



Herefordshire Disability United Network News

Autumn 2020

Fighting Covid



We welcome articles from individuals and organisations to promote their stories or interests.
Please contact the Editor..... details on the back page.

Editorial:

Let's be optimistic shall we, and look for the best and positive to come from our enforced view of life since 23rd March 2020!

I'm sure this sounds like the old "Monty Python" songAlways look at the bright side of life, but I will try and find some things or stories to make you smile. Hopefully they will be relevant and reverent but I can't guarantee that as we all have a different outlook on life. You will see what I mean on pages 18/19. I know I have an offbeat sense of humour on occasions, so please bear with me as my quirky nature has stood me in good stead over the years.

Firstly, I must be serious though.

On the opposite page is a reference to the Samaritans, whom we have worked with in Herefordshire over the past five years. Perhaps I should correct that statement, HDU has worked alongside Patricia and Henry Howland, who came and spoke of their work on in March 2020.

Since that meeting the husband and wife duo attended many HDU events, and also became known in other social care fields in this county. Their compassion for those in need of comfort and understanding in the field of mental health was always uppermost in the minds, as they took roster slots at the Herefordshire Samaritans centre.

Henry also joined the Mental Health Partnership Board at Hereford Council to interact with other professionals and gain insight and access to other members' roles. It is news of Henry that I now bring.

During the summer of 2020, unfortunately Henry became unwell, (not the virus), and after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer passed away in August. We would like to send condolences to Henry's wife Patricia as she deals with the aftermath of his untimely death. I am aware Patricia will continue with the Samaritans when she feels able to return. We will remember Henry for his calm quiet manner and understanding.

Since March lockdown the HDU committee have kept in touch via phone/ email/ Messenger/ Facebook etc and occasionally phone call. Not once have we felt the need to Zoom, and left that aspect to others who wished to entertain, exercise, run quizzes, sing or make fools of themselves for the benefit of making others laugh!

In fact laughter is what we all need, with a mask on if necessary, to lighten what has become a dire year. I think pets have got the right approach; eat, sleep, nudge for a cuddle and then repeat. So many humans have taken comfort from them and this has been a great benefit. Without a pet, its back to YouTube for some giggles as cats/ dogs and even larger animals entertain us. Long may this continue.

Stories/ news from individuals of the HDU committee can be found on the following pages. I hope you enjoy them.

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somebody now?



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Herefordshire Disability United (HDU) is an organisation that has developed to voice the concerns of disabled people, and to provide a platform where disability issues can be raised and policies developed.

HDU is run by people with disabilities for people with disabilities. It was started in January 2011, and has grown to be an acknowledged organisation representing service users, and their families fighting for a better future and understanding.

HDU take part in consultations to highlight issues that affect persons with disabilities.

Our networking is effective with representation via public sector officialdom, providers and the third sector, local and national businesses to improve their practices and policies.

We are a democratic, non sectarian, non party political organisation, stimulating discussion to improve outcomes for disabled people.

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Herefordshire Disability United welcomes any feedback on Network News, or any of the services it provides.

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The views expressed in Network News are not necessarily those of Herefordshire Disability United.

Barbara's fun with textiles



I had great fun with online learning and what's more it was all free. Before the Lockdown I had been going to "Artspace" in Cinderford for a silk screen printing course and was really loving it so when I couldn't go any more I felt deprived of my creative outlet and signed up to an online course.

The art courses were all full but there was space on the "Textiles in the summer" course so, knowing nothing about it and not having done any textiles before, I signed up.

Just before the course commenced, a bag of pieces of material and paper, a pot of red paint, an exercise book with plain pages, some baking parchment and even a bit of foam, some corrugated cardboard, thread etc and a plastic needle (just why would you use a plastic needle?)....were delivered to me by a lady who left it outside my door.

OK, so what was it all for? I used to watch Blue Peter with my children and wondered if we would be making something like that. Oh!... Had I made a big mistake and should I be keeping my toilet roll cardboard and egg boxes?

Week one arrived and after having a few challenges to get online with the Zoom conference call, I'm of the age that does not "do" techy stuff, we were introduced to the course. "We" were a mixed bunch, some like me with a disability but nobody let that get in the way, we just found ways around them. Older ladies, and a brave gentleman, a lovely guy with a learning disability, a young lady with other problems including some spasticity and a boy with his mum.

It turned out to be so different from what I had thought. The 2 tutors were able to give everybody the attention and help they needed which I thought was remarkable in itself considering that they had never done any distance learning courses before. The young lad and the guy with the learning disability did some amazing original work and I thought the standard overall was very high.

