did eventually use the bristly end, but it is really very off-putting feeding yourself slippery sucker noodles which feel like dead worms hanging lifelessly off a furry caterpillar.

We had at this point reached the point of no return. Exhausted, starving, and caffeine deprived, my sister bless her, started to laugh and we both ended up

laughing ourselves into tears, we laughed until our sides ached. The lesson I learned from these experiences are two-fold, first a bloody good laugh can solve a myriad of problems, dissolving them into the non important things that become part of the story of your life and are well, just funny in the end.

The second thing is the blessing of someone who can still see the funny side of things even when you are too tired to think. This created an everlasting, happy memory. When I think of this excursion with my sister, it makes me chuckle out loud and look at the situation I'm in a little differently.

**Choose humour to disarm, not anger to rearm.**



We finally did get to the Spectacular Terracotta Ancient Chinese Warriors and my archeologist sister was heard muttering.

“Dirty old bloody stones”.

They really are spectacular!

# Holiday Period

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

**October 2015 to March 2016**



It was time to go home to Australia. Having left the hotel on time I still got stuck in unforeseen traffic and began to panic as the minutes ticked by triggering my paranoia of being late to the airport.

I was travelling alone, Philip had returned on October 11<sup>th</sup>, my sister had taken a different flight after our Terracotta Warriors adventure and I was just arriving in time for my flight. I went straight to the plane and took my seat. I arrived back on Melbourne Cup Day November 3<sup>rd</sup>, a 10.30pm arrival so I missed the race, but I was home, not completely in remission but with shrinking tumours. I was recovering.

Now it was February, and I was off again this time to Bali. Just before taking off, the boy in the aisle seat next to me figured out the exact moment before takeoff when there would be no more passengers and shifted to the seat in front. My God! I realised I had a double seat all to myself, an added bonus. Who knew? Garuda had more seat room, more room to move, more room to breathe – bargain! I'd read that passengers on flights today had less space than slaves on a slave ship. So off I go all good – into the wild blue yonder by myself, which interestingly has not bothered me before.

Being alone, it gave me time to reflect on the last few months. I thought about the letter I'd received from Austin Health dated 17 September 2015 that gave me less than twelve months to live. They seem determined to get rid of me with their diagnosis of doom but I'm not giving in.



Then Philip's sister passed away from cancer on 7th December. She'd accompanied me to China earlier in the year, developed a love of 'minions' from the movie and bought a whole collection of them in China. As I mentioned earlier, she had failed to take advantage of the treatments offered in China, leaving me to wonder if it would have saved her life? Many of her family believed so.



Over Christmas and New Year, Philip and I went on a cruise around New Zealand. Never done a cruise before, found it quite an experience. For a time, I was the poker champion on board then no one would play with me so I got Philip to play and he beat me and he'd never played before! Beginners luck.

In Wellington, I developed blood clots in the legs and ended up spending our stay in the hospital. The staff there was excellent and made sure I was back on-board ship before it sailed. However, I had to have blood thinning injections and keep off my feet. Not good at giving myself injections so I got Philip to do it, possibly not a good idea giving Philip gets lightheaded when he sees needles. Somehow it didn't affect him; maybe there was a mean streak that made him enjoy sticking me with needles. I'm only kidding, he was quite good at it, I felt nothing.



One of the highlights was a visit to Hobbit Town, where they shot the Lord of the Rings movies. It's quite a site and I found the walking around exhausting, eventually the staff there gave me a lift in a buggy. Fascinating place.

Before going on the cruise, we had been exploring Australian hospital trials to help enhance the recovery treatment from China and avoiding a return trip. China had recommended PD-1 Trials. PD being Programmed Death of cells.

PD-1 inhibitors and PD-L1 inhibitors are a group of checkpoint inhibitor anticancer drugs that block the activity of PD-1 and PDL1 immune checkpoint proteins present on the surface of cells. Immune checkpoint inhibitors are emerging as a front-line treatment for several types of cancer.

PD-1 and PD-L1 inhibitors act to inhibit the association of the Programmed Death-Ligand 1 (PD-L1) with its receptor, programmed cell death protein 1 (PD-1). The interaction of these cell surface proteins is involved in the suppression of the immune system and occurs following infection to limit the killing of bystander host cells and prevent autoimmune disease. (Direct quote Wikipedia)

These trials were very successful, my tumour markers continued to drop. So, I went to Bali to relax and met up with friends.



# All Downhill from Here

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

**March 2016 to November 2016**

If you've ever been kicked in the head by a mule then multiply the pain by ten. If you've ever had a migraine, multiply that by four. Then you have an idea of the pain caused by the side effects.

