

BAD TIMES
GOOD TIMES

Teenage Cancer

Our Story

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We would like to dedicate this book
to all of the members and friends of CanTeen,
who have made this group what it is today.



Introduction

Acknowledgements

CanTeen Ireland wishes to thank the People in Need Trust and the Katharine Howard Foundation for their generous financial support which enabled the publication of this book. We would also like to thank Mark McCann and Goodson Print (Irl. Ltd.) who assisted us with this publication.

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In today's world cancer is a commonplace illness that affects thousands of people. In many countries groups have been set up to help people with cancer, and some particularly to help young people who have to deal with such an illness early in their lives.

CanTeen Ireland

CanTeen Ireland is a nation-wide support group for young people between the ages of 12 and 25 years who have or have had cancer. It was founded in May 1990 by a dedicated group of health care professionals. Our aim is to help, support, develop and empower young people with cancer. We recognise the importance of siblings and friends and members can bring a brother, sister or friend with them to meetings or weekends away. Currently we have 200 members.

So what do we do?

We have day meetings where everyone can get the chance to talk, share their stories about cancer and have fun. It is very informal, and there is never pressure on anyone to talk if they don't want to. We organise activities such as bowling, quasar, horse riding and many more ... We also go on 5 – 6 holiday weekends away per

year, and produce a newsletter, which contains stories and articles written by our members.

A few years ago one of our members, Dave suggested that members from CanTeen write about their personal experience of cancer. Dave suggested that, had such a book been available when he himself was sick, it would have been a great help. Other members agreed and this is our book “Bad Times, Good Times, Teenage Cancer, Our Story.” We hope that in reading this book you will be reminded that you are NOT ALONE and that other young people have been there too. Indeed this is their story!

Overcome any obstacles

Looking at me today, nobody would guess I had Leukaemia as a child. People see an average height girl with strawberry blonde hair and blue eyes, and presume I am a normal hormonal teenager. I am, but for many years life for me was far from normal.

It all began in January 1993, when I was six years old. I started complaining about pains in my left wrist. My mother remembers first noticing it when I said “stop squeezing my sore hand”. I went to casualty but nothing showed up in the x-ray. We put it down



Aisling and Caroline

to the gymnastics I was doing at the time. The pains went, but shortly afterwards returned. Again I went to casualty, had an x-ray, but still nothing showed up. This time it was my right wrist. The pains got worse. My mother brought me to my local G.P. where I had my first blood test, and before the end of the week I was in Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin. I was diagnosed with Leukaemia. In Our Lady's I began six months of chemotherapy under Dr. Fin Breatnach. My hair fell out, which made me feel very self conscious. I wore a lot of hats and bandanas. On St. John's Ward there was a sign which always made me feel better. It read "God only made so many perfect heads, the rest he covered with hair!!" Each bout of chemo had different side effects, and of course it meant day trips to the hospital, and longer stays too. I missed a lot of school at this time, and I was very prone to infections. I kept up with my school work, as best as I could in hospital with the teacher there, and my own teacher came to my house some evenings after school.

After six months of chemo, I was put on a maintenance programme which was just tablets to take at home. I had to return to the hospital for regular check ups. At one such check up my blood count was lower than usual. More tests followed and the result showed I had relapsed with Leukaemia.

At nine, I had to undergo another six months of intensive chemotherapy followed by a Bone Marrow Transplant. Second time round the chemo struck harder than the first time. I picked up a lot of infections, and often had to be rushed to hospital with

high temperatures. It was equally if not more upsetting for my family and friends than the first time. There was also the worry that they would not be able to find a donor. All my family had to be tested to see if their blood was "Ribena". It turned out that my brother Brian, who was six at the time, was to be my donor.

Before I could have my transplant Brian and I had to undergo a series of tests. We spent up to ten days in hospital with both of our parents before the transplant. The day before my transplant, I had to travel to Belfast with my Mam to get total body irradiation. On the 1st of October 1996 I returned to Crumlin and had my transplant. I was in Intensive Care for a total of four weeks. It took a whole year to fully recover after my transplant. I had to take the year off school, and had to go for regular check ups to Crumlin. These have slowly dropped to yearly check ups. Radiation produced a lot of side effects for me over the years. I have been on growth hormone injections to boost my growth. I have had cataracts removed from both eyes. Also my energy levels are quite low, and I find that acupuncture helps.

I am now 17 years old, in 6th year in school, almost eight years over my transplant. I don't really talk about my illness that much and that is why CanTeen is such a help. You get to meet people with similar experiences as yourself. Only a hand few of my friends know that I was sick, and that's the way I want to keep it. It's not that I am ashamed to say it, but it's not a problem for me at present, so why judge me on my past?? I have been very lucky, and had great experiences because of my illness. I've got the

chance to go to places like Barretstown, Lourdes and America. I also got the opportunity to "Make a Wish" and meet Boyzone at the Point Theatre. Another benefit would be the great friendships I've made over the years. I would like this opportunity to thank all of the doctors and nurses on St. John's Ward, especially Dr. Fin Breatnach. Also to my dear family and friends who gave me so much help and support, it is greatly appreciated. Finally to my Mother and Father who gave up so much for me to be here today, I could not have overcome it without you.

I believe cancer has made me a better person today and made me realise that if I can get through having cancer, I can overcome any obstacle in life.

Aisling Mulhall.

The story so far . . .

I've finally taken out my pen to write about my experience of having cancer. It's been an eye opening experience to say the least, more than the average teenager could ever imagine.

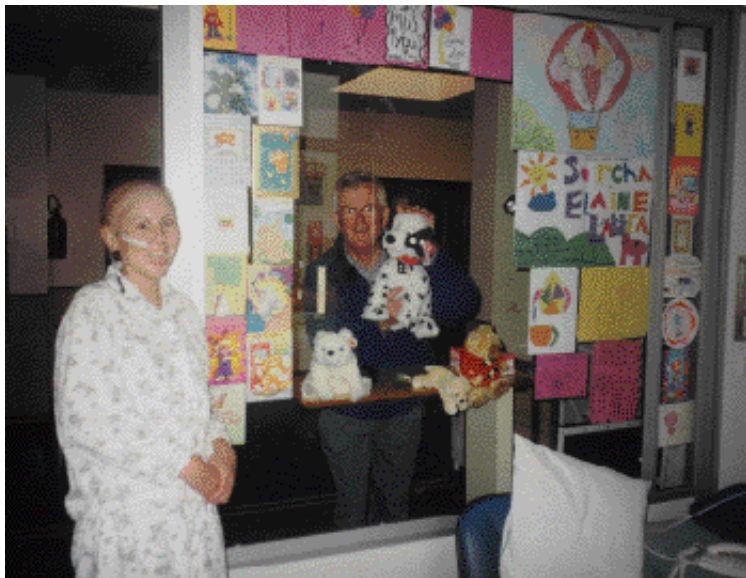
It all started in January 1999 when I was 13. I ran home one day, and found it difficult to breathe, so off I went to the doctors where he discovered a lump in my neck. Next I was sent to the hospital where I had x-rays and scans. It was there that I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease, and was told that I would need six months chemotherapy. Of course as innocent and young as I was, I thought this was just a fancy name for something stupid because to me I looked fine and healthy! The treatment I was to have I thought would consist of taking a tablet every day, but boy was I wrong.

I was allowed home for the weekend, and it wasn't until then that my parents told me that this so called "stupid disease" was Cancer. I hated that word. That was the word that made your hair fall out!! I was so wrapped up in the fact that my hair could fall out that I forgot my life was at stake!

The next day I walked onto the cancer ward in Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin. It was like a whole different world behind that door, that no one ever sees until it happens to them. Bald headed

kids running around playing, with their chemotherapy drips being dragged behind them. There wasn't a bother on them. This was just a normal thing for them.

Eight months of treatment, and an operation seemed to do the trick, and I was given the all clear. Life returned to normal, and things were looking up. I got the chance to visit Barretstown that summer (a ten day session of fun and activities). There I made great friends and had a blast. It was another girl, (with whom I am now great friends), who told about CanTeen so when I came home I joined. I'm glad I did. I've had such a laugh, made great friends, and found people my age who actually know what you've been through, because no one does until they've been there, even if they try to tell you they know. They don't!!



Ciara and her Dad, Pat

It was after a weekend in Barretstown with CanTeen in October 2000, that I came home to the brilliant news that my cancer decided to pay me a nice visit. This time the cancer decided to stay a bit longer. It wasn't as bad as the first time though as I knew what to expect. So after four months of chemotherapy I went for radiotherapy. I was fine until they started drawing all over my face and neck so they would know where to give me the radiotherapy. It was so annoying because everyday in school different people would come and tell me that I had ink on my face. At the start I tried explaining, but some people didn't understand so in the end I just said "Oh thanks for telling me, I'll wash it off now in a minute". They must have thought I never washed!!