We drew flowers and were shown how to make printing blocks from the foam stuck onto the cardboard. The paint was special textile paint and the first week we made simple designs printed onto the fabric. FANTASTIC!!!! We learned how to laminate the designs and stick them onto fabric and embellish them with embroidery etc.



Being creative

I even tried sticking a design of gold-fish onto a small canvas and embroidering the pond weed etc. (It didn't go quite to plan and it is not yet finished) but I have lots of ideas that I can put into practice over the winter.

Large red and yellow double daisies were the inspiration for more designs and a very successful one was a passion flower that I embroidered on top of the petals.



I loved the course and was sorry when the 6 weeks were up but I have been lucky enough to get booked in on a "Textures in the Landscape" course for November.

If you get the chance to go on an online learning course just have a go at whatever it is, you are sure to have some fun and remember that however old you are, your mind is much more elastic than your knickers!

Barbara Millman. September 2020,

If you'd like to find out more about the courses available at ArtSpace then checkout this link:

www.artspacecinderford.org

They also have a Facebook page too



My Little Lockdownin the main

Not everyone has an outdoor space right outside their back door - one which has always been, and remains, my happy place, my little pocket-handkerchief walled garden. The plants grew (except the kale and hollyhocks and sunflowers that were devoured by slugs!), the birds sang, the flowers smelled wonderful, the sun shone, the silence was peaceful and it was easy to be mindful.

Nor have I had a 'job' to lose. Our foster child left, as planned, to live in Birmingham when he turned 18 in August. He'll have a much better chance of making friends there, where there are fellow Eritrean refugees. And improved chances of a decent education than here in benighted Hereford, where there is no reasonable adjustment whatsoever for students have not been born speaking English. We hope to welcome a 14 year old Afghan refugee soon, and we are busy trying to ensure he will not be set up to fail because of this poor education provision. Fingers crossed.

And none of my family has been sick. Fingers crossed again. I dread trying to get hold of a GP these days and, as a phonophobe, this online Zoom existence drives me mad.

My husband has worked throughout, as a key worker in a care home. Our car was stopped once at a police checkpoint early in lockdown – the only one I ever saw – and we were waved on cheerily when he showed his ID badge. The roads were a joy to drive on for just a few weeks.

We have not seen as much of our daughter as we usually do – she has been working from home in her London house. As a theatre producer, she is lucky to be in employment still. However, her absence is a source of great sadness, and I have been suffering from secondary empty nest syndrome.

Unlocking has been very stressful. The diseased rabble (in which I include myself, of course!) is poking its nose out from under the lockdown lid with impunity. So many people seem to have no idea of or respect for social distancing. It is nice to see masks becoming a high fashion style item, but many people wear them under their noses, or under their chins, or dangling from one ear, where they do no good whatsoever.

The traffic has reverted to its usual chaos and, despite one or two feeble attempts to encourage cycling and reduce cars in town, there is no effective action to improve this. Decent public transport would help. Extinction Rebellion are doing their best ... And as for national and global politics – it all continues to drive sane people to utter despair.

I had hoped that lockdown would provide a golden opportunity NOT to resume the 'old normal', but to seize the day and start in earnest to fashion a new and better world. Oh well, ever glass half full!

Sara Siloko

Swimming again!

The main thing which I missed when lockdown struck in March was swimming!

I belong to a sports club which has its own pool and is divided into lanes where people swim, not mess about. If you timed it right, you could get a lane to yourself and swim with the freedom of a fish. That was what I did once a week, 60 lengths when my body worked automatically, and my brain could just chill, unwinding thoughts or abstractly thinking and coming up with new ideas. But from March 23rd to almost the end of July this enjoyable hobby was stopped, just like that!

Now I'm quite happy to swim in the sea, yes even in the UK, having been brought up in the south of England and spent many happy days at Brighton or Margate enjoying the sea air. In fact I'm never happier than wandering across the beach or promenade regardless of time of year getting my salty fix. It doesn't matter whether its Easter, Christmas or the summer months just that smell of salt and seaweed enables me to relax and enjoy the world all around.

BUT, living in Herefordshire it's a long way to a safe, sand beach. The nearest by public transport (I don't drive) is Barry Island which of course is in Wales. That was the next problem. We were banned from crossing the border thus preventing me from swimming, or walking along the coastal plains. Of course summer weather came early in 2020 and we enjoyed the heat of the sun way out of season when it should just have been spring.