Although I feel very fit and healthy, I've lost 40 kilos going from 100 to 60 then I'm struck by waves of pain and nausea that pass as quickly as they come. Although I had had severe headaches since my return from China in November, they were simply getting beyond my ability to endure. They were no longer passing quickly but would persist for hours and no pain relief medicine had any effect.



In addition, I had an overwhelming combination of pains, firstly the angry elephant with a knife and hobnailed boots, the crippling nausea in the guts, the rat that chews at my guts, the boa constrictor crushing my ribs and a tooth ache on my left side. When they stopped, the heavenly relief made me realise how painful it really was. When it repeats it's depressing and scary. Where is it going? What is really happening? I fight to hang on as the next wave of pain washes me ashore after drowning you in pain. The pain can be quick and dirty once only or on and off all day. Can be so severe I wish I were dead then suddenly I'm pain free. It brings me to tears when all at once you realise you are again slipping into the void that is cancer.

In addition, I experienced some weird sensations such as when my fingers went numb. It was as if they'd gone to sleep but instead of turning to pins and needles as the blood supply returned, this spread to the palm of my hand and up my arm, rapidly causing it all to go numb as well. You begin to worry if this is going to kill you? Is it a stroke? Then it spread to my face like I've just left the dentist and

you fear it's going to the brain. I'm already on blood thinners for blood clots! Maybe one is travelling to my brain? The irony struck me of fighting cancer and being cut down by something completely different!

Philip and I decided we had to return to China and find out what was going on. Australia yet again was offering no suggestions, writing it off as normal. The medication I was on had come from China so no local doctor would comment or prescribe and none of the side effect reducing drugs I'd had in China were being supplied.

So, we went back to China and today is my birthday, two birthdays after my supposed 'use by date' or expiry date according to Western Oncologists.

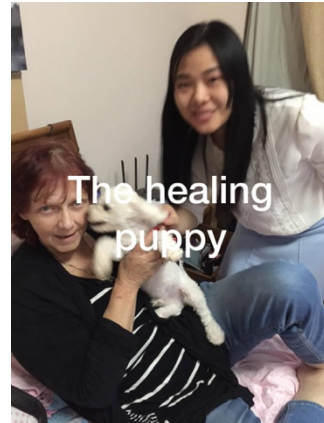


I'm writing this sitting around the pool at the Well Garden Hotel next door to the hospital. I must repeat it is the most beautiful garden I think I have ever been in or at least the most peaceful. It has a lovely vista over two pools, three spas and a number of garden ponds alive with multi-coloured fish. We actually attempted to go swimming; it was raining so we decided tomorrow might be better. Silly really, were we afraid of getting wet while swimming? So, we had coffee in the garden instead under a pergola. As we sat there, we heard what I thought was a dog barking. We couldn't see one and assumed it was hiding in the bushes near the pond. I barked back and it responded, Philip barked at it and again it responded. We stepped out of our cover to investigate continuing to bark. Here we were two Aussies standing in the rain, barking and laughing at the garden while being watched by three Chinese Waiters who were staring open mouthed at the crazy tourists. They later

told us they were dog frogs that were hidden in the reeds of the garden ponds. We did get to go swimming.

I have absolute faith in the doctors in China, who take pride in achieving a positive result and seek a solution to every problem. They even bring in puppies to help raise the spirits of the patients.

My latest CT scan indicates the tumour in my liver has enlarged and they are beginning to run out of ideas. We discuss radioactive seeding again, but it is dismissed. The current chemo treatment by tablet is



giving me unbearable headaches. I'm given a bunch of medication to take home as well as being referred to a doctor in Melbourne who also supplied me with a number of supplements to boost my immune system.

Things were not looking good, especially after finding a new lump just below the rib cage on the left side. It was not there yesterday. My heart sank, I do not know if I can launch a new offensive against this monster. I think it was then I began to believe I wasn't going to survive this. Anything new was devastating to me – gut wrenching! I expected a sleepless night lay ahead. However, I did sleep and dreamt of pushing through increasingly difficult corridors in a house overgrown with trees and bushes. I did not want to go down the corridors, but I was being strongly encouraged. Finally, I overcame the urge and refused to go any further and came back to the comfort of my home.

Next day I received the results – “your liver tumours are a bit bigger which is why you can feel it from the outside. “This might sound bad at first glance, but you have no new tumours and your cancer markers are way down.” They said.

This implied my treatment was working to prevent the spread, but we had but one big enemy. They were successfully debulking the minor tumours but needed to deal with the bigger ones differently. These were the best words I could have heard and gave me the most joyous feeling I can't even describe. I suddenly felt fantastic!

My wonderful Doctor Li and Professor Wang and the nurses worked tirelessly to seek solutions. And it worked! My energy levels returned, I was eating again and putting on weight for the first time in months. I'm feeling fantastic! I pray this is the start of new journey. I started doing some spiritual healing with Philip and that also seemed to help.