After that was finished I had a Bone Marrow Transplant in August 2001. In the months running up to it the doctor on three separate occasions painstakingly extracted stem cells from my hip bones and lower back. Eleven bags were stored away and would be used to pump back into me to give me a new release of "Tumour Free Life". Firstly I had one week of high dose chemotherapy and then got my own stem cells transplanted back into me, as the chemotherapy had killed them in the process of blasting them to infinity and beyond!! What followed was the worst seven weeks of my life- full of hair loss, nausea, fever rashes, infections and diarrhoea. You name it I had it. Being in isolation on a children's ward did not suit me at all. When I asked where could I have a shower because my room didn't have one I was handed a small pink baby bath! Now this is a girl of five foot

ten we're talking about, the chemo had not stunted my growth! So seeing that they were serious I did the impossible and bathed in a bath that only a one year old would fit in! Don't even ask let's just say I had lost a lot of weight!

Seven weeks later I was let out of the cage they had locked me in for "my own good". They were right though because it did the trick! It was a long road to recovery and learning to cope with the damage some of the drugs did to me wasn't easy, but I feel with the help of my family, friends and of course CanTeen I've come through it all.

Three years since my transplant and I'm full of life as I await one of my checkups. I got my Leaving Cert results and have just started nursing. Weird I know you'd think it would be the last place I would want to work! I swore I'd never go back! Revenge is sweet! Ah no I just feel I will be able to help sick people because I will truly know how they feel.

So would I change having cancer if I had the choice? That's a hard one but it would have to be No because it's cancer that has made me the person that I am today, and I wouldn't change that for the life of me. It has made me appreciate the things I've got and the friends I've made. Joining CanTeen has been one of the best things to come out of this experience. It has the craziest, funniest people you'll ever meet and I will never forget them.....

Life's too short, so I'll leave you with a quote that James Dean once said that I live by:



Ciara

Dream as if you'll live forever,
Live as if you'll die today.

Ciara Barry,
Age 19.

That's just the way it is.

It was 1995 and I was just seven years old, in 2nd class and everything was going great. Early in the year I started to get pains in my left leg, but my Mam just put it down to me being so involved in sport. After a week or so I went to the doctor's he said it was "growing pains".

Weeks went by and still I had the pain so my Mam took me to the hospital where I got an x-ray done. The doctor decided to keep me in to run some tests. I was in for a week, and after many tests they then sent me to Cappagh hospital where I had a biopsy done. Within two days they told me that I had a tumour in my left leg, and that it had spread to my chest. Ehh hello a tumour, I was seven, how did I know what that was anyway?

Two days later I was in Our lady's Hospital in St. John's Ward. I started my first chemotherapy on St. Patrick's Day. That all lasted for about three months, and then I had surgery to remove the tumour. It did not go too well, and after that I had to be in a cast for six months. Then after that I was in a splint for another six months. Then the unthinkable happened, the doctors told me that that my leg was not healing because I was still on chemo. The wound in my leg was so bad they said that I could keep my leg and live a short painful life, or get it amputated. I was told that I

would be able to get a false leg, and hopefully get on with my life. So in October of 1996 I had my leg amputated.

Everything seemed great, I was in remission for two years. Then in 1998 I had to get my tonsils out and never really recovered after that. I was taken back into Our Lady's hospital, where the doctor told me I had A.M.L, a type of leukaemia. At that stage in my life I was ten years old and already had one type of cancer behind me. So it started all over again, I was back to square one! This time the chemo really hit me hard, I was in hospital for most of the year. I never really got home, and when I did it was for no more than two



Ciara

days, and then I would have to go back in with a high temperature. Then in September 1998 my sister was a match, and was able to donate her bone marrow cells for my Bone Marrow Transplant. That all went great. Ever since then I have been in remission, and going strong. I am now 17 and have just done my Leaving Certificate this year. From time to time I go back to Crumlin hospital for a check-up, and I still attend Cappagh because every so often I have to get a new leg. Ah well that's just the way it goes, I don't mind.

I joined CanTeen four years ago, and since becoming a member I have never looked back. It's great, the people are some of the kindest and most understanding that you could ever meet, because most of them have been there too! I don't know what I would do if it was not for the friends and support which I have gained from CanTeen.

Although cancer was the worst thing that has ever happened to me, it has also been the best. Through my illness I've gotten to meet so many wonderful people, and gotten to go to so many places. If I had the chance I would not change a thing,

Also I would not have been able to get through it all if it was not for the love and support which my Mam, sisters, family and friends gave to me throughout my whole illness

Well that's my story. Thanks for taking the time to read it, and remember if I can get through cancer any one can!

Ciara Hoolohan.

Life is so . . . why?

My experience of cancer all started in 1997 when I was hit by a car. A day or so afterwards a lump came up on my neck. I hadn't a clue what it was so it was a bit scary. After that I was sent to the very nice people in Temple Street hospital, to see if they could find out what the lump was, and what caused it to come up. After 17 months of tests, scans and what not they decided to remove the lump. The next week I went in to have an operation. It went well but I was very sore afterwards. The week, I went back to have my stitches taken out, they told me everything was okay. But two weeks later I got a telephone call saying that I had to go back to the hospital straight away and that they had something very important to tell me. Little did I know they were going to tell me that I had cancer. To be honest I hadn't a clue what that meant. I had never really heard the word being used before, only when I was told that's what my uncle died from. That all happened in March of 1999. For 3 months after that I went to Crumlin hospital to see what kind of treatment would be best for me. At this time I don't really know how I felt. I didn't understand what was happening to me so I just went on with life as normal. Then one day it just hit me that I had cancer, and that was a serious illness that could kill you.

I cried for about two hours after that.

Instead of treatment they decided that I was to have another operation, well it was more of a clean out, because they weren't



Clodagh

too sure if the cancer had spread. I had that operation on the 9th of June 1999. This one took a bit longer than the first, mainly because they had to go a bit deeper this time. As with the first operation I was really sore, and had a lot of stitches, 56 to be precise.

The wait for the results after the operation seemed really long to me, but when I was told everything was clear, I was never as happy. It meant that I wouldn't have to get any more treatment which was a good thing. I was one of the lucky ones, they had caught the cancer in time.

It wasn't until 2 years later that I heard about the group CanTeen. This group has helped me talk about my experience a lot more, and I've only been involved for 3 years. It really helps me because I couldn't talk to my friends about cancer. None of them had experienced it, so they didn't understand what I was going through. But in CanTeen everyone understands how you're feeling and what you've been through. Well that sums up my experience of cancer. Maybe it will help someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer.

Clodagh Byrne.

Sometimes life is hard

Hello, my name is Colm Mooney and this is my story of how I was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of eight.

It all started around the Christmas of 1998. Everything was great until the evening that I happened to mention that my right hand was slightly weaker than my left, although I was right handed. At first, I was told that I wasn't using it enough. Well that was true as I had been neglecting my hand, but that was not why it was weak. Several weeks later of using my hand, it was much worse. At this stage, my parents brought me to my G.P. As he was examining me, he asked me to hop across the room on my left foot – it was a doddle! But when it came to my right foot, just as with my hand I struggled. From here, I was sent to Temple Street, to a Neurologist called Dr King, who did some scans on my brain. When the results came through, they could see that I had a brain tumour. So I was sent to have a biopsy in Beaumont hospital. I wasn't that worried at the time. I barely knew what a tumour was and had no idea of how deadly it could be. I was told I would be in hospital for just three days - what could be better than three days off school? I thought it was great! But it was nothing like I expected. First I had to fast which I hated and I was so hungry from the steroids. Then I got a Cannula put in my wrist, in which

I was given an anaesthetic. I thought I had just blinked but when I opened my eyes, I was in another room and a lot more tired. At once a nurse came to see how I was. I was feeling quite rotten for the next couple of days and instead of three days I was in for four days as we had to wait for the results, which were not good. I had Cancer.

This was something I could vaguely remember hearing about, but didn't even know it was a type of tumour. The type of cancer I had was brain stem astrocytoma, (astro meaning star shaped and



Colm

cytoma meaning cells), as that was the shape of the cells in the tumour. The doctors told me I would have to get chemotherapy. I had never heard of chemotherapy before but I didn't like the sound of it. I was told I would have to go to Saint John's Ward in Our Lady's Hospital Crumlin where my Consultant was Dr. Breatnach. He was very good. Before I started my chemo, I had to have a broviac put in. I had to go in for a small operation for this, but this time I knew what I was getting in to. It wasn't that everyone in the hospital wasn't very nice to me, but I always loved to get home.