I was deprived, but determined to not be totally denied something which I have always enjoyed. Consequently as soon as possible when travel bans were lifted I managed a mini- break. (More about that later on page 9).

However, on 25th July my sports club was able to open up with restricted use and the pool was back in use again, and for me even better conditions came with Covid rules. Patrons must book a slot on line, no more than a week in advance, and are guaranteed a lane to themselves. Just four people in the pool at a time, for either 45 minutes or an hour. On arrival at the building, temperatures are taken and we are allowed in to the changing room which has been suitably social distanced from any other patrons who might be using the gym, or spin class. Luxury!

In order to catch up with lost months, I've managed to swim twice a week instead of once, but I have to be very quick on the bookings. Nightly at 8.00 pm booking opens, and by 8.05 most slots have gone. I set my alarm at 7.56 p.m. as a reminder, and am all lined up on the I-pad ready to pounce when it ticks over to the top of the hour.

Now I am totally clean of any bugs as the chlorine is a wonderful anti-virus agent, (but I don't drink it), and know my temperature is "normal" twice a week. Something has returned to normal, at least for the moment.

Sylvie Nicholls

Notice the world around you



Travelling whilst under Covid restrictions has enabled me to see things which once were blurred by humans!

As a Londoner, (now living in Herefordshire) I travel the capital with my eyes half closed as I've "Seen it all before". But the thing is I haven't, as being used to crowds and the bumping and pushing on the streets and public transport, I go from A to B in the quickest possible time, knowing where to go and how to get there. However since passenger numbers have grown increasingly less, I can see the space between, and see the world through different eyes.

The London Underground is renowned for its adverts, usually depicting shows in the West End, but of course, there's no such productions currently, and so I have actually noticed other media intelligence instead. The tube is now sparsely populated (out of rush hour) and so my eyes have lifted to the posters either side of the underground maps, just above the seating. "Oh, that's interesting, poems on the underground". Evidently these have featured for over thirty years but this year is the first time I have ever seen them. I took out the phone and click, a memory to chase up when home again. There are many poems, but strangely the one I photographed seems most relevant during this pandemic. Do read it below, and see what you think

A Portable Paradise by Roger Robinson

And if I speak of Paradise then I'm speaking of my grandmother
who told me to carry it always on my person, concealed, so no one else would know
but me. That way they can't steal it, she'd say.

And if life puts you under pressure, trace its ridges in your pocket,
smell its piney scent on your handkerchief, hum its anthem under your breath.

And if your stresses are sustained and daily,
get yourself to an empty room - be it hotel, hostel or hovel - find a lamp and empty
your paradise onto a desk: your white sands, green hills and fresh fish.

Shine the lamp on it like the fresh hope of morning, and keep staring at it till you
sleep.

For more poems and info, see: <https://poemsontheunderground.org/>

Sylvie Nicholls

Short summer holiday



As soon as possible and I felt it was safe to do so, I took a three day break by the sea in Margate, Kent (where I used to live). I don't drive so it had to be by public transport. This involved train travel from Gloucester to Paddington, tube across to St Pancras, and a further train to Margate. This takes around 5– 6 hours wearing a mask, but the outcome was just what I needed; freedom and the sea!

I was staying at a Premier Inn opposite the beach, and could just pop across the road and go into the sea. Being July, the weather was warm enough for me, and the beach was empty.

Once booked into your room there isn't any housekeeping until you leave a few days later. That suited me well. I would pop on my swimming costume, throw an easy dress over the top, and go to the beach for a swim and relax. Afterwards, the dress went back over the soggy swimsuit, I crossed the road into the hotel and popped into the shower to clean off the salt water. This became a daily routine along with walking miles along the promenade to another bay and enjoying the view and fresh air.

Whenever I go away, I cram in plenty and this time was no different. Taking the expected precautions, I spent the first afternoon visiting old neighbours, sitting in their garden drinking tea, and catching up. The following morning, seated at an outside café, I caught up with a previous work colleague who had recently retired. Later that evening was spent with refreshments and a teacher friend after she had completed her virtual lessons educating teenagers in computer science.

I couldn't leave the area without popping over to Ramsgate (three miles away) which is where my grandmother was born in 1891. The house still stands on a prominent corner above the cliff tops. In fact this is my mission each time I go to Thanet, to check on whether it is still standing or not.

Many of the houses in this street have been taken down and new put in their place, but just two remain of the original homes. Number 34 being one as you can see in this photo.

