



My recovery from brain cancer

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PROLOGUE

I just caught myself. I'm just sitting on a train going to a homoeopathy college to do a talk on, well, ME! I can't believe it, I'm so excited, exhilarated even.

I text Janice, Can you believe it? It is 8 yrs since I was told I was going to die now I'm doing a talk about it. Thanx again for all your help. Yr FAB.

Gemma :0) xxx”

So, of course I'm eager to tell you what happened to me, and to share my experience of cancer and my recovery.

Why? Because I know there are lots of people out there who have been given a death sentence, like I was and have been told, “There is no cure,” or “There is nothing more we can do for you...There's no other viable treatment,” and, of course, we believe what our doctors tell us.

Yet, in my instance, this was not the case.

For me, I know that it was my loving family, my friends, and my boyfriend at that time, my will to live, and my very special homoeopath, Janice, that saved my life.

In a nutshell, doctors in St Bartholomew's Hospital in London had diagnosed me with cancer. I had tumours in my brain and spine, and was given months to live. I had been given the usual treatments of chemotherapy and radiotherapy and various drugs from the doctors. My oncologist told me the treatment had not worked for me and I was given three alternatives before the inevitable happened:

Go to a hospice. We have a place booked for you.

Remain in the hospital.

Go home.

I chose to go home. But that all happened in 1996.

I am told that in all good speeches, books, essays, dissertations, research papers and things of such ilk, there should be a beginning, middle and an end. Well, in my case there is no end, or - at least - not the ending that we were expecting at that time. As I write this, I am in good health, very much alive and very happy to continue with my life.

I will tell you a little about my life before cancer. I will share with you the build up to finding out I was seriously ill, and being close to death. I will tell you my experience of the treatment I had from conventional medicine, and share with you my recovery from cancer.

I also want to explain a little about homoeopathy, the therapy that helped me. I want to do this because if you, or one of your siblings, your partner, your parents, your child or your friend, discovered they had a debilitating disease, a terminal illness, you'd want to help, wouldn't you?

If you were told there was nothing else the doctors could do, wouldn't you like hear about something else that might possibly help? About another option that just might help, even in the most, apparently, hopeless cases? I feel certain that it was homoeopathy that helped me. So maybe it could help you.

Understandably, I am eager to share my story and tell you about this amazing medicine which has been used for over 200 years: 200 years of experience, and with plenty of evidence and research to support it. And I will guide you to all this, and tell you about myself, and many people like me, who can testify to the empirical evidence that supports homoeopathy.

So here goes.

CHAPTER 1

BEFORE CANCER

I was born at 8.30 am, Wednesday, 19 December, 1969. I am the last of seven children in my family and I was always told that this was significant when I was a child:- that it meant I would be lucky but those who have studied the astrology may know more about this.

As I have said, I had cancer and no ordinary cancer at that. I had cancer in the middle of my brain in the pineal gland, the one place where no surgeon can operate. It's just too awkward and a dangerous and potentially damaging place to do surgery, I was informed. Surgeons would have to cut through too many brain cells which would cause too much damage. I was told that brain tumours especially where my tumour was were not that common but, since my recovery, I have heard more and more about their occurrence I was

also told I had a really rare type of tumour, normally only found in infant males but I am an adult female, I can assure you.

WHEN I REALISED THERE WAS SOMETHING WRONG

The first inklings of something being wrong occurred when I was in my first real job. I was working as an admin assistant in a Staff Development Unit. It wasn't the job I wanted to do and I only got it because I'd been doing some temporary work there to tide me over after graduation. I had just finished a Social Science BA (Hons) degree at Wolverhampton Polytechnic and I needed to pay back my student loan and the money that the bank had lent me. So I got the first available job to remove some of the weight and worry I had about my overdraft.

I had found my degree in Social Science very interesting, definitely my kind of thing, but I was soon to find out in the job market, my BA degree seemed to stand for "Bugger All." I was cross that my degree seemed worthless to employers. On more than one occasion during the job-hunting process, I thought about how I could have left school at sixteen and trained myself to do something more practical and vocational.