At this stage, I had lost all movement in my right hand and almost all in my right leg. I was in a wheelchair a lot of the time, but I would try to walk as much as I could but it was more like a limp, and I couldn't even get down the stairs by myself. I was constantly tired and had a partial memory loss, but that slowly faded away. During all this, I was under the weather much of the time, and was on a lot of tablets and medicine. I had lost almost all my hair through chemo. The rest I decided to shave off, as I looked fairly weird with only a couple of hairs. I did go to school on some days if I didn't have any treatment and was feeling up to it. Even when I did, I could only ever stay an hour or two.

My chemo lasted about three months and I was quite relieved to get it over with. But I still had more treatment to go – this time it was Radiotherapy, which was at St Luke's. My Consultant here was Dr. O'Sullivan. This was a bit easier than chemo; I got it Monday to Friday after a bit of school, which I had been able to

go to more frequently. After twenty-eight days of treatment my doctor said I was holding up so well that I would be getting an extra four days. I only recently realised what she meant by that. At the time I thought that if I was doing well I should be getting less treatment. They said it would be six months before the treatment had full effect.

Now six years on I look at what benefits I have received despite what I have been through. The first would be Barretstown Gang Camp set up by Paul Newman. It is a camp for seriously ill kids that I was lucky enough to go to twice. I was also lucky enough to be selected last year to go to the US for 10 days to the Hole in the Wall Gang camp in Connecticut where I even met Paul Newman and had a 2 day trip to New York.

But more than anything it has been joining CanTeen which is a support group for teenagers who have, or have had cancer. We go on weekends away, day meetings, and last year we even went to Alton Towers.

Sometimes it is hard to have cancer because I am not exactly the same as every one else. But in CanTeen every one understands and can relate to what I've been through, which helps me to get over it. Cancer was probably the most difficult thing I ever went through but it has opened so many doors for me that now I can't imagine my life without it!

It's good to be alive!

My illness began at age 14. I was diagnosed within a week, but didn't find out the real truth until five weeks later. I had been suffering from weakness, tiredness, and constantly getting bruises. My parents had brought me to the doctor when nothing seemed to be getting better.

I had cancer of the bone marrow, and didn't know what it was when I was first told. I was very scared and angry, but didn't know what to do with my anger. My behaviour began to worsen so I started counselling.

My treatment consisted of 12 blocks of Chemotherapy, over three months. Because the cancer was so severe I was put into an isolation ward for over three months. This was a very bad time for me. Half way through my treatment I got chickenpox, which completely knocked my immune system. This meant that no-one except my folks could visit me. My family had a very difficult time while I was ill. They all had to wait and see if I was going to get better, which was very tough on them. At one stage my Mum got shingles from the stress of it all. She couldn't visit me for four weeks, and I missed her terribly. We couldn't even talk on the phone as we would both start crying. On the day she got the all clear, she came immediately to the hospital by taxi to be with me.



Darryl

All through my treatment and recovery my family has been with me every step of the way. My brother Aidan came to the hospital during his lunch breaks, when he could, and my sister Erica visited after work, nearly every day. My Mum and Dad came each day without fail. Mum even gave up work until I got better. Both of them stayed almost every night with me in the hospital.

One of my best memories is hearing the jingle of my Mum's bracelets outside the isolation room, as she washed her hands. I knew that my folks were coming. I will always remember the smell of the perfume my Mum wore in the summer. It was easy to pick up in the isolation ward and was a comfort to me.

Now I am in remission for the last six years. Each day is a bonus. Some weeks are tough, and tests are needed to check my bloods. I now have a lot more energy than I had. I have completed training as a lifeguard, and sometimes give classes. Two years ago I completed Transition Year work as a Nurse's Aid in Beaumont Convalescent Home, and loved every minute of it

My family continue to support me through everything I do. I want to take this opportunity to thank them for always being there.

My future is a positive one. I hope to work as a nurse, and am focusing on, and working towards my goals. I love working with people, and find it hard to stop myself chatting to everybody all of the time.

Having Cancer has made me realise that the small things in life are the most important!

Darryl Sheridan

A love for life

Cancer for me was always something that old people got, and I had never stopped to think about it all. I knew it makes you bald and that you can die. So when I was told that I had cancer I was convinced that they got it wrong, and refused to believe it. For a couple of days I thought I was just having a really horrible crazy dream, and at any minute I'd wake up to my old comfortable "normal" teenage life. But what I hoped to be an illusion or my imagination, just wasn't going away with the sound of an alarm clock in the morning.

My world had been shook to put it mildly. My days were no longer routine, they had become chaotic, filled with hospitals, nurses, needles and fear. As an already vain teenager I was very conscious of this whole losing my hair thing, which wasn't going to help my image. So in an effort to compromise with the doctors I offered to sacrifice my leg in order to keep my hair. Of course they didn't see my reasoning as an option, so they continued with the plan to treat my leg tumour with chemotherapy despite all of my arguments. I begrudgingly parted with my hair on Christmas night 1998, a month after being diagnosed. I had a wig on stand by for when it would happen, and wore the wig for the year I was sick and no-one knew any differently. I still attended school every day, when I wasn't in hospital. No-one in school knew that I had

cancer. I didn't want to be treated like a sick kid, I just wanted to be a normal teenager.

I had to undergo a bone transplant too, so they basically removed my femur and inserted someone else's. The surgery was long (13 hours) and I spent a while bed bound in hospital. I wasn't too pleased with that. When I got out after surgery, I was on crutches for a year and a half afterwards. I got more chemotherapy when I recovered from the operation.

During the summer while I was on treatment I went to Barretstown, a teenage summer camp for sick kids. I was reluctant to go there, as I didn't think it was really my thing. Turns out it was the most amazing place on earth, and no I'm not just being dramatic about it. This place for me was my personal Utopia. The people there were inspirational to say the least. I learned a lot from both the campers (kids) and the Caras (leaders). When it was time to leave it took a lot to drag me away. From then on my whole view on life had changed. I learned that I'm not the only one, and that there's always someone worse than you. I also learned something that I had kind of forgotten, with all the hassle and disruption of cancer. I remembered how to enjoy being childish, foolish and just plain silly. These essential characteristics had been reinstalled. I had a love for life. It also gave me confidence in myself. Because of this new found confidence I plucked up the courage to go to a CanTeen meeting. CanTeen is a teenage cancer support group. I had joined and never gone because I thought it wasn't for me! I was mistaken, as I found out after attending a day

meeting. I couldn't believe it! There were so many teenagers just like me. I knew there were other teenagers with cancer as I had seen them in Barretstown, but they were from all over the world. These were Irish teenagers. I immediately felt like I fitted in here. Finally my longing for normality was realised.



Deidre

In CanTeen I talked about my cancer, and this was when I actually accepted that I had cancer, and admitted to myself that I was a sick kid! It wasn't just the fact that I talked about my cancer, it was the fact that these people were the only ones who could listen to my story, and sincerely empathise with me. Because they really did know what I meant, and knew how I felt. They knew because they felt it too. After the first meeting I knew I'd be back, and I was!

I went on the next weekend away. I've made a lot of friends through it, and they are different from normal friendships. Even though we didn't do all that much talking about what we had been through, we knew we shared similar experiences and emotions. Because of this the bond was much stronger. I continued going to these meetings, and after a while I joined the Steering Committee. This gave me a say in what we do and where we go.

When the chemotherapy sessions finished I was shocked to find my self feel lost. When I was on treatment I had submerged myself in the stays in hospital, and everything revolved around it. It was as if I was thrown out in the cold. I no longer had five days in hospital with my Mam by my side twenty four seven, or nurses making sure things were okay. My Mam of course was still there for (she always is). But being told that you are better came almost as a big of a shock as being told that I was sick. This is when my friends from CanTeen come in. The members are all at different stages of their illness. So by speaking to people a few

years down the line from where I was, I found out that the way I was feeling was to be expected, and they gave me tips on how to deal with it.

They also gave me an idea of how to expect to feel in a while and how I could deal with that. They helped me out, and if it wasn't for them things wouldn't have been as easy. I'm back to normality now, but I still enjoy CanTeen as much as ever, if not more....

Because now I get to give back everything that was given to me, and help people who need help.

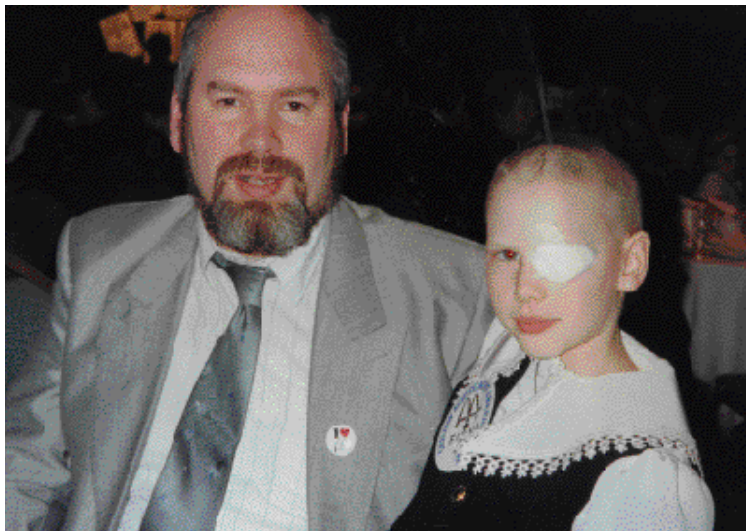
My friends are always there for me, and I'm there for them. The friendships are definitely the best thing to have come out of CanTeen.