My Gran was one of 9 children who was born and lived in this house. Its so hard to imagine. But I'm sure the location is one strong reason why I love the seaside. I've spent many happy holidays as a child staying with my great aunt and uncle just up the road from this house. Even Christmases were a walk along the front with the cold east winds blowing, after opening presents and enjoying the festive fayre.

Sylvie Nicholls



My pre lockdown / lockdown ventures

A week pre lockdown I had a holiday arranged, at that stage we were still being told fine to travel, so off we went to Folkestone with an outing to Dunkirk & Canterbury planned. It was a coach holiday, several had cancelled but listening to the media we were still feeling gung ho, it's only the flu we told ourselves, if we get it, so be it. That night watching the news, watching the disaster unfold in Italy, we separately began to feel uneasy. Neither wanting to admit that maybe we hadn't been very wise.

By morning we started the conversation about if we went into lockdown or contracted the virus, the real worry was being separated from our families; by degrees we talked ourselves into deciding to return home. We had travelled down by coach and my son was willing and able to take us home, but we decided not to bother him and come home on the train. Looking back a totally foolhardy thing to do going through London, a surreal experience in the height of infections in the capital. We got lucky and now laugh about it.

What a journey as I say surreal, no staff on stations, guards who wouldn't come down the train, they were keeping apart from us, felt so strange. A lovely young chap on the buffet trolley who took pity on us (when we told our tale of woe), did his best to help. Taking a lift at St Pancras a young couple in it turned their backs on us, felt so rude. Then in a taxi to Paddington a whole rank available, deserted streets of London, what a relief to be in the safety of home, not knowing that soon home would be our only option, with no visitors and only being allowed to walk short distances from home.

I remember driving to Ludlow out of my area, the worry of being stopped by the police. I carried my SOS volunteer ID, given to me by a group formed to help with shopping, chemist etc in the locality. I had run out of the dreaded toilet rolls. My sister had managed to get a bulk buy for me from a local business, formerly used as catering supplies who had suddenly lost their business.



So life now was being a volunteering and shopping, the food bank and community wheels initially, BUT, I am also a Shared Lives carer which means I care for someone in my home as part of the family.

The person who lives with me usually attends day activities 5 days a week, and with lockdown services ceasing to run, so suddenly I have the person 24/7, a bit of a shock to the system.

Then there was pressure on all care homes to have people from hospital into our homes with a 3 hour turn around without any of the usual safeguards, and no testing for the virus.

By Sheila Cole

I looked to my official support for help with putting a contingency plan together, but there was no support. I gathered my strength from a closed social media group of local Shared Lives carers. A lifeline able to share fears, fun of our cooking triumphs/ disasters in my case, the various ideas we came up with to keep the people who live with us active, interested.

I suffered with anxiety for the first time in my life, regularly convinced I had the virus I was so worried about becoming ill at home, with the person I care for and not being able to care for him

My favourite day was when lockdown was released so you could drive a further distance. We drove to Clee Hill, my childhood home, to walk in the bluebell woods and to my utmost surprise we saw a deer up close and personal. I had never seen a deer on Clee Hill before.

I loved the quietness, the ceasing of rush and tear. How wildlife started to creep back, our daily walks where I discovered different ways of interesting the person in the world around us, treasure trails, teaching him about the senses which I hadn't realised he didn't understand, until I asked him to find something prickly.

Watching young families doing simple things together, walking, watching a field of cows, flying kites, just being families.

We painted stones, hid them in the rockery in the front garden, put up a poster asking people to search for them, the interest it caused was lovely to see.

Our street joined together on VE day to have individual tea parties, I think it brought us all closer together, that has remained.

I really appreciate where I live, the freedom to wander, I realise how truly fortunate I am to live in the area I do.



So although I haven't been able to see my grandchildren except a couple of times, I was able to do so in glorious surroundings, I haven't hugged them yet but hopefully that will come.

Sheila Cole Shared Lives

The trauma of losing my guide dog



Regulars to HDU events will remember Pickles, the black Guide Dog which accompanied Committee member Becky for many years. In fact Pickles, her first Guide Dog came into Becky's life a couple of years after she lost her sight to Retinitis Pigmentosa. Around 2011, he became her independence after the sudden onset of this disease.

By 2019, Pickles was quite elderly for use as a guide dog, being 10 years old, (still able to do his job), but Becky knew she couldn't ask too much of him at this age. She had applied to the Guide Dogs for the Blind, for a new dog (they cost around £50,000 to train). There is much to be done in the background before any matching of dog to human can begin, and so it's usually when a dog is two years old they are considered "ready". Becky had tried a couple of possibilities but found they didn't get on with Pickles whom they intended to live his life out as a pet in their household.