It was 1991 and jobs were scarce for graduates. I had wanted, maybe in my innocence, to find a job to invoke peace, justice, equality and fairness to all. So, whilst looking for my real job, my true vocation, I decided to learn to type in order to do temporary work in administration. I eventually found a temporary position and the administrator manager, Shirley, suggested that I could stay on full-time. They needed someone permanent as the office was incredibly busy. In my opinion, they needed at least two new people for the position. I had just done a degree and I did not want to be on the lowest rung in an office but I responded enthusiastically; the bottom line was that I needed a job and some money! The possibility of a contract and the security that that brings with it was important.

Yet, time went by and no contract or permanent post had actually been offered. I stayed there without any sick pay or holiday pay, and there seemed to be so many Bank Holidays, for which of course I was not paid.

A colleague suggested that I should maybe take a few odd days off - to have some 'make-believe' interviews. Perhaps this would hurry them up a bit - I didn't want to be dishonest and certainly didn't feel in a position to do that. I had been applying for jobs on a regular basis and, as luck would have it, I got a positive reply from one of my application forms for a Building Society. A graduate position and a proper job, with training. An interview was booked.

Working for a Building Society certainly wasn't the job I had wanted to do and I definitely hadn't wanted a job with any financial aspect to it. I'd just stopped being a student; it was the '80s and a dog-eat-dog, materialistic world. Mrs. Thatcher was in office and I was anti all things capitalistic but, when I was invited for an interview, I was shocked to find that I was secretly quite proud of myself! I was really pleased to get any interview. I felt oh-so-cocky when I announced to my boss that I would be having an interview with a Building Society and so must take a half-day off work. I slipped into the conversation the amount of money they were prepared to pay for me, which was actually a great deal more than they were planning to offer me. I made it plain, without actually saying so, that if they didn't get their act together, then I may well have to leave and go elsewhere.

On hearing this they swooped in and offered me a contract at long last, albeit only for 6 months. What this actually meant to me was that I could take a few days off, celebrate, go down to Glastonbury Festival and actually get paid for doing it. Splendid! What more could I ask for?

I love Glastonbury Festival; it's just fab. Everybody is in such a good mood. Some of my best moments have been spent there. My favourite bands, loads of interesting stores selling jewellery, Indian wall-hangings and a huge variety of different cuisine. This is one place, where being a vegetarian is no problem. They have all sorts of different types of people, leading an alternative life and I couldn't help but look at them enviously. I felt that my life and job were so mundane and monotonous. I wanted to be more alternative, to be out there pushing to 'Help the Environment', to 'Ban the Bomb', to encourage people not to wear fur coats, and so on.

Anyway, it wasn't too long after getting my new post when I began to experience odd moments of dizziness and flashing lights once or twice a day, every few days. I had an eye test and was told that my eyesight was perfect although I would probably need reading glasses by the time I was 40. The optician's receptionist suggested it might be because of my vegetarian diet. Not getting enough vitamin B12 most likely. This theory supported all my dad's theories on vegetarianism. I was irritated by this suggestion and felt certain that this was not the cause of my problems. So I went to my doctor - his investigation found I had a slightly lower than average sugar level in my blood and a low potassium level. I asked what things have potassium in. Coconut was the answer. So I said, thinking what had sugar and coconut in, "Does this mean that I should eat Bounty Bars from now on?"

He said that if I wanted to, I could. So this gave me leave to eat chocolate. Yum ... one of my favourite pastimes!

Can you believe it, a doctor telling me to eat chocolate bars! Well, I did just that but, not surprisingly, my eyes were still not right so I returned to the doctor, as requested, when there had been no improvement and I was sent to an Eye Out-Patients at the local hospital where I was to see a specialist. They called to make me an appointment but no-one at the hospital could see me, they were too busy.

Following the non-appointment, I returned to work and it was just about the most hectic day there. But deadlines were deadlines. I told my colleague, Shirley, what had happened and she went immediately to the Personnel Department and arranged for me to see the Company doctor straight away. So off I went again. As luck would have it, he had specialised in neurology. He was the first one to see from looking at my eyes that something was seriously wrong.