We returned from China and began treatments at a Wellness Centre with vitamin drips, heat therapy and countless tablets and powders. Given the Austin and Olivia Newton John Centre seem to have written me off we switched to the Alfred. They were taking a keen interest, maybe because I'm new and they haven't grown tired of me living longer than they predict. They are putting me on to radiation treatment to attack the liver directly. The danger here is causing more damage by cooking healthy parts of the liver. This is what I think they did to Philip's sister Kathy. I hope they don't do it to me.

I can feel my body slowing down, I'm thinner again, though Philip says I'm developing quite a nice figure, I know I'm getting too thin. I feel healthy enough during the day but tire easily and still suffer from pain that keeps me awake at night. Tablets help but I'm taking so many I feel like they are rattling around inside me. I think they have damaged my liver with the radiation.

### **Thoughts about carrying on.**

You think of friends and relatives who have lost the fight you're still fighting. Are you next? But you close the door to that thinking. You can't afford to go there. You try to avoid being obsessed with yourself and your pain and worry about being a burden or to lose the person caring for you. You feel so alone because they can't feel what you feel. Are you up shit creek without a paddle?

Hope God realises it was all a mistake and takes it back.

You crack jokes to get through it - only way to cope. Alternative is to lie down and die. Dwell on it all day or fight back if you believe you can beat the odds. People think you're incredible but it's all about fighting to live and not giving up.

You put up with it all, continue the journey because the alternative is to give up. Easy to view the lesson as punishment – it's a journey, take what you can from it, even if you don't understand.

There are those worse off than you – take some comfort and strength knowing if they can cope you can cope. Fear of new pains – the old ones you know and understand. New ones could be a threat; you don't know how to handle them. Am I getting worse or is it a sign of healing?

If you're not ready to go – just don't go. Stop being bossed around by fate. I'll go on my own terms. I'll turn cancer into butterflies, transforming something ugly into something beautiful that can fly away and leave me free. I talk to my tumours and try to explain to them if they kill the host, they kill themselves – not sure they're listening. I see the future in a new light; see something pure in the absolute pain - must be something meaningful in it or is it the drugs?

You get very philosophical when facing death and begin to wonder about what lies beyond. I had a Christian upbringing but increasingly found the teachings illogical. I began to view God as more a universal consciousness and that each of us was like a brain cell in a bigger entity, but I saw each soul as more a thriving vortex asserting its independence and yet being part of the whole. This jelled with the concept of God being everywhere and that we are all connected.

Despite that I find I cannot connect with that greater whole, that higher self that exists independently with the body and survives death to move on to greater things. That Judgement Day is more a self assessment before returning to a new life to learn new lessons. Life is a journey and only through pain do we grow. One of the most connected moments for me is during the scans where you are placed in cylinders with cameras placed about an inch from your nose. If you have claustrophobic tendencies like me, meditation is a great way to focus your attention somewhere else. It is then I meditate on life. I'm not giving up! I'm not ready! But I feel I'm losing the battle.

### **My current thinking is focused on “I don't know how to die.”**

Do you just stop breathing? One second alive, next nothing, no fanfare, just stopped. Ceasing to exist? Alive? Have I left the building of life, journeying to the other side, passed over, deceased, dead! How can one just cease to exist in a heartbeat? I always suspected that you get a warning, a feeling. Hang on, it's happening! No, I have a few things to finish, a few things to say. I have recently been in a position to observe that this may not be the case. I have been so close, I

felt death leaning on me and I realise that it might well be just a stop – a last breath, a last heartbeat and gone. I read that we are energy beings in an organic body, that energy cannot be destroyed and thus our unique energy signature lives on – but how?

I feel the pressure on me, it is so close sometimes. But the pain has made it a companion. I will not be taken - I will choose when to go.

I feel OK! I feel it close to me. I need to acknowledge it, or it becomes scary, unknown and a bit dark. Make the scary a friend, it is not unknown, it is an inevitable intimate event that nobody can escape.

# Afterlife

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

*This is a story that Gail and myself wrote while bored in hospital, speculating on what might lie ahead.*

I had been told I was going to die - soon.

This is a concept most of us put in the back of our minds. We don't really believe it, although we fear getting killed it's not real. It's a possibility that happens to others, not me. Even when you are told you are 'GOING TO DIE', you place it in the back of your mind and get on with life as best you can. But every so often it hits you, you are going to die. Not some unknown point in the future but within a few months.

I feel fine; I have no pain, no physical disabilities, no indication to the outside world that I'm even sick. So why can't I just continue like this forever. Death is not an option. My affliction is hidden, a time bomb eating away at me inside. Inoperative because they cannot get to it without causing more damage.