Poppy, arrived on 5th March, just right, young, plenty of energy, enthusiastic and seemingly ok with Picks. What Becky had not been prepared for was the "takeover" of dogs right at the beginning of March. You see, Picks knew all Becky's routes, words, habits which of course Poppy had to learn with time and practise. So in a strange way, Becky was rather like the "blind leading the blind" which was traumatic and brought back memories of ten years ago when she felt she couldn't leave the house. When Covid hit and with lockdown, Becky considered sending Poppy back to the



Guide Dogs for the Blind as she felt guilty for having him. She couldn't go out, to exercise or familiarise Pops with regular walks. Social distancing was totally a disaster and she became withdrawn.

Pickles and Poppy got on well with each other which was a blessing, both loveable animals so as time went by Becky felt

blessed that their friendship pulled her through.

However in June things took a turn for the worst. Becky and Pickles had such a strong bond, so anytime that Picks was a bit under the weather Becky knew. Rob, her husband called the vet and they were able to visit the surgery. With some very prompt attention Pickles was diagnosed with a large tumour in the heart, but the heartbreaking decision made on 17th June for the vet to administer a lethal injection was hard to accept.

A lasting effect as described by Becky Bettington

Although devastated with the news, Becky could not let Pickles suffer with major surgery knowing that it was doubtful he would pull through. Her grief being similar to losing a close loved human, as he had almost become. Her trusted companion, suddenly gone.

Becky was back to square one, with enhanced issues of insecurity, lack of independence and Covid conditions to cope with. In the early days she had suffered a couple of falls walking the lanes in Weston Under Penyard, and needed to rest her bruised legs. When managing a trip to the shops with her husband for food further anxieties took hold. How could she social distance, and what was safe to touch?

What now could Becky do to help herself? She was missing Pickles so much and just wanted him near. There were two ideas. The first to get an impression of his face on a cushion. Becky always referred to Picks as “Mr Sexy Bum” and so the cushion aptly named was produced with paw prints, and a head photo of her beloved dog. That enabled Becky to “cuddle him” which gave great comfort.



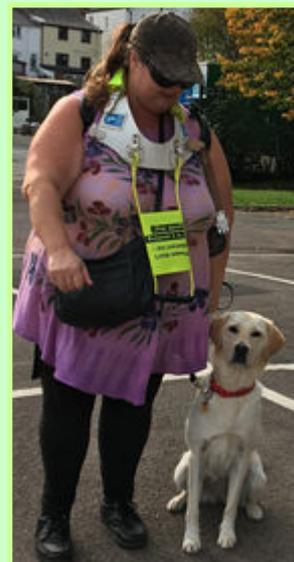
Another idea was a tattoo! This came out of the blue as she discovered that close to home, in Ross on Wye is a tattooist who will inject the ashes of Picks with the regular ink to form a tattoo. Now on her left forearm is the result.

You might think, but she can't see it! Maybe not, but it's slightly raised on the skin, and Becky can trace the outline with her finger. The tattooist has explained where on the artwork are Pick's eyes, so she has a rough idea of the overall design. This has enabled Becky to gain confidence once more.

The HDU committee met for the first time during Covid in mid September, and we were then able to meet Poppy. A completely different dog, but so happy and adapted to his new life. Poppy is alert, loving and friendly. He's “one of us”.

On a sunny afternoon in early October, I met with the delightful pair for a stroll through Ross on Wye town, and down along the River Wye. This was a walk she had managed during the summer, and Poppy was certainly used to it. As soon as we were dropped off by the Fire Station in Ross, Poppy needed to relieve herself. I'm sure this is something most sighted people don't consider, “How do those with visual impairments use the Poop bags with their dogs?” Answer :trust, close understanding and careful hands! So Pops and I are friends and I'm sure Becky's life will continue to be enriched as before.

I hope this has shown how difficult life can be, but with dedication and support, we can beat lockdown Covid and thrive again.



Abbey

The following read may be hard for some people but I am adding it to this magazine as it brings hope in the face of adversity, and breast cancer awareness is something we all need to take seriously.

This is actually about a young lady I know in America, who at aged 28 was diagnosed with stage three breast cancer. The lady is called Abbey. Abbey is the best friend of my grand daughter Becky. I first met Abbey with her young baby son around the summer of 2015 when I was visiting Houston to see my family. She has always been very bouncy, happy to be with, and enjoying keeping fit and healthy. In fact she and Becky first met at the gym where they both taught young children the basics for gymnastics, and trampoline. They became firm friends.

