

WENDY GODDARD STORY

My lovely daughter Zoe was 26 years old when she was diagnosed in December 15 with stage 2b cervical cancer. We were all devastated but at this stage everything looked hopeful for a cure. Zoe went to Ipswich hospital where she had 40 radiotherapy treatments and 6 chemo treatments. Everyone along the journey; the consultants, nurses and doctors did everything they could.

It was good news in May 16 when we were told the cancer had gone. We were over the moon and so relieved. Sadly this was short lived. In June 16 she was poorly and we were told the cancer had come back. It was too quick and she'd had all the treatment she could.

We went home and tried to make sense of what had happened. In July she became very poorly and had a massive haemorrhage. We went to A&E and Zoe lost over 5 pints of blood. We nearly lost her that night. I was so scared but she pulled through. After this episode she developed a lung complaint called Trali. It is brought on by being given blood too quickly. It couldn't have been helped, she needed the blood and it saved her but now she had cancer and Trali to deal with. By now her immune system was so low and she was very poorly and had to rely on oxygen.

She could have gone to Somersham Ward but she didn't want to be stuck in the hospital. Zoe had spent so much time in critical care and having chemo and radiotherapy treatments and it just felt really oppressive for her. In the hospital I slept on the floor in her room, it was uncomfortable and noisy. Someone had broken the Z bed and they didn't have another one. Gardens and open space were really important for Zoe and she wanted to be around younger people. Somebody told us that the Hospice was all on one level and had a beautiful garden. On that basis alone Zoe chose to come to the Hospice. It turned out to be so much more than that.

Zoe was a young person and having her independence and freedom was very important to her. The thought of being able to sit in the sunshine in the garden and move around all on one level rather than being 5 floors up was wonderful.

At the hospice she had lovely big room; she thought it was the best room and opened right out on to the garden. My husband Kevin and I were able to stay all day and even overnight if we wanted to. I made the decision I wasn't going to leave Zoe, she was my little girl and I would spend every possible minute with her I could. I slept by her side and in the daytime we'd push her bed outside in the fresh air and listen to the sounds of the pond. The hospice gave Zoe oxygen via a canister so she could walk around with. It made an enormous difference to her. Suddenly she was able to choose to walk around the garden, walk around her room and have some independence.

The weather was warm and sunny and we spent a lot of time in the garden with nature in the calm and quiet. Dr Jonathan helped Zoe to get outside herself, he organised an extra-long hose so she could walk around. One day it went wrong and she had to temporarily have the short one back on and she was devastated. It was only a short period but really affected her. Being young she was so determined and wanted freedom.

The consultants and doctors you see here are excellent. You see the same one every day, you get a good relationship and they have time for you, you never feel they are rushing you.

Zoe knew she was dying and as time passed she was determined she wanted to return home one final time. The hospice arranged 4 canisters of oxygen and put in place everything she needed to go home. The hospital just wouldn't have been able to do that. It was such a special and emotional day. When it was time to leave for the last time it was incredibly emotional, she shut the front door and said goodbye. She was so brave. Before we returned to the Hospice she said she had one more thing to do, and she went to see her grandad. He is very poorly with heart failure and was unable to get to the hospice to see her. They were able to say

their goodbyes and that meant the world to both of them. We were overwhelmed the hospice was able to facilitate this. This was a big thing and we have such special memories of that time.

Zoe had physio therapy in her room at the Hospice, she wanted to keep moving around even though she was poorly, and on so many drugs, she wanted to keep active and do small things. At the hospital they tried to stop this and she felt stifled. The Hospice team encouraged her to do the things she wanted to and were so supportive.

For me, it gave me time to be a mum to Zoe without worrying about everyday stuff like washing up and cooking meals. It was a very special time at the hospice. We lay together and talked about all sorts. In the night, there was always someone to talk to as well; I found night times were very frightening especially when Zoe had gone to sleep. At night my emotions would come out then, it was the time I had to let go as I knew I had to protect her when she was awake and be strong for her. I was grateful then for a kind ear from the nurses, a shoulder to cry on and just someone to listen.

We all have special memories of Zoe; she always wanted to help others. As a little girl aged no more than 6 there was a local girl in the paper who needed help fundraising for treatment. Zoe went and knocked on the door and donated her £2.50 pocket money. She did quite well out of it as her Nan and grandad heard about it and they have her more money, she ended up with more than she started! That was Zoe though, kind and always giving to others. The girls mum said that was so touching and Zoe and the girls mum kept in touch, although the little girl sadly died a couple of years later. Zoe would always try and turn a bad situation around, she was hugely positive.