Deidre Gorman.

Anything life throws at me

My name is Fiona Dunne. I am twenty two years old, and am nine years free from cancer.

It all started on 21st of October 1989, when I was seven years old. I was just home from Brownies asking my father if I could go on camp for a weekend. He didn't pay any attention to what I was saying, and started poking my face and asking me to open and close my eyes. He seemed to think that my left eye was protruding quite severely in comparison to my right one, and consequently brought me to see our G.P. Our G.P. in turn sent



Fiona and her Dad, Ollie

me straight to Temple Street hospital where I had many different tests, biopsies, scans and x-rays, and a tumour was found on the muscle of my eye. Overnight I was started on my first course of chemotherapy in Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin, three days in then three days home to recover. The chemo was very severe, and I was vomiting every half hour, day and night quite severely, and every time I sat up I would get a bad nose bleed. I lost all of my beautiful hair, including my eyebrows, eyelashes, and even on my arms! When I was on my treatment I was too ill to eat, and lost a lot of weight. I spent most of my time unconscious too weak to open my eyes. I also had to have many blood transfusions as my blood count seemed to be constantly low.

However after six months of this treatment my scan came back clear. The tumour was gone, and in a couple of weeks I would be well enough to go back to my normal life, staying with my friends and going to school. I had been getting fed up with not being allowed see my friends without Mum finding out if they had been in contact with anyone who had been sick, including even a cold. As I had such a low immune system something like a cold could do irreversible damage!

Just over a year later, my Dad upon checking my eye noticed it was protruding again. I was petrified, but at least I knew what to expect. I had less invasive tests than before, as they already knew what it was. This time I had six months chemotherapy and was then transferred to Scotland for a few months for Radiotherapy,

which I didn't mind at all. It only lasted thirty seconds every day, and had much less side effects than the chemo. During the radiotherapy I managed to have a much more normal life. Then upon returning to Ireland I had one more blast of chemo to make sure, and thankfully it appeared to have gone, and I was given the all clear a second time....

Unfortunately only six months later the tumour was back with a vengeance. I was terrified; I imagined that I would spend the rest of my probably short life ill in hospital. I was sure I was going to die this time. I was tired of fighting, and couldn't raise any motivation at all. Then it was suggested to me that surgery may be the answer. I didn't seem to have much choice, and it was my last chance to beat this. I agreed to have my eye, eyelids, optic nerve and muscle removed. After the surgery I was reluctant to believe it was gone forever. I was in and out of hospital continuously, due to side effects from the chemo such as kidney problems and I had stopped growing. I was always grateful though that, that was all I had to deal with.

I had a prosthetic eye made and unrealistic as it is it is my pride and joy. It stands for all the fighting I did over the years, and proof that you can succeed against all odds. I was finally free, enjoying life again, and happy.

Two years ago I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, my pride and joy. I was always told that I would never have children so she is also a miracle baby! My life is fantastic, and I find success in every aspect of it due to the determination I have gained over the years,



Fiona and Louise

which proved I can do anything I set my mind to!

Cancer was the best thing that ever happened to me. It has made me the happy, optimistic and contented person I am now, and I know I can deal with anything life throws at me!!

Cancer- not a fatal word

The first thing that comes to mind when I think of having cancer is my family and friends. If it was not for my extremely close friendship with my Mam and Dad, I don't think I would have had such a relaxed attitude towards my illness. If I started naming all my brilliant friends who kept me sane while I was sick, I would be here all week.

I could say I remember it like it was yesterday, but that is not true. I blocked out most of it, not because it was a terrible and traumatic illness, but because that was then and this is now!

It was November 1998, and I was in third year in school, so I thought I had enough stress with the Junior Certificate. When I was diagnosed I had a swollen neck, and I was sent for about seven blood tests. Finally they sent me to the Mater Private Hospital to have other tests done, including something to do with putting a camera up my nose. I was then sent for a biopsy. This was when they confirmed that I had Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a blood disease.

The fatal word cancer had not been mentioned yet. It was not until I went to see a Guidance Counsellor that I found out I had cancer. She was telling me about a group CanTeen. She explained that it was a support group for teenagers who have or have had cancer. Since that meeting I have been a member of CanTeen and

I love it.

Later I was introduced to my doctor. She was brilliant. When she spoke about cancer and my treatment, she spoke in a calming and encouraging manner. The questions I asked my doctor were "Will



Laura and Jean at their Debs

I die, will I lose my hair, and how long will it last?” She replied with “No, no and nine months”. My attitude at this stage was it will all be over in nine months, and then everything will be back to normal.

For nine months I was taking about 30 tablets a day, and once a week I went to the hospital for a blast of chemotherapy. I was really lucky. I was on chemo and tablets for two weeks, and then I had a break for two weeks but to be honest I think I felt worse when I wasn't taking tablets.

When I went into the hospital to see my doctor after my nine months of chemo I thought it was going to be the happiest day of my life, but she said to me that I was going to have to take another two weeks of tablets and chemo just to be sure. I know two weeks doesn't sound like that long, but it must have been the longest two weeks of my life. Finally in July 1999 I was finished my chemo for ever. I still had to go back for check ups, but that was easy after what I had been through.

I got my Junior Cert results back and was chuffed with what I had gotten. In November 2001 I went on my first CanTeen weekend away, and brought my best friend Laura with me. It was one of the best weekends of my life, and I have nearly gone on every weekend and day meeting since!

My initial reaction when I got cancer was it will be all over soon, and it was. I know it sounds strange but cancer is one of the best things that ever happened to me. It has put real meaning in my life.

I am now in 2nd year in college, and very healthy. I hope to be a member of CanTeen until I am twenty five, and then I hope to become a leader and help other teenagers who have or have had cancer.

Jean Gill.

The all clear

In 1989 I was diagnosed as having Cancer (a Brain Tumour). My local G.P was sent for and examined me. I thought it was a bug, but he then referred me to Temple Street Hospital. They did a lot of tests on me in Temple Street, and put me on a drip. I thought it would all be over soon, and I that I would be going home the next day. But instead I was transferred to Beaumont Hospital for a CAT scan, and the CAT Scan confirmed it was cancer. When the doctor came and told me it was a brain tumour and that I would need an operation I was scared. Not that I had cancer but that I had to go for an operation, as I was only 12 years old and did not really know what cancer meant. When I had the



Jennifer, Rebecca, Liam, Dave and Rossa

operation and woke up in Intensive Care, I was even more afraid as there were machines all around me and tubes coming from my head and mouth. I didn't know where I was, but then I saw my Mam and Dad, and that gave me comfort, and reassured me that I would be ok.

Then a day later, when the tube was removed from my mouth, the nurse gave me a mirror to look at my face, as it felt funny. When I saw my face I got a big shock as I could not smile or close my eye properly. I was told I had paralysis- the left side of my face would not move as normal. After a few days I was moved down to the children's ward where I started physiotherapy. It was hard to do with my body being so stiff and lazy, but as I did the physiotherapy I started getting stronger but I still couldn't walk. My speech was getting much better as this had been affected by the operation.

Eventually after six weeks I went home to a welcome home party and saw my friends. Two hours later I went to Crumlin hospital to meet the doctor and see what my treatment was. It was Chemotherapy. I had to start the following Monday which gave me two days to relax. When I started chemotherapy I didn't realise that I would feel so sick and be vomiting from it. It was very draining on me and I had no energy to do anything, but to sit down, and this went on for a year. Then a few years went by and I relapsed. I thought it was going to be all the same over again, another stay in hospital for six weeks, be in pain, and not be able to walk. But this time it was different. I didn't stay in

hospital for six weeks, but only ten days and was able to walk. Five months later I was told that I needed Radiotherapy. This was hard, as I had to leave school and travel from Finglas to St. Luke's Hospital in Rathgar every morning for 10 am for seven weeks. I just felt like staying in bed and forgetting that I was having Radiotherapy. But the worst thing was my hair falling out. This is not very good for your self esteem especially when you're 15 years old, and have very low self esteem. After that I counted the days until my hair grew back. After radiotherapy I went back to Beaumont, Crumlin and St. Luke's for check ups, After 5 years I was given the all clear from cancer and that meant the end of staying in hospitals for me. It was the best news that I had heard in a long time. I only have once yearly checkups now. During my stays in hospital I did manage to stay in school and then went to college and have done a N.C.V.A Certificate level 2 in Childcare, and worked with children for a few years, and now at 27 I hope to go and do different things.