I think, in order not to worry me, he didn't tell me everything he surmised and told me to get a taxi and go directly to Accident and Emergency at St Bart's Hospital and to take with me this letter he had written. I was to stay there until I was seen. He told me to expect a long wait. It was!

After numerous probing questions I found myself being taken to have a CAT scan for my head. I didn't know what this was or what it was for really. The nurse got me into a wheelchair. I was thinking, why do I need a wheelchair? Regardless, I played patient and remember complimenting her and remarked that "This is really good service." It was then midnight and I remember thinking how great it was that they were still doing scans at that time of night. The nurse told me that they didn't usually do this and they had put the scanner into operation especially for me. They only ever did this for severe car accidents, and usually the patient isn't conscious, so this was quite unusual. All I could think was, "So what am I doing here then?"

They put me in the scanner. I had only seen equipment like this on TV, when they were doing a documentary on cancer patients. I felt sure that I didn't have that. I only had a few flashing lights now and again, no pain or anything but of course, this thought had raced through my mind, momentarily.

I told myself not to be silly and to stop being a hypochondriac.

We got back to the Outpatients, where I followed the doctors down the corridor, as they were going to discuss my scan with two other doctors. They huddled together and spoke softly. I couldn't hear what they were saying and it dawned on me that maybe they didn't want me there. I said, "Shall I sit over there?" pointing to my outpatient curtained cubical. They looked horrified that I was behind them. They hadn't realized that I was there. I felt pretty furious that they were not involving me in their discussion; it was my head they were talking about, after all!

It was 2.00-am at that point and they suggested I stayed in the hospital for the night, rather than go home. I lived over the other side of London and the Tubes had stopped at that hour anyway. They found me a bed

straight away. “Funny,” I thought. “Maybe the Conservatives had been right and we don't have a problem with bed shortages in the NHS after all.”

A GLOOMY NIGHT

I arrived at my abode for the night. I didn't have a tooth brush with me, of course, and they had run out but they did give me a lovely flowery, nylon nightie with a slit up the back of it. As I lay in my bed I pondered over what had happened. It was dark and all the other patients were sleeping and snoring except one young woman. She was about my age and was watching TV with headphones on. She came over and asked why I was here. All I could say was that I'd been told I had something wrong with my head but I don't know what. I suspected something was not right: an available bed, the scanner being opened especially at midnight and their readiness to help me out by having me stay there overnight. I didn't want to wake any of the other patients so I went into a rather smelly toilet to cry my eyes out. It wasn't until the next morning that I found out I'd gone to the men's toilets by mistake!

After little sleep, I was desperate to phone my mum and tell her where I was. She lived in the West Midlands where I had grown-up. I asked a nurse to wheel the portable phone over. She suggested that I leave it a little while longer. It was only 5.30 am. I did, I waited impatiently until 6.30 am. My parents are the sort who were always up early, making cups of tea, and saying their morning prayers.



My sister Antonia (my family call her Toe) happened to be staying for the weekend at our parents' so she and my mother hot-footed it down to London straight away. I was so delighted when they appeared. My sister came rushing up and we held onto each other as if we were clams. I guess she suspected the worst but couldn't say it.

It was a Friday night when I was admitted and the specialists don't work at the weekend, so I had to wait until Monday for news on my scans.

“I could have gone home for the weekend after all, unless they were afraid that something dreadful would happen to me.”

THE RESULTS

When they arrived, the medical results showed I had hydrocephalus, a condition that children usually get. It is more commonly known as 'water on the brain'. This is when there is a build up of fluid in your head due to a tube in your head narrowing or some sort of blockage, a tumour perhaps. Either way, I was to have brain surgery. A shunt, a tube running from my brain to my intestines, would be inserted, to drain away the cerebral fluid that usually flowed around my brain freely.

The prospect of brain surgery sounded scary but I was reassured that this was a relatively easy neurological operation so it didn't alarm me too much. It seemed like an easy solution - one tube doesn't work, so you put another in to do the job instead - easy. The operation took place as soon as possible. No waiting list for me, even though I'd been told it wasn't all that urgent. I was told later that I could have lost my eyesight if I had waited any longer.