I can't imagine not being able to move my fingers to be lying very still, not breathing, my skin going a grey green, cold to touch. Dead flesh has a feel of its own, you know they are dead, cold, unmoving. Is that my future? Then what? Placed in a box and buried or do they incinerate my remains so there is no trace that I ever existed. My possessions redistributed among friends and relatives. My name removed from the phone book. I now only exist in the memories of those left behind. Is that it? The End? What do religions know? No one has returned to tell the tale. Those who promised to return never did. Is there an afterlife conspiracy to keep it secret from us mortals? Or is it nothingness. If that is true, life to me is meaningless, we are simply biological units perpetuating a species on an insignificant planet for no purpose but to allow life to flourish. Let's just throw out the old and replace with the new.

I guess I'll find out soon. They say it will be quick, just drift away on a cloud of morphine and then ...? I'll have the answers to the great mystery of life. I'll tell you now I'm going to be damn cross if there's no afterlife. I had a friend die a few years ago, he now has those answers but we studied the different religions together. He believed but he wanted to explore the different theories. I got confused as to what I believed, as a good Christian I'd believed in the rather simplistic view of heaven for the good and hell for the bad. Then there was Purgatory and Limbo for Catholics who didn't fit into either category. What else is there but good or bad, I asked why these halfway houses? Then what happens to kids who die at birth or die young, when did they the chance to prove they were good or bad. I guess they go to those other places. Doesn't seem fair - we only get one chance.

I guess I'll have to think on this some more.

Looks like it's getting close. It's been a week since I picked up a pen to note my thoughts and now I'm getting headaches. They've put me into hospital for observation. I think they're more interested in having me close because I'm an organ donor and they need them fresh. No point dying at home and wasting those good spare parts. At least some part of me will live on but that really doesn't help me. I've decided on cremation, I had considered leaving the body in the ground so that some archaeologist may dig me up in the future and display the remains in a museum like the Egyptian mummies. I know that was only holding on to some form of continued existence rather than ceasing to exist, but it made me feel a bit better.



The food here is quite intolerable. I like my food and what they serve could not be in any way described as food. I thought hospitals were supposed to be promoting health. Dry, hard half frozen sandwiches, tasteless coffee requiring ten spoonfuls of sugar before it develops any taste, jelly, soup that has had all the solids strained out of it. I have friends smuggle me in food, but they aren't exactly food connoisseurs either bringing in hamburgers, chips and bread rolls. What I would give for a night out in an expensive restaurant. I wonder if there are any who do hospital delivery? – Doubt it, probably goes against health regulations.



The nursing staff aren't very encouraging. I think they'd like me to push myself off this mortal coil sooner rather than later so they can reuse the bed. They keep offering me morphine but all I want is aspirin. I'd heard too much morphine shut down your organs. Don't they know I'm a donor? Then they tell me because I've got cancer, they don't want my organs. There goes my last chance at immortality. I shouldn't get angry; they say that could trigger an aneurism. At this point in my life even watching TV is a problem – what if I don't live to see the next episode of the series. I'd have to spend eternity wondering how it turned out. Maybe someone who died later could fill me in. I wonder what you talk about when your dead – the weather? Do they have weather?

Last night I had a dreadful headache, caused by the chemo tablets I'm taking, it cut through me like a knife then it was gone as quickly as it came and I drifted off into a very peaceful sleep. I had a very strange dream, like those near-death experiences that people talk about. I found myself floating above my body looking down at myself sleeping then I had the urge to just float. I found I could just lift off and float away. It was a very liberating feeling just to float anywhere I wanted and be invisible.

I floated out into the corridor and listened to the nurses on night shift complaining about the long boring hours, wishing patients would just sleep instead of constantly calling them. I had thought that was their job but they obviously had other ideas. I decided I'd heard enough and drifted out of the hospital. I had wanted to go out since the moment I arrived; it was invigorating to be out in the world again. I felt like the invisible man.

I knew I was dreaming but it was such an uplifting feeling and it felt so real. I was floating free through the streets, watching people, observing events without being seen. For a moment I thought this would be great if you were a 'peeping Tom' but that wasn't my way. Instead, I went to visit relatives imagining what they were doing and catching them in their homes asleep.

Then I had a thought! I'd always wanted to roam the halls and corridors of Parliament House, so I went there in this dream. The place was empty being the middle of the night. It was spooky and dark, then it struck me if I've never been here how could I picture this place in such detail. Then I remembered people talking of 'Astral Travel' and 'Out of Body Experiences'. This must be what I was

experiencing; I am here but in spirit only. I decided I could do this for forever but wasn't there something about getting back to your body by dawn or be trapped outside. I'm sure I read that in a 'Doctor Strange' comic book. So, I became concerned and headed back to the hospital floating quite peacefully three feet off the ground in a horizontal position along the streets. Unfortunately, I couldn't leap tall buildings.