Jennifer McLoughlin.

Living proof

Hey my name is Jenny. This is my little story about my experience of cancer. Here it goes.

It all happened roughly around nine years ago. I was eight years old, and ready to make my Communion, being a kid that's a big step. What I didn't know is that I had much bigger steps ahead of me.

Before I found out I had cancer I was like any other kid. I was in school, didn't like it that much, but I was still there. I took part in dance classes, which I looked forward to, couldn't have been happier, until the start of 1995.

At the start of 1995 I started limping on my left leg. No-one knew why I was limping, I didn't even know. At first my parents thought I just put it on. A few weeks had passed and my leg was only getting worse. My parents were getting very worried, so my Mam brought me to the doctor. The doctor told me it was probably just a groin strain, and that it would go away in time. The doctor also gave us an appointment for an X-ray, if my leg didn't get better. In a week I was brought to the hospital. I can tell you one thing it wasn't a groin strain.

When my parents brought me to the hospital to get an x-ray it was fine except for one little glitch on the x-ray. I was then brought back in for a CAT scan. Then I was kept in hospital for

tests. They had spotted a tumour on my left leg. At this stage there was less than a month to my Communion, so the last thing I need was to be missing school.

My big day was here, I got ready for my Communion in the hospital. By then I could barely walk, and if I did walk the pain would be too much. That day I walked down the aisle with the rest of my class. I didn't want to be different from anyone else. To be honest I had a great day. My parents had a party and all my friends and family came. Two days later I was in hospital again.

When I went back they threw a surprise party for me and the whole ward was there, that was cool! Unfortunately the next day I was transferred to Cappagh Orthopaedic Hospital with lots of



Jenny

new faces. It wasn't long before I got to know everyone. What they did here was that they took a sample of tissue from the tumour in my leg to see what type it was. That procedure is called a biopsy. The results arrived; I can tell you my life changed from that point on. The tumour I had was called Ewing's Sarcoma, it wasn't the worst tumour, I was lucky there. The worst was explaining to me that I had cancer. To be honest I was more upset about my hair falling out; I was eight years old I didn't know what cancer was!

A week later I was in Our Lady's Hospital, Crumlin on treatment. For this type of treatment I had to get a Broviac catheter. This is a piece of rubber tubing which went into my chest, and then into my heart. When I walked onto St. John's Ward there were kids with no hair, and they were attached to machines. I was really scared; the worst was still to come.

Back to my limp. By now my hip bone in my left leg had snapped, because the tumour had gotten to the bone and the pressure on my leg made it weak. So the lovely people at Cappagh Hospital decided that they would have to remove my bone and replace it with a metal one. It was more complicated than it sounded. Because I was so young and small it took them longer to build a bone to fit, but not too long!

On the 29th of August, operation hip replacement took place! I'll never forget that date, because it was one month before my birthday. On the morning of the operation I confused my doctor that he was about to operate on the wrong leg! It's one of those

moments where you had to have been there!! I'm sure he remembers though! The operation was a success, I was smiling coming out of the operating theatre. I knew the worst was over with.

Now it was back to Crumlin Hospital to get lots more treatment. So all together I had four long sessions before the operation, and twelve shorter sessions after it. During that time I had made lots of new friends, sadly some of them have passed away. The friends I had kept me going and we had each other's company, not forgetting my brilliant family of course.

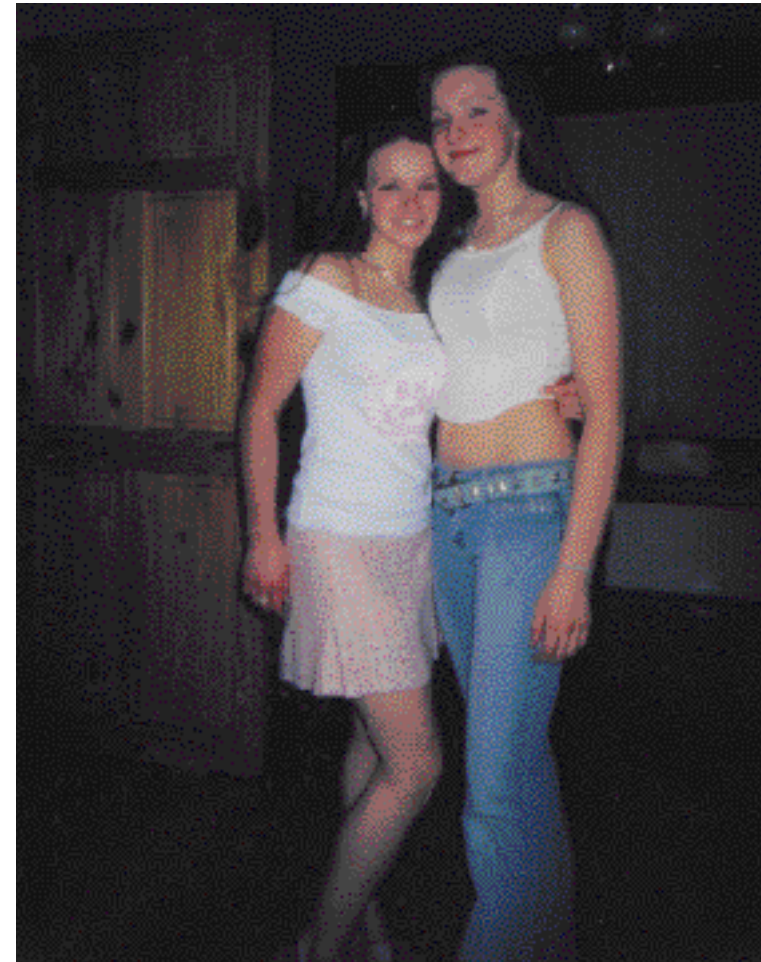
The bad thing that cancer did to me was that it made me lose my appetite, whereby I then lost an unhealthy amount of weight. I had to get a Naso-Gastric tube to keep my energy up. A Naso-Gastric tube is a tube that goes into your nose and on into your stomach. At night I would get this foodstuff pumped into me, it wasn't attractive, but I needed it.

Hooray the treatments over and I can walk again. I have a limp. But it's better than having no leg! My hair is growing back. I remember there was a bet on to see what colour it would turn out. Blonde hair would not have suited me, I'm a brunette!!

All I needed now was the all clear, and I could get my Broviac removed. Finally, I got the all clear. The only thing I had to worry about was my leg and showing up on time for my check-ups.

Two years had passed, and I was obviously growing, not that much though. When I grow, my limp gets worse, which the then lovely people at Cappagh have to fix. The great thing about my

new metal bone is that it can be stretched as I grow, just so that my left side keeps up with my right side. When they do this it's called a lengthening. I had to get one of these. It wasn't too bad as my friend Jamie was there getting a lengthening too! Since my operation in 1995, I have had one lengthening, so you can



Jenny and her cousin Aimee

imagine that I'm small.

After that it was just a matter of check-up after check-up. Now I go for check-ups at least once a year just to be on the safe side. For now I'm not really finished, as the metal bone I have is a children's bone. So when I'm finished growing completely, this means that they have to fit me with a new adult bone. This one will have to last me for life, but that's not for a few years yet! I'll just keep with this one for the moment.

Now I am almost 18 and am doing my Leaving Cert this year.

Other than school stuff, I have been in a drama group for over 2 years and love it. I am also part of a gospel choir and we sing at Weddings and corporate events. That's great too! Ever since I was 3, I was dancing, well up until I found out that I had cancer. A lot has changed since then. I have lots of new friends, and I have met some wonderful people. For instance I'm in a cancer support group for young people called CanTeen. It's really cool, we go on weekends away at least five times a year, and we also have day meetings. The people there are so nice, and if you need to talk to there's always someone to talk to. Maybe you can run for us in the Women's Mini Marathon next year, I did it this year, it wasn't so bad!

I have also met with some celebrities like Meryl Streep, Boyzone, Kenneth Brannagh and lots more. I met them when I was doing galas at Barretstown Gang Camp. It's this holiday camp for sick children and teenagers. You should go sometime, I think they have family camps also. It really helps you to overcome your

illness, and to realise what you have defeated.

At this point I couldn't ask for anything more. I have the best family and friends. I have to say that I am happier now than I ever have been. Who knows I might even go to Art College, I'm not that bad at art.

One more thing, when a lot of people think of cancer they think of death, I am living proof that we don't all die!!