THE OPERATION

To perform this operation they were going to have to shave a small channel of my hair off, from over my ear but this was only going to be about an inch wide and it would grow back. Initially, I wondered what all the fuss was about but I was to find out later.

The next day, after the operation, the same doctor came up to see me and said he had a confession to make, that they had had to shave half of my hair off. This was the least of my worries. What choice did I really have? OK, I'd lost half my hair to have an operation but the alternative could have been massively worse, even fatal.

As luck would have it, my hair was thick and shoulder length, so I successfully hid my baldness by parting the side of head that had hair and pulling it over to the other side; a sort of Bobby Charlton style. This, coupled with wide headscarves, solved any embarrassment.

I was surprised at my concern over my hair. I don't consider myself to be particularly self-conscious but a trip, later to the hairdresser, proved me to be wrong. About six months after all this, my hair had grown a few inches and I went to see if they could even it up a bit and get some sort of style out of it. I thought of myself as quite a confident person. I'm not one to just agree that a horrific hair cut is fine to the hairdresser. I sat there and I had to unwind my headscarf and reveal my secret and looking in the mirror with one side of my hair long, the other short. I was so embarrassed I just felt so exposed. My face went really red, my voice went all croaky. I told myself that this was ridiculous, that she was just a hairdresser that I'd never meet or see again. So what was my problem?

Prior to this, whilst in hospital after my operation, the wig man visited me. I didn't expect him. He just turned up beside my hospital bed, with a brown suitcase, full of wigs. I was asked if I wanted to try some on. There were some long blond curly ones, some short grey curly ones, some red, some black; all he could stuff inside a small case. I could choose any of these or chose one from a picture he'd brought with him. I really was not bothered with them and somewhat embarrassed by it. Had it not been for my persistent mother, who was visiting at the time, I would have sent him and his bag, packing. She convinced me that I may want one at a later date and anyway, why not have one, they were free. So I decided not to go for a colour change or a curl or even a different length. I chose the very same style and colour I had had pre-operation, a dark brown pageboy bob, as I liked my hair that way.

So I became a wig owner but my pride would not allow me to wear it and I stuck to my scarves but the wig did serve to be very therapeutic, in a different way. I got people I thought would never try it on to wear it: my dad, my brother in law and even my 88 year old grandmother who, to our amusement, looked like the woman from the Planet of the Apes! It is astonishing what people will do if you are ill. We all had so much fun with it. Everyone was up for a laugh.

As the news about me being in hospital spread, I had more and more visitors. It was just great to have so many. I was told at one point that I had to go to a separate side room with my visitors, as there were too many of them and we were making too much noise, I guess.

I had thirteen different visitors at the same time at one point - It was great, just like a big reunion. I loved it because I'd thought of myself more as an only child because, although I had six brothers and sisters. I was the baby and the age gap between my next sibling and myself was nearly seven years. They started to leave home when I was around six and by the age of thirteen I was on my own. Two of my sisters had emigrated to South Africa and one had gone with her husband to America. Also, I'd been sent to a private school on the other side the city and as I'd gone to a school that was not local to where we lived, my friends lived all over the West Midlands. This meant I rarely saw them outside school. I was conscious of people calling me names like "posh!" or "spoilt!" because of the school I'd been sent to. I was lacking in self-confidence but when I went to Polytechnic, I came out of my shell and made many good friends. Later on, when I became ill, it was so important for me to have their support. It was a shame that it had to be under these circumstances.

During that first weekend at hospital, I had so many phone calls too. My sisters abroad were concerned for me and would call me from South Africa and America. I'd barely start a conversation with a visitor and the ward phone would ring for me.

Late one night, after what became three weeks in hospital I counted that I had had over fifty different visitors, many of whom came more than once. One friend, Dominic, who worked nearby, visited three times a day; once before work, in his dinner hour and then after work. Being in hospital was so dismal it was lovely to get regular visits throughout the day. You find that some people just shine through in these situations. People, who you wouldn't expect to visit arrived and expressed such unconditional positive regard for me and my health, I will always be grateful to those people who came to see me then.