On reaching my floor at the hospital I got a strange feeling; you know that feeling when you know something is wrong but you have no idea what. My immediate family were standing around crying. I couldn't understand what was wrong. Had they received bad news? I went to my bedside with the intention of re-entering my body or waking up whichever state I was in, but I couldn't. I tried lying on top of my body, but nothing happened. I tried diving into it but found myself under the bed. Then I looked at myself. My face had that green-grey pallor to the cheeks. My body was still, not just sleeping, I wasn't breathing. I was dead!

How could that be? Death was the end, lights out, biological breakdown and hard drive wipe. I was still here; I was a ghost – there was something after death? Or did I just exist in those dying moments as my brain cells twinkled out and I eventually faded away.



I waited but nothing happened. I was still here. For the next few days, I hung around. I stayed a bit protective of my body and accompanied it as it was taken away and prepared for the funeral. I approved of the coffin chosen but was having second thoughts about cremation as it would be a dreadful shame to incinerate that ornate box.

I stayed for the funeral and listened to all the polite eulogies and wished people had enjoyed themselves more, after all the first three letters of the word funeral are “fun”. It was nice regardless, but I was really pissed off I couldn’t enjoy the cakes at the wake. Obviously, death hadn’t curbed my appetite for treats but I wasn’t hungry otherwise.

After that, death started to get boring. It occurred to me if I’d committed suicide to escape life, how did you escape death? You’d be pretty pissed having to stick around as a floating spirit on your own, especially if you’d killed yourself to escape loneliness.

Floating around gets rather tedious when you’ve nowhere new to go and you are all alone. Someone must have observed my predicament and taken pity. I hadn’t taken much notice of the dog that started following me around. It was just another intangible object to me. I guess he got tired of being ignored and jumped on me. What shook me was I felt it, the dog didn’t fall through me, he was as non corporeal as myself. Then I recognised her, it was my dog “Leah” who had been run over a few years before. She’d been a special dog, the sort of dog you never forgot. She had been my close companion for ten years. Once she had my attention she was joined by a golden Labrador, my other special dog, “Ebony” she had been 17 years old, frail, back legs failing, eyesight gone, hearing poor. Now she was young again, full of energy and wagging her tail in unison with Leah.

“You know where you are?” asked a voice from behind. I turned to see my father who had died some fifteen years before, the first death I had witnessed.

“I’m dead but what happens now? Is this it?” I asked him.

“No. This is your ‘orientation time’. It’s the time you surrender your ties to this life, resolve the unresolved and when you are ready, I am here to guide you to the next phase.” I didn’t respond; he looked the same as I remembered him. “Many people stay a long time and become earthbound. Angry and evil people often stay to cause harm. I sense you are ready to move on.”

I nodded. “But what lies beyond?”

“I can’t answer that. All I can say is once you enter the light, the early limitations on your memory and thought processes will go. You will see things clearer so that you can enter the self-assessment phase. There you evaluate your

life, what you achieved, what you failed to do, comparing this to what you had planned to achieve when you entered that life.”

“You mean Judgement Day where God assesses whether I go to heaven or hell?”

He shook his head gently. “No. It’s you that do the judging. Before you were born you entered into a life contract with your higher self for what you needed to experience and learn to gain spiritual growth. It is now time to see where you succeeded and failed in preparation for your next phase of growth.”

“You mean I have to go back and live another life?”

“Not necessarily and only when you are ready. All will become clear when you pass through the light. Are you ready? Or do you need more time?”

I hesitated. I looked around; the dogs were anxiously awaiting my decision, sitting in front of me and panting. What did I have to lose? I had done all I could here. It was time to move on.

As I took my last look at the world, I’d known I had a moment of hesitation, even fear of what lay ahead. I was standing in my old home, surrounded by my earthly possessions, things I’d cherished that I now must leave behind. Everything that I’d done, accumulated, the things that marked that I’d ever existed were being dispersed. Soon there would be no trace, I’d be eliminated, my name would be struck off mailing lists, voting rolls, guest lists. I’d only exist in the memory of those who remembered me. “Can I come back and visit?”

My father replied with a gentle smile. “Once you have completed your self assessment- yes. That will take about twelve weeks in Earthly time.”

I turned away and saw behind me a bright light filling my field of vision. It was not a swirling vortex threatening to sweep me away, it was more like a mist that was surrounding me. As it did, I started to remember a previous death. I’d been murdered along with my father by home invaders in the Old West of America. I was forced to leave my mother alone and in danger. I’d stuck around to ensure she had survived the ordeal, but I had remained stuck on this side of the light waiting for her, watching over her; helpless to assist, as she wasted away from grief. When she died it was me that had guided her through the light and my father who’d come to escort us. My memory beyond that was nonexistent.