In December 2019, I was visiting again, but this time to look after Becky's daughter my great grand daughter Bella, who was almost two years old. Abbey had recently moved to North Carolina, and Becky wanted to be with her friend Abbey who was to undergo the first session of chemotherapy. I was there to relieve her of motherly duties knowing that Bella would be in safe hands with me.

The text in blue is Abbey's story as seen on Facebook./ YouTube.



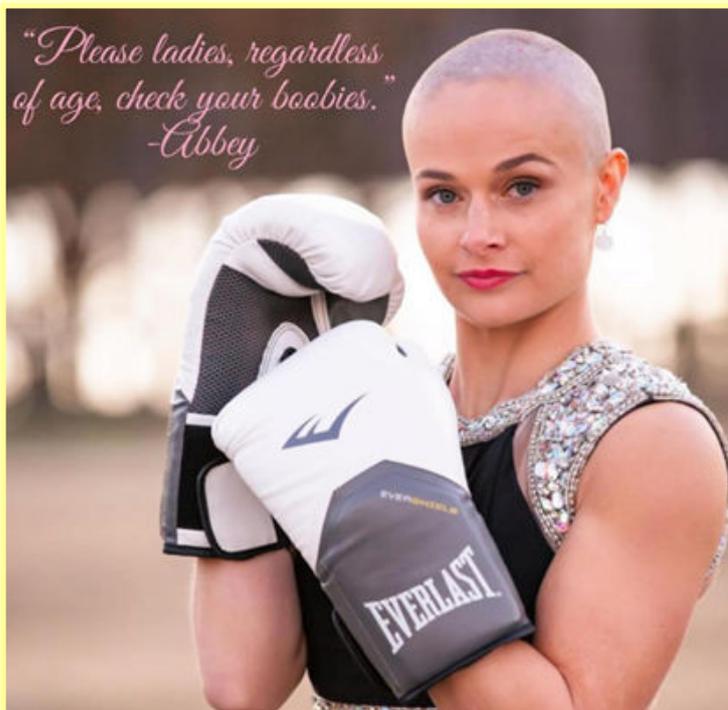
There is one week in November 2019 that I will never forget. It happened to be one of the best and worst weeks of my life. That week I had just achieved a major accomplishment by receiving my OCB bikini pro card. I had won first place in open bikini and overall bikini, all this a few days after celebrating my 28th birthday.

The feeling after winning was unbelievable, it is something that I will never forget, knowing that all the hard work and determination in training paid off. However, the days following that win I received a call with my test results, I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer.

On October 31st, a week before my 28th birthday, I noticed a lump in my armpit which I believe the only way I noticed it was because of the amount weight cutting I was doing in preparation for competition just a few weeks away. Deep down I suspected it to be cancer so I went to get tested, but I did not dwell on this as I had to keep focus on my competition that was coming up. Right after receiving the devastating news about being diagnosed with cancer, my doctors started me on my chemotherapy treatment right away.

Treatments and videos

Those months were difficult, some days were good and some were not. However, during this time even with my hair loss and eventually having my husband shave my head, I was still going to the gym as it was my happy place.



Following chemotherapy, I had a double mastectomy followed by a month and a half of radiation treatment. My time in radiation was not as bad as chemo but I was unable to go to the gym due to COVID-19.

Just a week ago I received that last preventive measure for my cancer treatment, by having my ovaries and tubes removed, due to testing positive for a mutated gene which increased my risk of getting cancer again.

My cancer journey is not over yet, I still have to take medication and eventually additional surgeries later in life.

This past year has been a rollercoaster not to mention that everything else going on the world just made it that much more difficult during my recovery. My goal is to get back in the gym and eventually compete at Yorton Cup, not sure when that will be, but I do know that is my next goal in life and I won't stop until I've reached it. I also have to be very thankful for competitions, as if it wasn't for me getting prepped to compete, I probably wouldn't have found that lump in my armpit. I believe this competition saved my life.

The best part of this journey has been being able to spread awareness and inspire others during their battle with cancer. In my passion to help others, I have documented every step with video blogs and posts that I have shared on multiple social media platforms. The overwhelming responses and support from sharing my journey has been incredible and I will continue to do this to help others. Cancer does not care about age as 1 in 8 women will be diagnosed with it. Please ladies, regardless of age check your boobies. No one knows your body better than you. Please fight for yourself and get checked as soon as you can.

