



Speaking from Experience *Breast Cancer*

Transcript for chapter 2 of 6: Breaking the news

Barbara (diagnosed 4 years ago, aged 45) - I was shocked, but I thought, 'I've got to get on with this, I've got to cope with this.' I've got three young daughters and a husband, and I've just got to deal with it. So, I drove myself home that day. I rang my husband, who was interstate. My children had called my mobile to find out what went on and I just said, "yeah, I've got cancer". "Oh, are you ok, mum?" "I'm fine. I'm fine". A few girlfriends new I was going in to get it checked and they rang. A few girlfriends came around that afternoon. We had a couple of bottles of wine and when they left, I felt a bit lonely. My husband was interstate, so he came home.

Glenise (diagnosed 8 years ago, aged 45) - I sobbed. I did everything. I rang up all my girlfriends. They all came around, bottles of wine. I had several drinks of wine, and I don't drink. So, we laughed and we cried, and we laughed and we cried. And my kids, we all laughed and cried and hugged. It was just a warm and fuzzy day actually. It was really lovely.

Sophia (diagnosed 5 years ago, aged 49) - My son was waiting anxiously that day, when I came from the doctor. I said, "what are we going to eat? It's lunch time." And he said, "Mum, I'm waiting for you to tell me what the doctor said!" I said, "Oh well, you know, it's cancer." Oh, he got worried, he ran to grab books and things. You know, try to tell me not to worry, and all these things.

Barbara - My eldest daughter, her reaction was that she wanted to give up Uni and look after me. My middle daughter didn't know what to say. She came into hospital once. Didn't want to go to the chemotherapy. Didn't cope very well at all. She did write an English essay, expressing all her fears about my cancer.

Glenise - When I told my children... I had three children, one son wasn't at home. I had another son, 16, he just threw his arms around me and just cried and cried. My daughter was only four, so I had to really pick a way to tell her that mummy was very sick and I had to go to hospital. She could accept that.

Barbara (diagnosed 7 years ago, aged 54) & Husband - I can remember the day that this happened, because I was so sure that this could never happen to us, I didn't even think about it. Then I went off to work and my daughter rang me and said - I was going to a meeting that evening -, "I think you might cancel the meeting because mum's had a bit of bad news." Nothing serious, she said, but then she told me that mum had had the results of the biopsy and that they weren't good.

Barbara - My husband reacted to the diagnosis, by wanting the cancer himself. He didn't think I'd be strong enough to go through it, go through the chemo, and he wanted to be the one to have the cancer. He didn't want me to suffer. He was a great help with all my treatment. He sat outside the surgery door when I had the surgery. He came to radiotherapy, chemotherapy. Cleaned up after my vomiting after chemo.

Ruth (diagnosed 4 years ago, aged 29) - He was able to believe it more than I was. After I had a lumpectomy, before the diagnosis came in, so the first operation was to remove the lump. Then, the tests were done on the lump. And, when the doctor told us it was breast cancer, my husband said, "Well, in the back of my mind, I half expected that." Because he'd thought about how aggressively the lump was growing, etc. So, he was ahead of me in receiving the news. So, it was helpful for me that he was right there with me receiving the news. Understanding more of what was going on than I was.

Barbara & Husband - The prospect of losing Barbara was my major concern. That was a horrifying thought. My major thought was to get the cure as quickly as possible. My brother had died of cancer and we'd had that major impact of what cancer can do, and can do so very quickly, in some forms. I guess, Barbara and I have always been pretty close, so I can't say that it brought us any closer - it just made me more concerned for her, I guess.

Sophia - But I didn't tell my husband and my daughter at the time, because my son thought it would be better if... because I knew my daughter would cry, and my husband too. So, he said, better don't tell them yet. And I just told him the day before I go for operation.

Glenise - My biggest concern was, how do I tell my parents? That was one of the very first things that went through my mind. How do I tell my parents that I have malignant cancer?

Ruth - Telling mum and dad that I had breast cancer was one of the most difficult things to do. I had to tell them over the phone and just the silence on the other end of the phone was very hard to take.

Sophia - I didn't tell my parents, because they lived far away. They couldn't see me. The other thing was they had already lost one of their daughters and I thought it was too much for them to take. And they weren't here to see me that I was doing very well. I'm still here, after all these years. But when you're far away, you're always wondering and crying, you know. It's very hard to reach out. That's the only reason I didn't tell my parents.

Glenise - To people who are older, being told that their child has cancer is the big 'C'. And to them, they're going to lose their child.

Ruth - The more I told people, the easier it became. Telling my family was the hardest, then I started to tell family and work friends and it became a little easier. But, um, the hard thing was trying to guess how they were going to react to me. Because some people were very shocked, stunned, crying. That sort of thing.

Barbara - At the time I was diagnosed, I wanted to tell everybody. I rang my mum, my dad, my sister, my neighbours, my friends. I just thought I had to tell them. I hadn't known anyone with breast cancer before. I had a wide circle of friends and no one had even been diagnosed with cancer, let alone breast cancer.

Barbara & Husband - Well, at first, I was very teary. I think the first person I told, apart from our close family, was my sister. I couldn't talk about it without... I said, "I'll probably cry telling you this". But, after I'd told it two or three times, I was able to talk about it quite alright.

Ruth - The affect on my relationship with my husband, is that it's brought us much closer together. Through the diagnosis, through that time, we learnt to talk a lot more. We basically



sat down and talked a lot more than we had before. So, we're much closer. We understand each other a lot more now. It brought me closer to my parents. We were a close family, but I've lived away from them for quite a number of years now. So, we do talk more often. It's a weekly contact there. You know, every week. So, it's brought me closer to them, and also to my sister. We were never very close, but now we are a lot closer and we talk a lot more.