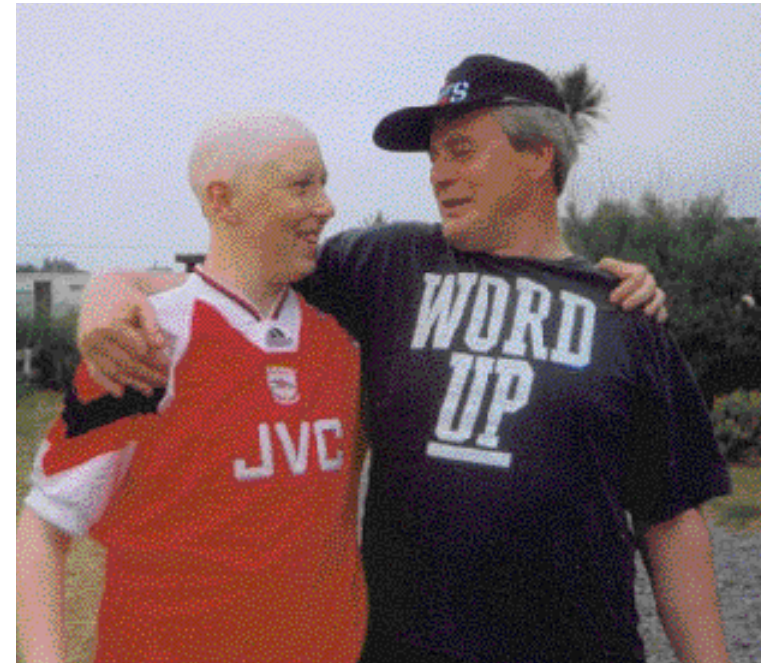
Goodluck!

Jenny O'Donovan

It's my life Jim, but not as you know it!

Well here I am, sitting at my computer, feeling a bit melodramatic. I'm just looking over my life and how things have gone. You're probably thinking loser, I know I am, but I'm doing it anyway. This year, I finally was told I don't have to go back to hospital until another year, which to me was the closing of a chapter of my life and the opening of another one.

This chapter, so to speak, began back in April 1994 when I was told I had cancer. At this time I was studying hard for my Junior Cert, my beloved Arsenal were conquerors of Europe (how sad am I), Live Forever was at no. 1 and Robbie Williams was a snotty nosed backing singer for a rubbish boy band called Take That. Sorry about that, but I have issues with Robbie Williams. The first sign that all wasn't well was a lump that appeared on my neck. Big deal, or so I thought. Luckily, my parents didn't dismiss it like I did, and sent me to the doctor with it. He sent me into hospital to have it checked out. All this commotion for a lump, I could be in school learning. I was a bit of a nerd back then before TV corrupted my soul. Well, two weeks of going back and forwards for various tests, x-rays, biopsies (a lot of fun???? Yeah right!!!!) I was told I had Hodgkin's Disease. Like I knew what that was!!!



Liam and his Dad, Gerry

My parents would not use the word cancer to me, they probably thought calling it Hodgkin's made it less serious. My friend, who incidentally is studying to be a doctor now, told me it was cancer. I have to admit it wasn't the ideal way to find out. And this was all before I met the Oncologist. One of the hardest things I have ever had to do was to then tell the rest of my friends I had cancer. I mean, how do you do that?? Telling people at first met with a mixed response. I lost a few friends because of this, but I also became closer to the friends I have.

The first day in hospital was pretty strange. I met with my

Oncologist, Professor Daly and he explained to me how my cancer works and how he was going to treat it. This actually went fairly well. He told me that if I didn't understand anything, he would explain it to me in a language I could understand. This part was fine. I knew about the physical side of things. I new I was going to get sicker before I got better. But trying to deal with all this is a lot harder than anyone could imagine. The first dose of treatment didn't go well. I reacted badly and was taken in to hospital. This freaked me out. I felt really alone and just scared about it all. It passed after a while but I was still freaked about the ordeal. I didn't really let it show as my family was finding it hard and this would be another worry for them if I was upset by all of this, or so I thought.

While I was in hospital, Margaret (CanTeen leader) told me about this group called CanTeen, and that other teenagers who also had cancer were involved in this group (other teenagers with cancer, I thought I was the only one), and that I was now in it. My folks were grand about this, as they knew Margaret from the hospital, which gave them piece of mind about letting me go. My first weekend away was to Redcross. I was just over my third Chemotherapy session (still freaked out by the way), but by now I had no hair and I had gained a bit of weight from the steroids. While I was away, not only did I have a deadly time, but I got to meet others who had gone through similar treatment (and sometimes worse) than I was going through and were now well and leading normal lives. Woo Hoo!!!!!! Finally I didn't feel so

alone and I learned that people who get cancer can actually live. This was a concept that was alien to me previously.

So my outlook on everything had changed. Life wasn't that bad, except for treatment, but this was just something I had to do now. When I finished the chemo, I then went for Radiotherapy. This sucked, as I was tired all the time and my taste buds changed. But I got through it all and my taste buds came back.

Things then slowly got back to normal. Eventually I got back to school. By now I didn't really have much interest in school as I was so far behind it was hard to motivate myself. It was now the summer of 1995 and things were going ok. I was back in for a check up when the news no one wanted to hear was given. It's Back ! The CT scan picked up the cancer in my lower stomach and groin. My doctor seemed more pissed off about it than I was as he thought he had finished the job. This time I was to have high dose chemo (to blast the thing out of me) and a Stem Cell Transplant to replace the bone marrow that would be destroyed by the chemo. This time the treatment made me a lot sicker and I had to spend a time in isolation after receiving my stem cells. I then eventually left hospital at the end of November, and that was the last time I had any treatment. It's now ten years since I was first diagnosed and nine years since I was last treated. The only long-term side effect of my treatment is that I have an under active thyroid. This is just an inconvenience as all I have to do is take a tablet in the morning, and that's it.

I was involved with CanTeen throughout my whole treatment.

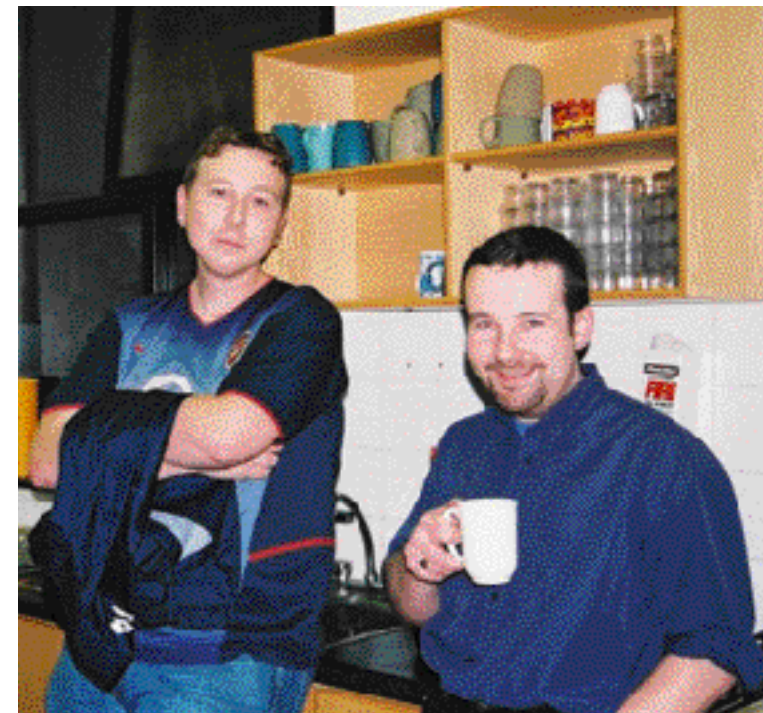
I'm glad I was because that was the time I needed it the most. When your sick, it's hard to relate to anyone, as not many people have experienced what it is like to be sick, having to be in isolation, or not having much hair. Going to meetings with CanTeen meant I could talk to people who know what this is like, and more importantly, have a good time. It was also good for me to get away from everything and enjoy myself without the worry of being sick. The most important thing CanTeen has given me is a sense of self-belief. People, who know me, find it hard to believe that I was really shy before I became a member of this group. I have problems with "shutting the hell up" now. It has allowed me to work on stuff that has benefited other teenagers who have had cancer. I was involved in the writing of a guide for teenagers with cancer (which didn't exist when I was in hospital), as well as the TeenLink program. This is a pilot program where teenagers who have had cancer, visit newly diagnosed teenagers and talk to them about what it is like to be sick.

To be honest, I believe cancer was the best thing to ever happen to me as I've got to see and do so much, meet so many people and visit so many places. I've also been on the telly and radio a few times. These are all things I wouldn't have been able to do if I never had cancer.

Anyway, just in case you are wondering, since been successfully treated for cancer my life's been OK. I went back to school and got a decent leaving cert. I then went to college to study Electronic engineering and I currently work as an electronic

technician. I also play bass guitar (badly) in a band. I'm still supporting Arsenal, but a football team is for life, not just for Christmas.

