

FOREWORD

My name is Carol Standfield. On 27th May 1988 I suffered a brain haemorrhage. “The Journey Back” is the story of how I overcame this illness, and how, with the help of my doctors and friends, I am readjusting my life today.

I hope that this tale will be read by others in the same situation, and that it will give them the strength and encouragement they need to begin that “Journey Back” to a normal life.

All the proceeds will go the MRI Scanner Appeal at Frenchay Hospital.

Finally, a special thanks to all my family and friends, especially to Carol, Keith and Lisa, who visited me regularly in hospital, June, and of course my employer Kleeneze who assured me that my job would be waiting for me when I came out. But most of all, all the doctors and nurses from Ward 21, Bristol Royal Infirmary and Ward 1 Frenchay Hospital, and to my brother Gordon and his wife Mary who did so much to help my recovery, and a very big thank you to Swanhorse Printers, Droitwich for producing the first edition of this pamphlet free of charge.

THE JOURNEY BACK

Everything in my life was going really well for me. I enjoyed my job as a PA and had lots of friends. I lived alone in a furnished flat since my divorce 18 months ago, and my ex and I were still good friends.

At 7.00 a.m. on Friday 27th May, Alan, a good friend of mine, telephoned asking me to meet him for lunch at 1.00 p.m. For the rest of the morning I was really looking forward to seeing him again as it had been two weeks since our last meeting.

At 12.45 p.m. I drove to Alan's house after arranging an extended lunch hour. I had bought him the Phantom of the Opera record as he used to love listening to it when we first met.

After a long, unhurried embrace, Alan poured me a large gin and tonic, and we sat talking until 1.30 p.m. Alan said he had to get something from his car. As he closed the front door I felt a pain at the base of my head. I went to the bathroom where I was violently sick. I called for Alan but he couldn't hear me. The pain was getting worse and I guessed I was having a Brain Haemorrhage. I fell into unconsciousness and when I came to I was in a bath of sweat and I was vomiting again.

I must have looked a repulsive sight. When Alan returned he couldn't believe what was happening to me. He rushed to the phone and called an ambulance and then returned to the bathroom where I was still lying. I told him to go to the other room as I didn't want him to see me the way I was.

At long last I heard the ambulance, and two uniformed men came to my side. After questioning me they gently carried me to the waiting vehicle. I told Alan to phone my friend Carol, as she would know who to contact, and I left him standing there.

I must have lost consciousness again, because the next thing I remember was the doctors standing by my side. After more questioning and tests I was admitted to a ward, the nurses were very comforting and eased me no end.

Shortly afterwards Carol arrived. She was very shocked and upset, but I felt so much better having her beside me. When she left the nurses inserted a catheter to help my discomfort. I don't know if I then fell unconscious or if I slept, but at 4.30p.m. my mother and John (my ex-husband) were at my side. You could see the worry on their faces although they tried so hard not to show their concern.

I was transferred to another hospital on a Neurological Ward. My mother came with me with John following in his car. I couldn't understand why my father was not with her, but at 75 she said he was very tired and under the weather.

Another doctor saw me, and after lots more questions I was told I had to lie flat on my back and keep my head still. This I found very difficult at first. More tea went over the bed than in my mouth, but the nurses didn't seem to mind. One good thing in having a catheter was that it saved me using the dreaded bed pan.

I was told I had to have a C.T. Scan, the thought of which made me very frightened. I was assured that it wouldn't hurt, but I was still scared. I worried for no reason - it was as harmless as having a photo taken.

Soon the doctor returned to my bedside and confirmed that I had had a Brain Haemorrhage.

I was transferred back to my original hospital for three weeks and was laid flat on my back again. One afternoon I had another bleed and was rushed back to the Neuro Hospital. The Doctor said I had to have an angiogram (dye injected into the body to enable them to pinpoint the bleed).

The nurses explained to me what was going to happen; first of all I was shaved in my right groin and given an injection to make me feel drowsy. I was awake, but didn't have a care in the world as I was wheeled down to the unit. There were about six people in the room. I was lifted onto a table with my head placed between two metal plates, and then I was covered in green cloths from the waist down.