-Abbey Motta, wife to an amazing veteran husband, mother of a beautiful son, and natural bikini competitor.

Abbey has documented her treatment with videos on YouTube. She has managed to impart knowledge throughout so that others may learn and understand how each treatment works. Just type Abbey Motta YouTube in Google search and you will find them. The most poignant video is of David her husband shaving her head. **EDITOR**

Lockdown trials and tribulations

On first hearing about lockdown and that the over 70's should isolate I didn't consider that it applied to me...a classic case of self-denial.

However, the seriousness of the situation quickly became clear and I gradually adjusted to the lockdown. I was able in those first few days to do a few preparations for a period at home. I managed to snap up one of the last big tubs of white emulsion and some gloss from my local Handyman House and set about decorating my conservatory, utility room and downstairs shower and toilet whilst listening to audio books on my i-Pad. A good job done and one that might still be waiting if it had been a normal year.

I have always been a very keen gardener so the fact that I could no longer work as an invigilator for the GCSE and A Level exams, (as I usually do) gave me a lot more time to spend indulging my hobby. As a result, I managed to grow a lot more edible produce which cut down on shopping trips and has given me a nice full freezer of fruit, vegetables and tomatoes in various guises.

On the downside all the meetings of the gardening clubs I belong to have ceased as did the outings to various open gardens and get togethers with my "plantalcoholic" friends.

A little article in our Parish Magazine caught my eye and led to another enjoyable pastime. Our church was flooded in February 2020 and all the cushions and kneelers destroyed. They were asking for volunteers to embroider some more. I do enjoy sewing, although my hands are not what they used to be, but I volunteered and have now completed a kneeler in cross stitch. (See above as it took shape).



That, together with some water colour painting for our local history society project recording life in the village in 2020, have helped to fill those moments when the weather was bad, or I was simply feeling fed up. (Woodpeckers are very striking to put on canvas).

I have lost count of the number of books I have read: it is so good to be able to escape into another world.

By Penny Walshe

Keeping fit was no longer weekly ballet classes and yoga but zoom sessions online....not quite so good but better than nothing.

I have also indulged in a number of other zoom activities ranging from the Hay Festival, The Chalke Valley History Festival, a gardening talk and a Murder Mystery where you had to work out "who done it"! It was also a great relief when family bubbles were allowed and I could meet up freely with my son, who also lives in Herefordshire

The biggest disappointments have been the cancelled holidays. Scotland, bird watching over Easter, moth trapping and sand and sea in Norfolk in late June, and a cruise down the East coast of Canada and the USA this September.

However, I went away the first weekend the hotels were open to Northumberland and have just returned from a belated trip with my son to Scotland and the Isle of Lewis, where I have been wanting to go for a long time – a really beautiful place with very few people!

**Lone
bird
watcher
on
beach!**



AND what now when it seems things are taking a turn for the worse? Well the garden will need to be put to bed for the winter, and I took loads of photos in Scotland that might well turn into a painting or two. Ballet and yoga are continuing on line and next week I have a streamed class on art history starting, through the auspices of the WEA. Plus of course there is always the phone to keep up with friends and family and the wonderful surrounding countryside to walk in. BUT I really do wish it was all over!

Covid spacing funeral



My Mother in Law, Sybil (seen here in 2007) passed away on 2nd July this year aged 94. It wasn't unexpected, nor Covid, but the continuous decline due to dementia.

Back in 2014 we all knew as a family that Sybil's aptitude for life was altering, and she too was aware. So much so that in March 2016, she decided that living alone in her bungalow in Ipswich was getting too much. She didn't want to burden the family, and knew that right in the centre of Ipswich, next door to the huge open space of Christchurch Park was the perfect answer, a care home for people with dementia.

Sybil and I had always got on well, liked a giggle, and could be totally honest with each other. Consequently, I went to help her sort precisely what was precious that she wanted to take with her, and what could be left for me to decide upon afterwards.

We packed boxes and a case, on which I tied a belt, to prevent her unpacking again once I'd left (her dexterity had virtually gone). Sybil with her dementia would have come back into the room next day, and thought "What's that doing there and put the contents back in the wardrobe again. Sybil liked the care home, which was carefully planned with two sides to it. One for those still in the early stages, and one for those who were totally confused.

My brother in law, Lawrence visited her weekly, travelling from Surrey on what could often be a 5-6 hours round journey (due to the M25 etc). Sometimes Sybil was awake and with it, whilst others times she slept through the whole day and night. I have travelled with Lawrence on several occasions, and we'd been lucky enjoying Sybil's company and laughter, especially listening to music via YouTube.