Slowly I felt like I was dissolving as I lost all feeling of any form, I was an entity, an energy being, no body, no shape just existence swimming in a world of bright light. My father had gone, I no longer felt his presence, but another was nearby. A familiar presence but I could not identify it. “Who are you?” It was more a thought than words because I had no mouth, no sense of sight, sound or touch.

“I am what some call you’re Guardian Angel or your Spirit Guide. I helped you put together your ‘lifeplan’. I was that little voice in your head that you often ignored guiding you along your chosen path. Now we are here to see how successful you were.”

“So, angels do exist?”

“Not as you might think. We are people or souls like yourself that have advanced to a higher level. It is our job to help you achieve that same level and to go beyond. The purpose for existence is to grow through lesson learned as a spiritual being through earthly experiences.”

“And then what?”

“The ultimate goal is hidden from us all. As you grow you learn more, but many mysteries still exist in this realm. We will discuss these further as your memory of your journey so far returns.”

“Why can I not remember now? Why is it a blank when I was alive?”

“Because it would cloud your judgement and interfere with the lessons you had chosen to experience and break agreements with others who accompanied you on this journey.”

“What do you mean?”

“When you were born you chose the family you’d be born into. You chose them because they would provide you the life you needed to live, and you provided them what they needed for their growth. A child who dies at birth teaches a lesson in grief to the parents, while the child may learn a lesson of pain.”

“Is there a God?”

“We are all god. We are all part of a Universal Consciousness that created a playground called ‘life’ where we can experience things that cannot be experienced here. This place is a place of rest and recovery from ‘life’. Where you assess your next journey, back to Earth or a stay here. It is your choice.”

“I feel like I’m about to sit for an exam.”

“In a sense it is but you are both student and teacher. I’m only your guide. Shall we begin?”

If I’d had eyes and someone to look at, I’d have stared at him briefly in fearful hesitation. But I did not so I agreed to proceed.

Time had no meaning here, but my energy levels did wain and I needed rest. We began with my birth and slowly walked our way through my entire life, looking at events, decisions, discussing how my choices affected my life and how other choices may have panned out differently. I found I could do this without any real bias as if I was assessing a stranger. I could be honest with myself and I no longer felt the pain of life’s ordeals, I could forgive those who’d done me harm because I could see that I had planned to learn a lesson from their actions and they a lesson from my responses.

When we’d finished analysing my life, we began looking back at other lives, reincarnation does exist and I’d lived many times before as both male and female, black and white, savage and civilised, rich and poor, criminal and victim, dumb arse and genius. From these lives we put together a pattern of what I’d learned and what lessons I’d missed, poor decisions that could be relived, I found the process of rediscovering myself exhilarating. Of what I’d been and what I could be again. I didn’t want it to end. However, in the back of my mind I was still wondering what lay beyond the next door. That is if I still had a mind.

The amazing part of all this was my memory, my ability to do this analysis of life’s data in my head. Remember and recall every detail like a movie- Draw threads together without pen, paper or, computer – nothing physical. It was all in that spiritual mind that was now me or rather had always been me no longer constrained within a mortal body. So much had been opened up to me but many of the mysteries of the universe were still unknown. Was there a Big Bang at the beginning? Or was the Book of Genesis more accurate?

I was told that twelve weeks had passed in the corporeal world when I’d finished my self assessment in the “Recovery Room”. Not that time had any meaning in this realm where even a bodily form didn’t exist. I was a thought in suspension. Now I had a choice – I could move on to what lay behind the next door or I could go back and check up on my loved ones or just watch the world go by. Now that I remembered my past lives, I remember being a young girl, murdered

while trying to protect her mother from being raped. As that girl I had lingered on the corporeal side of the white light watching over her. Helplessly I'd watched her slide into depression and loneliness having lost her daughter and husband to the same home invasion on a farm in the American mid West in the 1880's. When she'd died, I moved on with her before I had moved on again into the life I'd just left.

I decided to go back; I had all the time in the universe, eternity in fact, so why rush into going beyond. I soon got bored with watching what now seemed like mundane lives pursuing an unknown 'lifeplan' of goals guided by their spirit guide who could only whisper hints into their minds and be frustrated when we failed to comply. My spirit guide or guardian angel had now moved on, having completed the debrief, I was now alone watching a world I could not interact with, I began to feel the frustrations of my guide as I watched them make stupid mistakes in their lives.

Eventually I decided to go explore the world. Go to those places I'd never had the chance to see when I was alive. Years passed in the 'real' world, but I began to realise that that world was the illusion. I was in the real world. The Earth was a playground, a school to enable the consciousness of the universe to learn and grow. For what purpose who knew but we were all part of that universal consciousness. In that sense God was everywhere because we were all part of God, he wasn't an independent entity he was a conglomerate of our individual consciousnesses. It was our consciousness that brought form from the chaos of the Big Bang- In that sense Genesis was correct in that "God" created the universe.