One of the nurses held my hand and talked to me while the doctor injected me in my groin. I felt no pain when they started to perform the Angiogram. I was told that I would feel a warm sensation and see lights in front of my eyes. I can't say it hurt but it was uncomfortable. A television screen displayed my brain and everyone was very busy. The nurse who was holding my hand comforted me and talked to me the whole time which I found very soothing. It was not long before I was bandaged up and taken back to the ward. The following day a large bruise appeared in my groin where the doctor had exerted considerable pressure to close the vein.

Every day the nurses used to ask me my name and where I was. I always knew. They would make me grip their hands to make sure I still had strength in them. I was still told to lie flat and keep my head still.

I don't know how to describe what happened next, but my mind was very muddled. To me my dream was real and I honestly believed that I was travelling to New York to see Alan who was the Phantom of the Opera. Everyone from work was travelling with me on a large ocean liner. Alan was waiting for me on the quay side and we were to be married. I was feeling very frustrated because my friend Carol had her dress and I did not have one to wear. When she came to visit me I even shouted at her because she didn't have my dress. She didn't pass comment as the nurses had already told her that I was rambling, but her agreeing with me made me more convinced than ever that I was in America. This continued for about a week and then I returned to my normal self. The nursing staff were very patient with me when I was going through this difficult time. I was seeing things and hearing things, but they took all this in their stride. (This is quite normal under the circumstances).

Two more weeks passed and I had another angiogram. This one didn't take too long and I wasn't frightened this time.

Again the doctor came to see me, but this time came the news that I would need an operation immediately. I said I wouldn't agree to it even when they told me I was walking around with a time bomb in my head. Still I refused to agree to the operation. I was very scared, and cried and cried. My brother and his wife tried to talk me round, but I still refused. I was surrounded by very sick people and I couldn't think. The next day Carol came to see me. I told her how I felt, so she asked the Sister if she could take me out of the Ward in a wheelchair. She agreed. I could think clearer away from the ward, so Carol took me for a coffee just outside the ward. It had been seven weeks since I had been out, and was able to smoke my first cigarette. Carol talked to me and said I owed it to my many friends and family to have the operation and live, so I agreed.

She pushed me back to the ward before I had time to change my mind. As we were going down the

corridor, my doctor passed. He asked how I felt and I told him I would consent to the operation. He smiled and said he would take good care of me.

After Carol left, my mother came to see me and explained that my father's absence was because he had been in hospital himself and they had told my father I was on holiday. She assured me he was now OK and would be in to see me that night.

The doctor returned and explained all about my operation. I asked him what my chances were. He said he had only done two operations of this kind before, but they were both 100% perfect. I felt a little more at ease. and when visiting time was over I felt calm.

My dad came in and cried as soon as he saw me. He looked at the rest of the patients and couldn't bear the thought of his little girl being so sick. Lots of my close friends came to see me and stayed for a couple of hours, there were lots of tears and they were all very worried. When they left, all my family were still at my bedside. My sister Hazel had travelled all the way from Shropshire and was staying with my mother for a couple of days.

After my brother and his wife had left with my parents, my sister took me to the day room where we talked and smoked endless cigarettes. The nurses told us to help ourselves to coffee. Hazel stayed with me until 12.15 a.m. After she left I lay in my bed and wrote a letter to my brother telling him to sort out my belongings if things went wrong. I also told the Ward Sister that if I didn't make it, I wanted to donate my vital organs to help others to live after my death.

Surprisingly enough I slept. In the morning the vicar came to see me. His name was Bob. Although I am not religious, just his being there was a great help to me. He held my hand whilst I had my pre-med, and when the porter arrived to take me to the theatre he was still with me holding my hand. Although I was 37, I took a teddy bear that John had bought me along to the theatre.

I can't remember anything else until I woke up in the Bristol Royal Infirmary. It was about six weeks later. The Ward Sister, whose name was Judith, was fantastic. I was in a side ward and she placed all my get-well cards on the wall for me, 152 in all, to cheer up my room. I was under the care of a doctor whose name was Annie. She told me that I had in fact had two operations, and things had been touch and go. They had inserted a Shunt in my brain, and I had a small incision in my stomach where they had placed tubes into my bladder as I was retaining fluid. To me it was very strange not remembering anything, but I guess it's sometimes better that way.