While I recovered from my operation the doctors told me, with absolute certainty, that I did not have a tumour. Nothing had shown up on their scanners to lead them to say I had. One of the tubes in my head must have just narrowed, by itself, for no known reason.

I was shocked. I didn't know they were looking for a tumour. I told my dad and he seem very relieved. I was shocked again. Had he also thought I might have a tumour too?? To everybody's relief, it had all just been a peculiar quirk of nature: - my tubes had narrowed. After recuperation at my parents' house, I was eager to return to my usual life in London and returned to my job.

At this point, my hair had not grown back properly and so I had to continue to wear my headscarf. This did not match their corporate image at all. Although they didn't insist on me wearing a grey shoulder-padded suit, I did feel they weren't too happy about what I think they felt was a hippy, headscarf! I had no hair but I did have a contract. But this was to run out shortly and they offered me a new one - for one month. Yes, one month!

I suppose they didn't want to be stuck with me if I got ill again. I resumed work, and I was doing my best, which they had deemed to be good enough before, as they had made me a job offer. Since I had been away there seemed to have been many changes going on within the department and it just seemed like I couldn't keep up. Nothing was explained to me. They just expected me to know it all without explaining anything to me. Mistakes were being made and I seemed to be the one they put the blame on. This didn't seem fair and they got impatient with me when I asked questions, or referred telephone calls to them regarding queries that they felt I should know about - even though I had never been told. On reflection, I can now appreciate that I may have been told but my memory couldn't retain it.

The worst error I made was when a workshop for 80 or so teachers had been arranged. Amongst other things, I was to make sure all the files and papers for each participant to receive, were sent to the required locations. These would be vital to the day's workshop. On this particular occasion, I arranged that the correct number of boxes of files were sent to a planned venue but I heard a week or so later that I had sent the

wrong set of files to the workshop. My boss was on his own in the office whilst I and the other administrative staff were away helping at conferences. He had to spend all morning ringing round to double check if they had taken the wrong boxes only to find that this was not the case and they had taken the ones I had told them to transport. Chasing all this up would have taken him all morning; it had to be sorted immediately and he was the only one there to do it. What a pickle he must have been in. Eighty rather agitated teachers who had come from all over the country and taken days off work, waiting for their workshop files. My boss must thought I had done it on purpose, especially as the timing was so right, him being in the office all by himself was an unusual event. I had felt angry with my employee about only being given a month's contract, although, of course, I had said nothing. I couldn't have planned a better revenge if I had tried! But I hadn't. The outcome was that they took me aside, pointed out to me that I wasn't as sharp as I used to be and that they would not be renewing my contract.

By now my debts had been paid and I would get my month's salary when I left work. So I decided to make something positive out of the situation - make it into a blessing in disguise. Rather than look for another job straight off, I would go travelling first, something I'd always wanted to do but had never had enough money. I decided that I would work as I travelled.

I chose to go to a Kibbutz, something I had heard about only briefly. It would be perfect. I could work in a socialist environment where everyone did everything and where there are no hierarchies. Why not live there for a while, rather than here? I could see some of the country, meet some fellow Kibbutznicks and travel to Egypt and Jordan; see the Pyramids, travel on the Nile; go to the Pink City in Jordan, across the desert on a camel. "So yes," I thought, "that is what I shall do."

MY SPONTANEOUS ADVENTURE

OK, maybe living in a kibbutz is hardly a socialist statement but it was as near as I felt I could make it. I booked it up, leased my room in London, and stored all my belongings. I even learned a few words of Hebrew. I packed my borrowed rucksack and stayed at my friend's flat the day before I left. Sue, my friend,

was at work and I had a day to spare but that morning I got out of the bath and felt dizzy. I could see flashing lights! Alarm bells went off. "Is my shunt working properly?" I had been told it could fail on me. The doctor had likened it to a car: some last for years without any trouble, others always seem to be going wrong.