When my guide came to check on me, I realised I had regained my spiritual form. Not having anyone to interact with I had not reflected on myself. My guide reminded me that to move on I needed to consider if I was returning to the corporeal world what sort of life I was seeking. My immediate past life had been one of my goals always being just out of reach and filled with tragedy. It was also my choice as to what age I wanted to return to, I could move into the past or the future. I had always been fascinated by the possibility of time travel, now it was a possibility. Maybe I could go into the future and become a star ship captain. Modern living had been very stressful, cutting us off from nature, I could return to a more primitive time and commune with nature, hunt for my own food and not be challenged by the

pressures of society to conform, to make money, to obey an endless series of rules, to be dictated to, bullied by authorities and controlled by the greed of others.

So, I explored the past without the fear of catching ancient diseases, being burned as a witch, captured and put into slavery, eaten by cannibals. It was indestructible but again I could only observe. I could not interfere, and they could not harm me. What little influence I did have was to give a room a chill, my presence sensed by those aware of the existence of spirits or ghosts, but I never found one I could speak to and pass on messages. Maybe I mixed in the wrong circles.

Bored with history I found I could also whisk myself off into space. All I had to do was focus on a star and I was there. I went to view magnificent nebula that were even more wonderful than any images supplied by the Hubble Telescope. I found weird planets but no intelligent life. However, given the size of the universe I could spend eternity looking and find nothing. There must be life out here but even in the debriefing area I only encountered human souls. Did that mean we were tied to the Gia consciousness of the planet? What if you died on another planet? Did this mean you were isolated in another realm? Did each planet have a 'universal consciousness' or was it truly a Universal Consciousness for everywhere? Perhaps it was both a 'planetary consciousness' that formed a higher consciousness that was the universe? Maybe these answers would come when I moved beyond the light.

Then there was the future. Could I see the future? Was this where seers got their visions - a memory of their spiritual journey? Perhaps Nostadamus was so accurate because he retained memories of his afterlife journeys into the future. Maybe I could become a prophet or a seer? Did that mean the future was set? That didn't gel with the life plan. We might plan our lives and do deals with other souls to join us on that journey, but no plan ever succeeded 100% no matter how well it was constructed. Even with guides we tended to mess it up. I remember a theory of other realities; quantum physics or some such where I lives were multi faceted. So, when we made critical decisions one facet would experience the positive impact of that decision, the other the negative. Those impacts could also vary splintering your life into a multitude of alternatives. If that was true why hadn't I had the opportunity to review those facets, those lessons? Another question for when I reached the other side of the light; I was really starting to get a strong urge to go there and find



these answers. I had had enough of the loneliness of exploring this existence from afar. I needed others. In my travels I had not run into other souls on a similar journey. It was not a crowded world in this limbo I was in.

I decided to visit the future.

In life I had worried about the future. Each generation seems to think the next is going to devalue the principals of the last and to some degree they do but the world keeps spinning. However recent trends seem to indicate a world of greater control, more rules and suppression of thought by dumming down the population. The threat of global warming, whether true or not, has shifted the debate away from pollution, mass extinction and deforestation as the real problems.

What I saw of the future gave me hope. I saw the final realisation that population growth initiatives were simply for-profit growth, increasing their markets to sustain ever increasing profit growth in a throw away society that was using up limited planetary resources that were unable to maintain supply. People lured into debt with increasing computerisation led to increased unemployment, fewer customers and less profit. Failure to invest in infrastructure and the reduction of education funding and quality led to a decline in the skilled workforce. All it needed was a second global financial crisis, the mass repossession of homes, increased unemployed for the community to band together and say, "NO MORE". The financial infrastructure collapsed with business' too big to save and a new world was born with different values and a return to local communities rather than global economies.

But was that future set? My newfound knowledge of the universe told me that all history is the past when seen from the future. It was now time to move on. I had seen enough, time to go beyond. As I thought this, I found myself surrounded by white, the world I knew began to fade and so did my spiritual form. I was again a thought surrounded by nothing with no shape. As I drifted through this existence I felt as if I was being reconstructed. In life every decision I had made had at least two differences courses my life could have taken as a result. I discovered that in different realities my life had acted out those alternatives and now I was being reunited with those different facets of myself and gathering up the accumulated experiences of all those alternate lives. It was a liberating but frightening realisation to see that I had succeeded in one reality what I had failed in another.

This merging into my higher self showed me that I was not as insignificant as we all thought in life. We were not just ants on a grain of sand in a universe too big to imagine. We were part of something bigger; God was us – not just an old man who ruled over us with an iron fist. God was everywhere because he was us; all of us were one giant universal consciousness. Brain cells in one huge brain or mini vortexes within a tornado.