Gradually I was allowed to sit up, and soon I was able to swing my legs over the side of the bed. Then the day came for me to walk my first steps. My legs were very weak and thin, but with those first steps, I crossed the first hurdle - I was on my way to recovery. The nurses were wonderful, they used to take me by wheelchair to the day room for a cigarette, and my family were allowed to bring me in my favourite meals. Every day I made progress. My first bath was heaven (pardon the most unsuitable pun). A nurse stayed with me all the time. I felt shy at first, but I soon got used to it.

One day about two weeks later, my mother took me for a cigarette. We used a lift that I had never been in before and on the wall was a mirror. It was the first time I had seen myself. I was devastated. My lovely long hair was gone, I was cross-eyed and looked a real mess. I cried. I returned to my bed and didn't want anyone to see me.

I was given a wig, it was very much like my own hair but I couldn't get used to it. One day, Mike

Talbot from work came in to see me and I was crying. He put his arm around me and said I was still the same person, and that my hair would soon grow again. He gave me the confidence I was lacking, and as he kissed me goodbye I felt a bit more like my old self again.

Every day after that things got a lot better, and each day I achieved something new. By now I was walking the length of the ward unaided. I was still a bit wobbly, but I was at least walking. I was taken to physiotherapy each day, and there they taught me how to make coffee. With my double vision, this was quite a task! I missed the cups and water went all over the units but I persevered and eventually managed to pour one cup - another goal conquered.

Shortly afterwards I was allowed home for the weekend. My friend who owns the Paramedic Ambulance Service came to pick me up and take me to my brother's house in the country. It was really good to be out in the big wide world again. They let me try to do things for myself, and when I made mistakes they didn't seem to mind and let me try again.

On my return to the hospital I was visited by the Occupational Therapist. She said I was ready to go home. It was now up to the doctors. When Annie (my doctor) came to see me, she asked how I managed away from the ward. Then, after careful consideration she said that I could go home at the end of the week. This time I cried with joy.

The day before I was due to go home, my friend Julie brought me a large "Thank You" cake to share with all the staff; everyone from the doctor to all the nurses came to my bed. Judith brought in a bottle of wine. Everyone was very tearful. A special bond had grown between us over the months, and although it was nice to be going home, it was also very sad.

The Paramedics came to pick me up the following day to take me to my brother's. Every day was a hurdle. What with my double vision, things were very hard. I kept bumping into things, and when I went out I was very nervous, my confidence was shattered and I was very depressed. I thought things would be a lot better when I settled in my flat. My friend Julie was going to share with me as I didn't feel that I could cope on my own, but when I got there the depression was still with me.

My friends were wonderful, and called round to see me every week. I couldn't understand these black moods. My G.P. explained that most people feel the same as I did after brain surgery. The Social Worker came to see me often. He helped me a lot, but I was still crying over the silliest things. I felt bitter, why me? I hated my short hair and I was not sleeping, partly because I could not get my head comfortable and secondly I was scared of meeting people, who had not seen me since my illness, and all this played on my mind, so sleep didn't come.

One day my sister-in-law Mary took me to see my friends at work. I wore my wig as my scars were still visible. My friend Hazel from Personnel walked around with us to see everyone. It was a very emotional time, everyone from Directors to factory workers and office employees greeted me with hugs and kisses and said how pleased they were that I back on the road to recovery.

It had been five months since that unforgettable day when I returned to work. I hoped with all my heart that I could cope, and as I went into my office my boss said my extended lunch hour had taken too long and we both laughed. I have now been back at work for six weeks and every day I get better. The tears are still with me and I still attend Out Patients, but the skill of Mr Cummings the Brain Surgeon, gentleman and friend, will be remembered by me forever.

I hope this book will help others to understand their illness a little bit more, and all proceeds are

going to the MRI Scanner Appeal.