I panicked. What if I went to Israel regardless and I got worse? Do they have the same kind of shunt there as they do here? I had a special type, one where the valve in my head could be changed from the outside with a magnetic device to let fluid flow around my head at the correct setting. Clever, but did they have the correct, up-to-date equipment in Israel? I didn't want an emergency operation all those miles away, in a strange country. I phoned the hydrocephalus help-line and they put me in contact with one of the doctors who worked for them and often did special talks on hydrocephalus. He suggested that I be cautious and stay in the UK. I was also told that I might also get too hot working in such a country and get dehydrated, not something a person with hydrocephalus should ever risk. He recommended that I should get myself checked over first.

I was not foolish. I was having dizzy spells and a doctor's advising me to stay, so I did. I phoned the Kibbutz agent and cancelled.

I cried and cried in disappointment. This was to have been my big adventure and all my hopes and wishes had been dashed with that one call. That evening, I had planned to meet a crowd of my friends in a pub, who were sending me off. I just couldn't make it. I was too sad. One of my close friends then came round with the presents people had bought me to go off with. How lovely, but oh, how sad did I feel. So I was left jobless, homeless, with only a rucksack full of clothes, my dreams broken, my boyfriend, of two years had recently broken up with me and this looming fear that there might be something going wrong in my head again.

I had contacted the hospital to tell them of my concerns. They took a head scan immediately and I went to get the results a few days later. The consultant said, "Been getting afraid of going to Israel have we?" in a

most patronising manner. I was furious with his reaction. I had no abnormalities on my scan and so he presumed I had made it all up. Their scanners showed nothing but I know how it feels when something in that part of my brain is out of sorts. I was relieved that the scan showed nothing but I was not satisfied with his conclusions. I knew there was something wrong and I told him not to be so patronising. I was furious.

I had lost all the money that I had spent on the planned trip to Israel, and had very little money left. My sister in America called and invited me to visit there instead. I leapt at the chance. I had never wanted to go to America. I didn't want to go anywhere 'westernised'. I wanted a complete change of culture but the American option was safe, they had a hospital nearby, and my sister had found out that they knew about my type of shunt. I decided I would go and I would leave the very next day. How great it was to say to her on the phone, "I'm coming across the Atlantic Ocean to see you for six weeks and I am coming tomorrow." I loved the impetuous nature of it all and the flexibility I had.

I had the best time. My sister Judith is thirteen years my senior. She left our family house when I was only about six years old. I'd seen her now and again, but we really didn't know each other that well. I wondered how she felt about her young sister landing upon her for, not two weeks, not three weeks but six?

We all had a great time, my sister, her husband, Syd, and my three nephews, Jonathan, Adam and Thomas. One event we did, that stands clearly in my mind, was our trip to Niagara Falls. It was nothing less than amazing! As I gazed upon the Falls, I made sure that I took it all in. I recalled the fact that I may have gone blind if I hadn't alerted the doctors of my problems.

When my holiday ended, I returned to England and moved in with some friends to busy, bustling Brixton. It was lively and energetic, humming with buskers, drunkards, flower and fruit stalls and people hounding you to give them your tube ticket, once finished with. Going through the barriers, you'd find people would run up close to you as you went through, so they too could get through the barriers with you without paying, and then hurtle down the left hand side of the escalators. The left hand of the escalators are always left empty so commuters can rush about like scalded cats and get to their destination, ooh, five minutes earlier.

So, there I was in Brixton sharing a house with my two friends I'd known from Polytechnic and one other friend of theirs. I got a new job at an Art and Design college. I was to arrange short and evening art courses. This was OK, a little boring though, as there didn't seem to be too many people doing evening courses in art and design at the time. Some days I had one booking to administer all day. I'd fill my days with watering the potted plants. Meanwhile, my hair had grown a little so I could dispense with the headscarves. I could turn my head and let my hair swing from one side to another - a favoured movement I had on the dance floor. I loved to go out dancing. It was at my favourite club that I met Allan.