This is where my life is now. When I was first diagnosed, I never thought I would be here to write anything like this. It is possible to lead a normal life after having cancer. If I had it back, I don't think I would change having had cancer as I think it was cancer that has made me the person I am, and I like being me. I told you I would get a bit melodramatic, but hey, I enjoyed writing this almost as much as you got bored reading this. Well, I suppose it's



Liam and Mark

a good idea to leave you with a quote, something to end this on a high (which should be easy, if you actually read what I wrote). I don't know who wrote it but it's cool. Well here it is:

"Life is like a beautiful melody,
only the lyrics are messed up".

Liam Quinn

Everything happens for a reason

What is the first thing that comes into your mind when you are told you or someone you know has cancer?

For most people its 'oh my god I'm going to die'! For some people this may be true but in most cases it's not and hopefully you, as the reader of this book will come to realise this when you finish reading these stories.

My experience started at the early age of five. For weeks I had a horrible cold sore that just wouldn't go away. So after months of going to my local G.P. I was sent for a blood test in Temple St. Hospital. I can't remember exactly what happened after that except I was prodded with needles for what seemed like hours, and the fear I felt was over whelming. Eventually I can remember daddy carrying me up to a ward where I was put in a room on my own. A doctor came to see me then he told me I had Leukaemia a cancer of the blood. I was only five so I didn't understand what cancer was, but I knew it was serious! Treatment started soon after that and my hair fell out in clumps. For me this was the worst part of my illness.

I remember the day a nurse came into my room and without asking just started to cut my hair really short so I wouldn't be going around with all scraggy bits of hair hanging from my head.

I didn't understand this and I hated her for it! I was in isolation and only my parents were allowed to visit. The treatment made me really sick and I used to have nosebleeds for hours because my platelets used to drop so low. After about a year in hospital my leukaemia went into remission and I was let home! Yay!

After a year off treatment I was all ready to get the all clear. I returned to Temple St for the usual fortnightly check up. When I



Lisa



Lisa and Rossa

got to the ward we were called in first which was unusual because we were last in the queue. The doctor then began to tell me that they thought my leukaemia had come back, and I was to be admitted the next morning for a lumbar puncture to be sure. After the L.P. it was confirmed that my leukaemia had returned. I was more upset about the fact that I was going to lose my hair again! It had just grown back all nice. I was also going to miss out on a trip to Lapland that the hospital had arranged! But my motto was I got through it the first time and I was going to do it again! I don't ever remember thinking that's it, I'm going to die. The fact that I could die never even crossed my mind. This time I had to

get a Hickman line in, which I hated and busted it more than once! After another strong course of chemotherapy and more sickness and nosebleeds etc things began to look up for me. I began to get well again.

I am twenty-two now and have been free of cancer since I was eleven. Although my experience was at times horrific I never look back and say why me? I believe everything happens for a reason and what doesn't kill us will make us stronger! The way I see it if I had never had cancer there would be a lot of things I would have missed out on. A few years later on one of my many visits to the hospital for a check up my doctor asked had I ever heard of a group called CanTeen. I hadn't so she explained what it was and told me how I could contact them.

Joining CanTeen was probably one of the best things to come out of my experience with cancer besides my trip to Euro Disney and the BoyZone concert I went to with the hospital! I have made many friends along the way and lost a few too. In CanTeen everybody is in the same boat, nearly everyone there has gone through an experience similar to mine. It's good to get away and be with people who understand what you went through. I am now in a support group organised by CanTeen to support young people who have been newly diagnosed or who are new members in CanTeen. TeenLink works in a buddy system. We act as a buddy to the new members on weekends away or else we visit newly diagnosed cancer patients in hospital to talk about CanTeen or everyday teen stuff and we also share each other's

experiences. I remember when I was sick in hospital the nurses used to dress me up as a nurse and I'd go around with them helping them out. It may have been that experience that made me decide to train as a nurse. I just know its something I've always wanted to do and so in October 2001 I enrolled in D.C.U. as a student nurse. I am training in James Connolly Memorial Hospital in Blanchardstown and I love it. I'm a qualified nurse now as I write this, and although it can be hard at times I love it really. So that's it in a nutshell! It wasn't the most pleasant experience for me and I wouldn't wish it on anyone else but I'll never wish for it never to have happened, it made me who I am today!

Lisa Kirwan.

It's strange, but true!

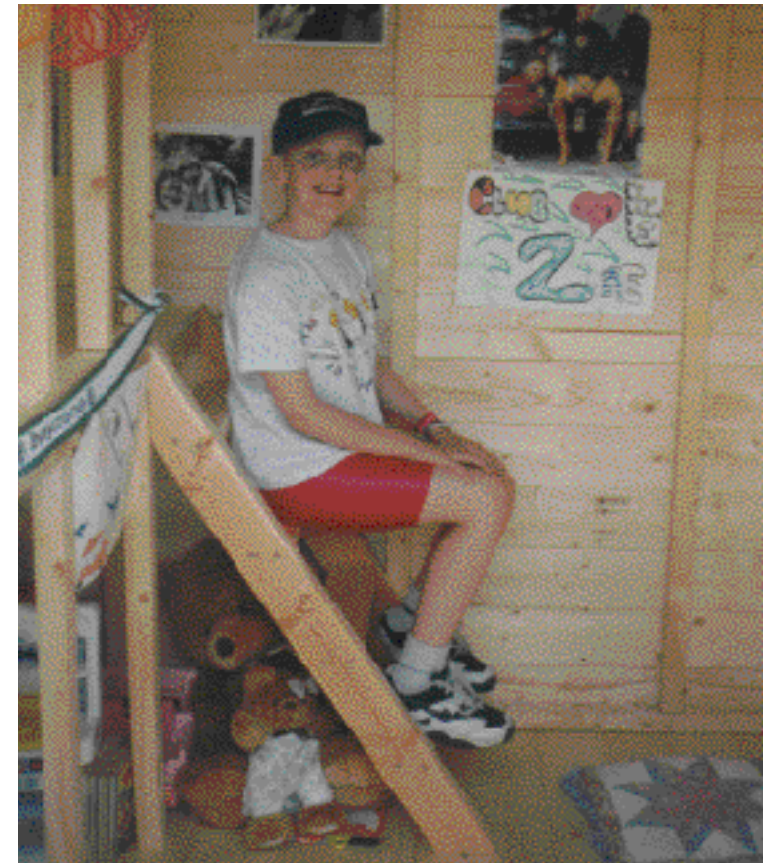
1996 was going great for me, I was in fourth class, had many friends and was doing well, but then I wasn't feeling well. I had many colds and flu's and had no energy. So I was taken to the local doctor, he told me to go to Temple Street hospital to get a blood test. I remember my Mam practically had to carry me home from the doctors I was that weak. The doctor's surgery is basically a stroll down the road. At Temple Street Hospital I was kept in. The doctor came to give us the news as I sat in an isolation room with my Mam. I don't think what he was about to say was what we'd ever have expected! He said I had cancer, I knew this wasn't good, but I didn't know exactly what this was. I saw my Mam crying and I knew it was serious.

A few days later I was moved to Our Lady's Hospital for Sick children in Crumlin. I was told I had Leukaemia and I'd need chemotherapy. All this was obviously taking its toll on me as I didn't understand most of it, but then I heard what I couldn't believe . . . I'd lose my long straight hair. I loved my long hair and the thoughts of it gone was terrible! The next few months were basically chemo, and medication and a bit of a blurr.

Then things seemed to be getting better. I was feeling well, my hair started to grow, even though it was only as long as

Sinead O' Connors! It was hair none the less, then it went curly, This was a total shock as my hair was dead straight before-hand, but it looked cool. I remember the day I was told I was in remission was the day I was also told I could go home for an hour or two. I didn't know what remission was that day, but I heard home and I was delighted!

I'm now 18, eight years off treatment and doing well. I'm just



Maeve



Maeve and Diane at her sister's wedding

finished school, still have the friends that went through all this with me, and have gained more along the way! The support I got from my friends, classmates and neighbours while I was sick was unreal. I was getting presents from people I didn't even know. I don't think I'd have got through a lot of this without the support my family and I got from these people.

I know what I'm about to write may seem strange or weird but I've gained many good things from having Leukaemia, I've visited Barretstown on numerous occasions, gone to Connecticut in the U.S.A to visit the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp, gone to

Lourdes and done many things I never I'd have thought I'd get to do! Having Leukaemia has also made me more optimistic and made me realise not to take things for granted.

I'm also a member of CanTeen Ireland for nearly four years now. CanTeen has definitely helped me understand that I wasn't on my own & that many teenagers go through similar things that I have, or sometimes even worse! I've become a more confident person now, with the help of CanTeen and the members. The friends I've made in CanTeen are ones I hope I will always have! One thing that kept me going through it all was my "P.M.A" Positive Mental Attitude. I know Cancer is obviously tough but I'm glad it happened to me! I know it's hard to remember but there is light at the end of the tunnel!!

