

Christmas 2015

The family Christmas day lunch at McEntee Road was a very special event for me this year. Whether I make it to Christmas 2016 or not, this will be the last Christmas day lunch at home. My third son is doing major extensions to his little house and plans to host next year's Christmas at his place just round the corner. And I hope to be there.

My children and ex-husband organised all the food and what a magnificent feast it was. I was starting to feel better post-chemo earlier this time round which meant I was able to eat a reasonable meal. The grandchildren opened their presents, bounced on the trampoline and finally got out the water guns for what was this year a very restrained water fight. Christmas day water fights are a tradition at McEntee Road and usually end with the children and young adults absolutely drenched due to the fact that some of the adults get carried away and end up racing around with buckets of water!

My new wig got favourable comments, the sun eventually came to the party and we sat out on the deck enjoying its warmth and sight of the grandchildren playing their games on the trampoline. Later in the afternoon my nephew and niece and family popped in for a visit.

It was however tinged with that bitter sweet feeling, as I wondered if my youngest grandchildren will remember me and Christmas days at Grandma's house. Missing out on seeing them grow up is my biggest regret around what is happening to me.

And I still can't look at myself in the mirror without my wig on.

Tomorrow I am off to Pukehina beach for a week.

The new me

Yesterday, my friend arrived to take me to have my hair shaved off. It was now time to face this next hurdle. On the short drive to the hairdresser, while sitting in the passenger seat, hairs were literally leaping off my head in droves so that by the time we arrived I was covered in hair.

I explained to the young woman at the Sharing Shed in Westgate that I had started chemotherapy and my hair was now falling out. I had bought my wig with me and I wanted her to completely shave my head. I sat in the chair and took a last look at myself in the mirror, trying to hold back the tears. Once she started I closed my eyes and kept them tightly shut until she had finished. My friend reassured me several times, telling me I had a beautiful head. But when I finally opened my eyes I did not recognise the old woman looking back at me in the mirror.

The hairdresser then put my wig on and gently started arranging the artificial hair while I struggled to get used to the person in the mirror. When she had finished, I tearfully thanked her. I went to the counter to pay the bill, but she would not take my money, and instead gave me a big hug. My friend then went and did a little shopping and while she shopped I walked around trying to see if anyone was looking at me funny. But nobody seemed to notice that I had a wig on. I slowly started to relax. Another milestone achieved.

However, this morning I found that I can't cope with looking in the mirror unless I have my wig on.

Goodbye hair

Over the past two days my hair has started falling out. Although I knew this was about to happen around about now, it is still very disconcerting seeing big clumps of my hair in my comb, and then peering in the mirror to see how it looks and if it is obvious yet.

A couple of weeks ago I went to the wig shop accompanied by a close friend and my daughter, and I ended up buying two wigs. That is so me – when in doubt buy both! So I am prepared for this event. I also decided several weeks ago that I would shave my head before my hair got too sparse. I think this week I will take the plunge, have the rest of my hair removed and start wearing one of my wigs.

Here's to the new me!

Second chemotherapy marathon completed

My third son picked me up and dropped me off at Auckland hospital in what is already feeling like a routine. This time the room was empty and I had my pick of the seven seats. The day progressed much the same as the first session, except that now I knew what was coming. As the others arrived, I found that a couple of them were much more chatty than the group I was with the first time. It was good to compare notes even though none of them had pancreatic cancer.

A friend arrived around 11am with a big smile and a bunch of flowers. I felt really special. We talked about the article I had written in the December issue of the Auckland Women's Health Council newsletter on the media stories about Keytruda, Herceptin and PHARMAC and about other related issues, including death.

It is so good to have friends who are okay and willing to talk about these things with me. And to have children who also talk about it with me and contribute their ideas. I am such a fortunate woman to have been blessed with such wonderful family and friends who are willing to share this journey with me so openly and supportively.

My eldest son arrived just before noon with a wonderful nutritious lunch and I ate well – by my standards. After my friend and my son had left, I fell asleep around 2.30pm just as I did last time. When I awoke nearly an hour later, I felt the familiar chemical taste in my mouth, and my body felt as though it had once again gone into shock.

My third son arrived just after 4pm and took me home. This time I know what the next two weeks will be like and I am prepared. I can do this.

[The chemo dance](#)

I woke this morning feeling much better. Isn't that just the way? The day of your appointment with the doctor arrives and you realise that you are feeling much better. And today I am definitely starting to feel a bit more like my old self.

My eldest son listened as I moaned to Dr S about how bad I felt last week and described all my symptoms. Dr S asked about

other symptoms such as nausea, mouth ulcers, blisters on hands and feet, etc, none of which I had. Then he explained that I can expect to have a bad week following my chemo marathons and then expect to start feeling better the second week.

So the chemo dance for me goes something like this. I get flooded with toxic drugs, my body goes into shock for a day or two afterwards, I spend the next week slowly losing the will to live, then five or six days before the next chemo marathon I start feeling much better, and want more time.

Off we went to the hospital pharmacy for more drugs, and bottles and bottles of liquid paracetamol. I had asked Dr S for a prescription for liquid paracetamol since I was having such a hard time swallowing pills.

So today I can face the chemo dance.