Since the onset of Covid, visits were stopped and we all relied on updates from the staff, although the home did not have any outbreaks at all. When the staff noticed a dramatic change in Sybil's medical pattern, they called Lawrence, and allowed him into her room at the care home. They knew the end was near, and he would be better having closure. Sybil passed away two days later, a blessing to her in disguise.

Now how could we plan the funeral? Everything was so uncertain and definitely not as we would have wished, with a great send off from friends and relatives accumulated over the years. At Sybil's 80th birthday celebrations we had managed to gather 13 of her cousins together, but now we couldn't even have 13 individuals in the same room.

A date was arranged, 3rd August, and 10 relatives and one close friend permitted. I was one of the few. Lawrence and I would split the eulogy, his memories from birth, and mine from 1977, when we first met, via the Bluebell Railway in Sussex.

Using modern technology

Modern facilities at some crematoriums are enabling families to come together virtually, and Ipswich was one such facility. With parts of our family across the world too, this was a great comfort to some who would be able to follow the proceedings as the service took place. Consequently, at 14.15 in Ipswich, and 08.15 in Houston Texas, my two grand children plus I great grand daughter, Bella were watching us.

As “the few” stood outside awaiting funeral cars, I noticed the lead director, a female, immaculately dressed in smart black trousers, featured hat and other appropriate



attire and my mind disappeared back almost a decade, as a broad grin spread across my face. I was transported back to the comedy sitcom, written and starring Ruth Jones as Stella, in a very Welsh valleys TV show around 2012. One of the interwoven stories of Stella, was a funeral parlour and the intricate goings on with the female funeral director of the show and her husband, whose

irreverent behaviour amongst the empty caskets, in “playtime clothing” sprang to mind! It was very difficult to come back to reality!

However, transforming my face and mind I concentrated on the event unfolding as my Brother in Law, Lawrence took to the lectern describing his mother’s life and relating early memories, such as when she used an old parachute to hand sew a tent for an early camping holiday. Then came my turn, and with just eight prompt words on a tiny slip of paper, I took my place. But, whilst awaiting the interlude music to stop, I glanced at the array of things in front of me. A green button, mmm ... I knew what it was for, and I certainly didn’t want to turn the serious occasion into a comedy sketch. You see Sybil had a similar sense of humour as me, and I imagined her giggling seeing what I saw.... But I didn’t press the button.



Instead I related fun times, staying with me and my young grandchildren (7 & 11) as they played “doctors and nurses” on the conservatory floor, at the bungalow in Kent. When 7 year old Sam, using plastic tweezers, pulled out Sybil’s teeth. It was ok they were false ones but Sam didn’t realise at the time! Then more recently, in Sybil’s care home, us all singing along to familiar songs, using the YouTube app. Sybil’s head and fingers bopping in time to “Baby Shark” plus Vera Lynne classics.

The service over, we stood appropriately spaced outside the crematorium to chat. No one could hug or kiss as we would usually do, and leaving in separate cars. My phone pinged, it was the family in Houston. They were discussing their memories too, and so we had all been brought together. Bella hadn’t quite worked out why “Nana, (me) was on television!

The Editor

Useful Contacts

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Mobile Tel No: 07825 681801

Email:

makingexperiencescount@wvt.nhs.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Freepost RRLL-GHUX-CTRX, Arndale House,

Arndale Centre, Manchester, M4 3AQ

Tel: 0808 800 0082 Website:

www.equalityhumanrights.com

RADAR, now at Disability Rights UK

12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London, EC1V 8AF

Tel: 020 7250 3222 Minicom: 020 7250 4119

Email: enquiries@disabilityrightsuk.org

NHS Direct Tel: 111 (free service)

Wye Valley NHS Trust

The County Hospital

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Wye Valley NHS Trust

Community Health

Vaughan Building

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Hereford

HR2 9RP

Tel: 01432 344 344

Herefordshire Council and NHS Herefordshire

Social Services Adult Duty Desk

Office hours 9am - 5pm

Office Tel No: 01432 260101

Out of hours: 0330 1239309 adults

01905 768020 children

HDU would like to extend our congratulations to Vince McNally MBE at Hinton Community Centre.

He has just been awarded this accolade for his commitment to voluntary work at the hall. This extends to all ages, race sport, ability, disability and beyond.

Vince works tirelessly to support and improve opportunities for the people of Herefordshire

WELL DONE VINCE

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