This would disappoint a lot of fundamentalists who'd execute people for stating such beliefs. Religion never made real sense to me; it was too contrived. How could a baby who dies at birth be judged? That baby had to be given another chance hence reincarnation must exist.

Spiritual growth of a higher being in a constructed training existence was the bigger picture. Our lives, the earth, life was an illusion created by our spiritual consciousness. That reality was a construct for us to learn. And that construct extended to all living beings. Animals were not soulless creatures they were part of our construct, souls going through experiences as animals. We are all connected. Makes me wonder was I a dinosaur in a previous life? I'd always liked dinosaurs. Then my memory was flooded with memories of previous lives – countless lives across the ages, so much to take in. If I'd been limited to my physical body, I think I would have had a breakdown from information overload but no I just absorbed it all as if a door had opened to an archive that I'd been denied access.

I don't know how long I was there; time has little meaning here as you can go back or forward in time by simply thinking of the destination. But what now? There were still mysteries about the ultimate goal of existence for a soul. I might now understand the origins of the universe, if I could return with this knowledge, I'd be the next Einstein. Maybe that's how he did it, some of that knowledge stuck.

One theory is that the world we live in is a holographic projection of the real world. I had learned this was partly true. It was a projection, an illusion created by our combined consciousnesses, but it was not a reflection of the afterlife world. This too was a construct. Once I had consolidated myself and reformed my higher self into one entity, I found I could create a paradise of my liking. I found that I had an inner circle of people I shared multiple lives with, not everyone, every time and here we finally got together. I was no longer alone; it was time to rest in peace for awhile before deciding what to do next. Would I return to the training ground?



Probably, but I needed time to recover from my experiences in life and after. To relax with my ‘soulmates’ in a setting that made us relax, floating among the stars, resting in a forest. There were no threats, no pressures, no death, and total freedom to do as we wished.

I often wondered whether life was designed to be hard and oppressive to stop you becoming too complacent with existence.

Total peace and harmony can eventually get boring.

**Note from Philip:**

*This is where Gail stopped her writing. A month earlier we had been shopping for trousers for me and she seemed fine. Then she started to feel unwell and I took her to Austin.*

*She passed peacefully at 2.46pm 16<sup>th</sup> November 2016. It was just a stop, I had my hand on her heart, she made a quiet gasp and stopped breathing, a minute later her heart stopped. She was gone yet that morning she had been awake, drugged out on morphine after a rough night. At lunch she went to sleep. She did however keep her sense of humour to the end.*

## Epilogue

I remember 1959, I was only six, but it was the year I discovered that decimal currency was coming and placed my apparently worthless coins into my play money, not realising it would be another six years before that happened. It was the year I started thinking of my future, played banking and shop games with my friends and began to wonder who the girl would be that I'd spent my life with. Coincidence or telepathic link that it was also the year that Gail was born?

Despite having several relationships in my life, what we shared was different in so many ways. We shared common interests and goals. We could talk for hours on the nature of the universe, criticise religion, government, oppression, conspiracy theory and spiritualism. We were idealists who made a film about the food we eat and how it is killing us. It was a symbiotic relationship and for fourteen years we worked together writing scripts, building a business, making documentaries, establishing an on-line television network and fighting the good fight.

We also had a tumultuous relationship with ups and downs, arguments but something always drew us back together. When Bob died, it was me she turned to, when she got sick it was me that she relied upon. It was more than just being friends, something bound us together and now that she has gone a part of me has gone with her. A part of me wants to go with her to discover the truth of what lies beyond, a question we debated in depth over the years that we fought the cancer. Now she knows the answer and I feel a bit left out.

I completed this book on her behalf because she wanted to get the message out about how badly oncologists treat their patients in this country and how they actually kill people through neglect, ignorance, greed and arrogance. They are dealing with peoples lives and cannot be allowed to be so cavalier about other people's suffering. What happened to the Hippocratic Oath or is it really a Hypocritical Oath?

Philip Rainford

## To Philip from Dad

*My father woke up one night with this poem in his head and couldn't sleep until he'd written it down. He has since joined Gail in finding the answers to the big questions.*

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*Into my life came a girl called Gail  
My spirits began to sail  
Together we blazed a trail  
However this was bound to fail  
Into our lives came hail and rain  
But once the stormy seas fell calm  
We formed a partnership divine  
This bond became stronger with time  
And our talents we did combine  
Our teaching skills began to climb  
TAFE suited us fine  
Affection and admiration no longer in decline  
This partnership was as strong as iron  
Then that dreaded disease as old as time  
Sent Gail into decline  
We fought together this love of mine  
But we were defeated by old man time  
And so I have lost my love divine  
No longer can we wine and dine  
So I am left alone in pain  
However there is a large family of mine  
For which I must find more time  
Grandchildren being a light to shine  
And happiness will again be mine*

By Ian S. Rainford