The biggest difference the hospice made was having Zoe with us and the special time to be together in a calm, unrushed, homely environment. Zoe was very scared, her anxiety levels were very high and the doctors helped us to calm her down and feel safe again. With the help of the Hospice she took every day in her stride, made the most of it, she was so brave.

I think if we'd have been at home with just each other it would have been awful. We appreciated a whole team around us, nurses, doctors, cleaners, whoever – just normal conversations. Help with washing, making tea – just allowing us the luxury of time to be together. Everyone is so special. Zoe felt safe here, we all felt safe here. They cooked her chicken nuggets or whatever she wanted. Or ordered pizzas in when she fancied it. It was these small things that helped so much, Zoe especially enjoyed a soak in the large Jacuzzi bath at the hospice with all the lights off and listening to music.

Zoe was a huge Peter Andre fan and previously had tickets to see him perform in March on her 27th birthday. Unfortunately she was mid treatment and simply too poorly to go. Then we heard he was coming to Ipswich for a book signing in September so I approached the East Anglian Daily Times and they contacted his team. Initially his PA said no they were on a tight schedule. However, Peter was away at the time, but when he came back he said he would definitely make time to see her. I found out that Zoe had been contacting him on twitter when she was receiving treatment and he had sent messages wishing her well.

The day he came to visit was just amazing. Right up to the day before we weren't sure if it was going to happen. We didn't tell Zoe as we wanted to surprise her. That morning I helped Zoe do her hair, she was usually so particular about it, but that day she said I'm having a scruffy look today! I was trying to encourage her to do it like she usually did knowing what was coming! It was incredible when he came; it was so special for Zoe. Her face lit up and there were tears all around. We had lots of pr from it; the newspapers were interested locally and nationally. It was great to get such a good response and get people hearing about Zoe and the Hospice. She was so pleased and so was I.

After the high of Peter's visit Zoe went downhill very quickly and she only lasted another 2 weeks.

In that time, in true Zoe style, she chose to spend it focusing on my birthday and making it special for me. I was thrilled when she bought me a miniature schnauzer puppy as my birthday present. He's very mischievous and so was Zoe, so it's a good reminder of her and he makes me smile which I need.

Three days after she gave me the puppy she went downhill very quickly and sadly passed away aged 27 with me by her side. Funnily enough Zoe was born the same year the Hospice first opened. The things the hospice did were so important to us. They gave us time, being comfortable, it was just brilliant; there was help here if we needed it but I wanted to do a lot myself. She was my little girl, although she was grown up. Absolutely nothing was too much trouble, the food brilliant, whatever you fancied. We were so lucky to have got a bed in the Hospice and benefited from their care. It is such a shame more people aren't able to experience it. More beds are needed but I have mixed feelings, as I wouldn't want the hospice to lose its personal and intimate feel. But definitely more people need help.

One of the most important and valuable things to me that the Hospice helped with is giving me the time and space to think about what I needed to do after Zoe had gone. I gave her the best send-off possible. I designed her coffin myself one night at the Hospice while Zoe was asleep. It was a rolling blue cloud, with a rainbow above and a swooping dove and loads of butterflies and it wasn't a standard coffin shape. It helped me and others to look at something bright and beautiful, like Zoe was. We also had a horse and carriage and so many people came including the East Anglian Daily Times.

Zoe left behind so many different things for people. Her best friend was having a baby and one day we went to shop and she brought a baby girl congratulations card which she asked me to pass on to her. At Zoe's funeral I asked the friend how long she had left until the little girl was due and she said "I don't know I'm having a girl I haven't found out". Sure enough she had a baby girl, Zoe must have known!

It was very special for Zoe to do things for people to enjoy when she'd gone. Her cousin Jessie had asked Zoe to be a chief bridesmaid next year, but Zoe knew she wouldn't be here for that so she threw herself in to planning the things she could. Zoe picked the bridesmaid dresses, a beautiful country pink colour that she loved. She helped Jessie make decisions about nails and hair.

When it came to the funeral we dressed Zoe in her bridesmaid dress and did her hair and nails how she wanted them so she was right ready to go to the wedding. It was lovely. People might not think that's important but it really was to her and us.

Zoe said to me, when the time comes that she wanted to be buried with her mobile phone so she can call me every day. That has stayed with me; it was so emotional when she said that. I made sure she had all her wishes met. I think it is important you know what they want and do whatever you can. I have no regrets, I did everything I wanted to do and am confident Zoe had the best care and the best send off.

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