One particular night a guy – Allan - had caught my eye, we danced and then we kissed. At the very same moment, my friend, Sue, had also met someone. At the end of the night, we exchanged phone numbers. I didn't want any of this "I'll phone you" and then you're left waiting for the phone to ring and when they don't call back, periodically checking whether the phone is working or not. No, I would have his number too, should I decide to contact him again.

He called me the very next day and we'd meet regularly to go a comedy club, or see the latest films on the big screens in Piccadilly Circus and then to China Town to a Chinese restaurant. Our relationship developed and I was very happy but sometimes strange symptoms were happening. They didn't worry me but, looking back, they were signs that something was wrong.

For example, my memory seemed to let me down more and more frequently. It was early on in our relationship, I was cooking tea and Allan turned up at my door at about 6.30pm after work. "How lovely" I thought, what a surprise and I asked him what he was doing here. Apparently, I'd asked him to dinner! I'd totally forgotten! A mistake anyone could make but I made it more than once and not just with Allan. Previously, my friend phoned and asked, "Where are you?" I was half an hour late for her dinner. I didn't think, "Oh God! I forgot!" or "Oops, my mistake." I simply denied making any such plans.

I discovered that if you have a real memory problem, then you don't remember you have a memory problem! Things don't come back in a flash. I'd have to discuss the matter for ten or so minutes before I

could maybe recall any such conversation. It's not like forgetting where you have put your glasses or keys. As far as I was concerned that arrangement had not been made!

Gradually, as good friends and family pointed my problem out, I'd simply had to reconsider my situation; "Why would so many beloved dear friends and family be so awkward about things?" I began to think this was something more sinister. I took to writing everything down, every date and arrangement.

My friends were very patient but work was not. My manager would get frustrated with me forgetting to give her important messages and memos. I was left feeling very stupid and incapable. They simply didn't understand that I wasn't a dizzy and disorganized young woman. It wasn't fair, because this simply wasn't me - except it was!

Around this time I had intermittent consultations with the neurologist and neurosurgeons. On one particular occasion, I went alone to see my neurosurgeons because I had gone completely do-lally after having a bit too much to drink. I had been wary about having too much alcohol, as I knew it affected your brain. I was particularly worried it would affect my shunt and was told by a neurosurgeon to take it easy, only one glass now and again if I wanted but on another occasion I was told by another that there shouldn't be any additional danger in having a few drinks. I tried it out; I had a few more than I would normally since my operation but a whole lot less than I would have previously.

On this occasion, I went out dancing and had a drink or two but I remembered very little of the next three days. I was told I was sick all over Sue's bedroom carpet, and had slept and slept, so that she could hardly wake me and she was concerned about getting to work the following day.

I recall being told that I had problems waking. If I was tired, nothing and nobody could wake me. The lads in my house told me I fell asleep on my sofa once and they tried to waken me, pushed the sofa around the room and shouted at me but to no avail.

Sue had managed to put me in a taxi and phoned my housemates to warn them of my arrival. On my way home, I apparently stopped off at a cash point to get some money to pay the driver. I could swear that this did not happen but later I found I had a receipt for it in my coat pocket. Apparently, I was also sick in the taxi. This was a whole 24 hours after drinking and I really hadn't had that much to drink.

Hearing about this my sister called my flat mate and urged him to take me to Casualty. We were in the taxi going there and he told me that I kept asking the same questions over and over again. "So, where are we going then? What time is it?" I got to Casualty and we waited there for hours and hours. Apparently, Allan too had been redirected from my house to hospital when we had planned to meet. He had told me I was lying on a stretcher, being asked the very easy questions that nurses ask patients, to test their awareness. "What's your name?", "Where are you?" and "Who is the Prime Minister?"

I got none of these correct.

These kinds of errors happened irregularly and sometimes I was fine and other times not Allan told me about this years later but, to me, everything had seemed fine. For instance, on another occasion I'd set my radio alarm clock for work for the morning and had set it to play on the loudest volume for up to an hour. I didn't hear it, which would make me late for work. My sister was getting more and more concerned and would ring me more than usual.

