

‘Ramblings of a Redhead’

OK – so I’ve finally decided to start writing down the thoughts that transpire in my head day to day since being diagnosed. Alongside my vlogs it’ll be a massive help to someone who really struggles to talk about how they feel and would much rather do everyone a favour and keep quiet as everyone has their own shit to deal with – right?

So I’m sat here, MacBook resting gently on one of the many tumours on my liver (which I’ve aptly named – ‘The Gang’, the main culprit tumour in my bowel I affectionately named Terry and they’re all a bunch of cockney wankers, but rather than fearing them I thought naming them might make them easier to live with). My ridiculously long nails making it near impossible to type but with terminal stage 4 cancer and a daily craving for BBQ Beef Hula Hoops – I can think of worse things.

For a lot of people, being told you have any form of cancer is pretty awful, no matter what age you are or what stage its at or where it is in the body. I vividly remember the day I was told. I remember not crying, or feeling sad, or the whole ‘why is this happening to me etc crack out the violins’. It was a strange feeling. I’d compare it to a sense of relief if anything. After feeling the worst I’d ever felt in my life for literally only 2 weeks before admitting myself to A&E, I knew it was something sinister, I was under no illusion – and the prospect of battling cancer was terrifying.

Exhausting for everyone involved. So after being stuck in a hospital bed for 9 days, in pain, being poked and prodded for various things, wondering what chemotherapy would be like, how I’d feel, how desperate I was to keep my hair (I spent a bloody fortune on hair extensions), would it work, would it come back, how poorly would it make me etc – you can almost appreciate the relief when I was told that this cancer

could not be cured. I know it's a weird concept, I'm almost glorifying it all, but I'll try and explain why I felt the way I did.

Firstly – as soon as I was told chemotherapy would not cure it, this opened the door to alternative therapies. I had absolutely nothing to lose. Chemo would only extend my life – but what quality of life? That was my main concern – no way was I dragging this out. It was either try and cure it with alternative medicine or nothing at all. And I certainly was not going to sit back and let it take over and sink into a depression. Who's that going to help? No-one. Plus I get bored far too easily and the prospect of rotting away in a bed after spending most of my time in the gym was not an option. Now obviously I wouldn't be sat here writing this if the routes I tried had worked or even had some sort of impact – and that's ok. I was never under any illusion that I would find a miracle cure and it'd all be rainbows and unicorns and everyone would live happily ever after. I went into this Stage 4. Bowel and Liver. Ulcerative Colitis since the age of 11 (my immune system was pretty shite anyway and have been anaemic for god knows how long thanks to the Colitis – so it was always going to be a long shot). There were still no tears on the results of my second CT Scan and being told my liver was now 70% cancerous. The tears I cried were not of fear or pain or sadness, they were mostly down to exhaustion and the prospect of those around me having to witness me suffer which in turn would cause them to suffer. That's what always played on my mind. I'm not afraid of death. It's going to happen to everyone eventually, I was just given the privilege of a heads up. And that brings me onto another reason as to why I use the word 'relief'.

When you're told you've only got months to live (which is incredibly vague in itself) it gives you one hell of a shake up. It's hard to describe. It's almost like someone gives you a key to a secret door that only a select few know about. This key opens a door to a world most people don't get

to see or appreciate until its too late, and I have made it a positive focus of mine to try and explain this in the bid to change people's perspective on things. Anything. No matter how trivial. In the hope it has a positive effect on someone. Now – don't get me wrong, I certainly did not walk round like Ghandi preaching words of hope every day – trust me – I did not have the energy for that shit. But when I felt I could I did, and in the meantime I just told it like it was. I maintained a healthy mix of positivity for the masses and those around me, and a large dose of realism for myself. I certainly was not going to sit there and pretend I was ok, but at the same time why torture myself with negative thoughts – its only going to rub off onto those who were around me pretty much 24/7 and make life miserable for myself. I'd already begun cutting down on meat, which was miserable enough in itself. Anyway. Your entire outlook and perspective on things changes. You appreciate the strangest of things, miss things you took for granted, and realise the trivialness of most of the objects and situations you encounter in life. This unfortunately means a lot of what you witness and hear can be incredibly frustrating and makes you want to scream at 90% of the people you listen to or speak to – but you can only do so much, and its down to the individual to take what they want from what you say. The comfort comes in knowing you've (hopefully) left a positive impact on someone, somewhere. In the meantime the occasional sausage roll and fish finger would fill any emotional void I had. Everything in life is down to perspective. How you approach and handle any situation that is thrown at you, and whether it makes or breaks you. Some of these situations (such as my own) most definitely bring out qualities you never knew you had. It'll be the same when I die and my family then have to learn to cope. This is another thing that bothers me – when I die I die, that's it. Gone. Off to the giant, unlimited, pizza buffet in the sky where nothing tastes sweet and I can eat as much as I damn well please. But those around me will have to carry on, their fight will still continue. And I want to leave making it as easy for

them as possible, as I can't exactly pop back in 6 months and check everything's ok now can I?

So in summary, yes, cancer is a shit. A massive, life destroying shit. But that's not to say there aren't any positives to be taken from it – whether it's treatable or terminal. I for one am glad its happened to me and not one of my friends or close family, and have chosen to use it as a platform for awareness rather than an excuse to disappear quietly.

What it does to your body

Now. Coming from a self-confessed foodie and gym addict, by far the hardest battle for me has been witnessing and feeling the physical effects cancer has on the body. And this I'm sure is the same for any sufferer, but perhaps on a different scale depending on the individual.

I've always been an 'all or nothing' kind of girl, so the effort I put into training was 100%. To come out of hospital after just 9 days, and stand naked in front of the full-length mirror in my room and witness the devastating effect of (what was not yet diagnosed) cancer on my body, was nothing short of soul destroying. But of course that was just the beginning. I remember telling myself 'It'll come back, it's ok. All is not lost. Plenty of people get ill and lose muscle mass and then recover.' Ignorance is bliss, right? Of course I had no clue that it was going to get so much worse. My body would quickly be ravaged by the cancer to the point of not even recognising myself in the mirror anymore. Facially I was still the same – for a reasonable amount of time too. I'd lose count of how many times people told me I looked well and didn't look like I'd been given months to live. This was comforting. And one of the main reasons I didn't want to endure chemotherapy. I didn't want to look like a cancer

patient. I didn't want people to look at me and feel pity or sympathy. I never have and never will have time for that. I lived with an invisible chronic illness from the age of 11 so I was perfectly used to dealing with day-to-day problems that no one else could see or understand. This was no different. I wanted to carry on as normal, being me, looking like me, behaving like me, for as long as I possibly could.

Over the months my weight loss became drastic and was the most challenging change for me. It wasn't going to improve and I chose not to weigh myself. My clothes most definitely highlighted that for me. Nothing fitted anymore. Even shoes became loose. I'd gone from a size 10 in the leg to a size 6 in the blink of an eye. My enlarged liver distended my abdomen so I couldn't wear jeans unless they were maternity ones.