I felt she seemed to be the only one who recognised there was a real, possible, medical problem. I hadn't just experienced a bad hangover. She had noticed on other occasions I couldn't even answer simple questions like what day was it, etc. I was angry with her because I thought everyone forgets what day it is now and again, don't they! Previously, she had asked me for my home address, she hadn't noted it in her address book. I'd been living there for three or four months now but I couldn't remember it! I had to go outside to the front of the house and check the number on the door. This kind of thing was happening more and more. My work colleagues were astounded when I announced that I now knew my boyfriend's telephone number. I

was feeling pretty good about this new achievement. They looked at me horrified. "How long have you been seeing him now?", "Do you know our work's number?"

"No."

"Do you know the fax number?"

"Of course not."

This really upset me. I could always look it up if asked by an inquirer on the phone. I didn't need to know our fax number, or our telephone number. What a waste of energy that would be, I hardly knew my own telephone number let alone the works number!

Getting back, to the hospital, the staff, when I went to Casualty had made an appointment for me with a neurologist. My sister came over from Cardiff especially to be with me at the appointment, to put her view across, to help me remember too, and to ensure I wrote down everything I needed to tell him and ask him. She knows about these things - she is a clinical psychologist.

The neurologist listened to what we had to say, looked at his CT scan of my brain and seeing no anomalies said to me, "You are either mad, taking drugs or we have missed something."

He then told us that he would arrange for me to see a psychiatrist. I guess he thought I must be mad! My sister was furious, knowing that I was not mad and I was not taking drugs. Personally, I was just happy that something was going to be done. Tonia told him that she thought they had missed something and after we left his consultation room she urged me to contact my GP.

I did just that and some weeks later I was referred to Kings College Hospital to see a neurologist. He agreed that there was something wrong and he sent me for an MRI scan. I was also sent to see a psychologist, who confirmed that I had some damage to my left and right brain lobes; minor damage, but enough to cause memory problems.

So, I wasn't mad and I wasn't a hysterical hypochondriac young woman who created symptoms but someone with a real, physical problem!

I visited a consultant neurologist and he saw, after studying my scans, that there was a mass and as a result of my appointment in December 1995 I had a more intense, deeper scan called a gadolinium scan. This is where they inject radioactive ink into your blood to highlight if anything abnormal is going on. I was to await the results of my MRI scan.

Weeks passed. I was anxious to learn of their findings. "Had I got something awful going on in my brain or not?" I telephoned the hospital but I just couldn't get any information. When I finally got through, I was told not to bother him!

Bother him? Didn't they realise the importance of this? There was something wrong with my brain! I was advised to contact my GP. She would have the letter with my scan results. So, my neurologist did have the information. I was cross that he hadn't contacted me. I made an appointment with my GP. She found the letter amongst my huge pile of notes. She read them, as if for the first time. Hadn't she read her post before it had been filed away? Anyway, as she read her eyes widened and she looked concerned. She said that I should wait for my appointment from the hospital, but I wanted to know what the letter said NOW. I had hung about for appointments before, for too long. She seemed very reluctant to tell me what it said. I knew I could demand to see my doctor's notes and I urged her further. She said that I might need a stereotactic biopsy. I had no idea what that meant. She said that she didn't know what it was either and that she would contact my neurologist about this so come back next week, when she had done this.

There was no way that I could wait a week to find out. I had been told I might need a stereotactic biopsy. I needed to know right NOW exactly what that meant. Why couldn't she call him up right away, why wait until next week?

I had no idea what a biopsy was let alone a stereotactic biopsy was. This was before the common use of the world wide web and Google. I decided that I would telephone the neurosurgeon myself. This turned out to be problematic for a number of reasons: I worked the same hours as the neurosurgeon and I did not want to call him whilst I was at work. This was the pre-mobile phone and Internet era so I had to go and find a telephone box in my lunch hour. The neurosurgeon was never in. I left messages for him to phone me, at the Out Patients, with his secretary, at Kings College Hospital and the other Hospital, the Maudsley. Finally, he returned my call one evening when I was at home. He said that from my scan, he could see a few small tumours.

A FEW SMALL TUMOURS???? TUMOURS..... A FEW.