Maeve Killeen

Age 18

I wouldn't change a thing

“Goal” what a feeling, twelve years of age playing my first game for my new soccer club. I was on top of the world.

My name by the way Murt O'Mara and now I'm twenty. Eight years ago my life changed. I'd noticed myself being tired a lot, and bruises that I'd had for ages. But at that time I was only after starting secondary school, not finished till four and then playing my beloved sports. My Mam became worried about my tiredness and the bruises so I was advised to attend the local doctor. Me and the doctor, I never used to go to the doctor, takes up too much time, when I could be playing football. So to get my Mam off my back I went to the doctor one Friday before training. The doctor took a blood test. Me being me, thought nothing of it, and headed off training. Two days passed and as long as I live I'll never forget this moment. I was upstairs playing my Sega mega drive with my younger brother, and suddenly heard the sharp sound of our doorbell. I got my brother to check to see who it was and he just said “I don't know Murthy” so we kept enjoying Sonic the Hedgehog. Not long after the front door closed I was being summoned downstairs. Thinking in my own head I was after getting in trouble in school, still not knowing who was at the door. But on arriving down I noticed my mother looking scared

and she spoke to me in her soft gentle voice, “Murt we've to go to the hospital tomorrow for tests.” I didn't understand, I was ok, I didn't need any tests, I was supposed to be playing soccer.

I arrived in Crumlin hospital at 9am and began to get very scared. I was in for all these tests, needles putting me asleep. I didn't know what was happening. When all of these tests were completed I was allowed to go home. That drive home was very silent, nobody had anything to say. My brother met my Mother at the door saying that the hospital rang “Murt has to be up there at 8 in the morning.” This is when I began to get very scared. I didn't know what was happening, I was only 12, I just didn't understand.

Again up early the next morning, and I was put in a room this time while my parents spoke to some doctor. Next I was called



Murt with Stephen

into this room. I first noticed my mother sitting on this chair, frozen and crying. Then I saw my sister and she was crying too, but the thing that made it clear that there was something up was my Dad crying. My Dad - I'd never seen him cry, so I started to cry too. I sat in front of this giant of a man with a moustache and grey hair, later I found out it was Dr. Breatnach, and he spoke in a gentle voice. He asked questions about cancer, and I still didn't understand, all I could ask was "Am I going to die?" He looked back at me and said "I don't know Murt." Slowly he began explaining what was wrong with me. He explained the ins and outs of what illness I had, and told me it was like stepping into a ring with Mike Tyson for 8 rounds.

So my fight began. I got my first course of chemotherapy. It didn't seem to have much effect on me apart from getting sick and a sore mouth. I was allowed home for the first time in three weeks. I remember being so afraid, thinking to myself what would people think of me? I wasn't normal anymore. But it didn't turn out that way at all, everyone was wonderful and helped me deal with my illness. I was at home for two days before I got a temperature and had to return to hospital.

My second course of treatment started two days after returning to hospital. This one caused a bit of damage to my body, most notably my hair, I was bald. I got out again after I finished that course. It was 3 days before Christmas, and I was so glad to be home for it. But before I left I was told the worse is still to come, course 3. I arrived back in Crumlin on the 28th of December for



Murt with Aoife

my third course of 5; well that's what it was supposed to be. It was actually my final. My body couldn't take all the chemo, it shut down. I was restricted to bed; I couldn't eat or sleep and even went to the stage when I couldn't talk to anyone. My family began to worry a lot. I was in that room for three months without getting out. I remember people talking about me as if I wasn't there. They said "He's not long left in him now", and "I wouldn't like to see him go through too much pain". I remember one morning I had 5 doctors in front of me, and they asked how I felt. My reply was the same every time "I'm grand," but I wasn't and they told me this. They said that I couldn't have any more treatment 'cos if I did it would kill me. I was so scared, but I felt I had to be strong

for my family. They were wonderful. They were there through it all and I had to be strong for them. At this stage I was four and a half stone, and being fed by a Naso-Gastric Tube, with most of my feed in the bowl beside me the next morning. I remember a Sunday when I must have had about 100 visitors. They all came to see me and all talked about me not lasting much longer.

From that Sunday on everything changed. My strength got me through the hardest. I started to talk again and smile. Days went by and I started to sit up in the bed. The talk about me dying went away. My dad looked happy and my Mam was smiling. I knew I was going to be ok even though I hadn't eaten or walked in three months, but I knew I would be ok. Days passed and I slowly began to eat. I was taught how to walk again. One Tuesday morning those 5 doctors came back into my room and asked how I was. I told them "I'm grand" and as they left the room I called out and said "It only took three rounds and I knocked him out!" I saw Dr Breatnach look at me and smile, referring to Tyson and his 8 rounds.

Basically that's my story of me and cancer. Although it was the worst thing that ever happened to me, I wouldn't change it for the world. There's a saying that something good always comes out of something bad. Well that's so true. Being sick made me who I am today, and made me a strong person. From being sick I've encountered some amazing things. From meeting Michael Owen to going to Disneyland, but I feel one of the most important things I've done is I've made so many friends from CanTeen. It's

an amazing thing!

Now as I said I'm now 20 years old, working away, driving my own car, playing my beloved sports again and meeting the lads for a few drinks. I'm normal again but I wouldn't change anything. Just to finish I'd like to thank a few people who were there, and who still are. The nurses and doctors on St. John's Ward were simply amazing. My friends and families' friends who kept me going through my illness, and also kept my family going. But most of all I want to thank my family for pulling me through those few months. My Mam and Dad and their partners, my sister, she was just the best and my brothers, also my Aunts, Uncles and Cousins. Without the help and support they've given me I know I wouldn't be here today writing this for you.

Murt O'Mara.

Getting on with life

It was coming towards Christmas 2000. I was thirteen and I was just about settled into my second year in secondary school when I began to feel tired all the time and lost my appetite. In the beginning I thought my tiredness was just due to school, sport and all the other stuff I was doing.

It was during the Christmas holidays that my Mam said she'd take me to the doctor but I kept telling her (and myself) that I was getting better. A pinpoint rash then started to show on my feet (which I later found out was because of low platelets and not an allergy to my socks as Mam had thought!). On the 5th of January '01 I went to my G.P and he sent me straight into the regional hospital in Limerick.

I was put in a small room off the main corridor away from all of the other patients. A doctor took a blood test while myself Mam and Dad waited for hours until they came back with results. Then finally a doctor came and told that us they were 95% sure that I had Leukaemia. Whaat? Leukaemia? I had thought that there was nothing seriously wrong with me because I wasn't sick or in pain. This was a big shock I didn't know Leukaemia was a cancer at the time, but I knew it wasn't good. I was taken by ambulance to Crumlin hospital the next day. It all happened so fast. They

tested my bone marrow, and yes, it was true I had leukaemia. The doctor gave us the news and I remember thinking "I never thought anything like this would happen to me." It's the kind of thing you hear has happened to other people, but you never expect it to happen to you. I had a broviac put in (which I hated from the very beginning), and started chemotherapy a few days later. I was getting intense chemo for about ten months with a few breaks in between (during which I'd usually end up in my local hospital with a temperature anyway so there was never much of a break!). After that I was on maintenance treatment, which let me get on with my life for the most part. This finished after about a year (in June '03) and I was delighted.

I'm almost 17 and did my Leaving Cert this year. I go back to Crumlin every 3-6 months for a check up and everything is going well.



Órla



Fiona and Órla

I joined CanTeen about two years ago, but only went on my first weekend away with them in April 2003. I had a brilliant time and I've been on every trip since. It's great meeting people who really know and understand what you've been through. I've made great friends there.

In the beginning cancer was terrible for me, but now all the friends I've made, people I've met and places I've been to because of having had cancer are making up for it. I don't think I'd go back and change anything even if I could.

Also the immense love and support I received from my family and friends gave me the courage to try and overcome cancer and I think I've come out the other side of it a better person.

Órla Derrane

Where there's a will there's a way

In 1998 my life changed dramatically, some for the worst and the best, and I will explain this. That year I got something I didn't expect, cancer. The way that I found it was I noticed something on my tongue. It took me a while to realise there was something wrong. I went to my G.P. He had a look, I knew by his face that there was something wrong, but of course he couldn't say anything. So two weeks later I saw a Consultant. He told me that I had to have a biopsy. I knew when I heard those words that it could be cancer.

A week later on the Friday, I had the biopsy. I was told that I would know the result a week later. It was funny that whole week I was spoilt, anything I wanted I got. I remember the morning that I got the call to go and see the specialist. I had to wait until 4pm, it was the longest day of my life. My parents and I went into the office, he sat me down with my parents. As I look back I remember his lips moving but no words, it was like a silent movie. That night the phone never stopped ringing. In my head I didn't know what the deal was, but in my heart I knew. The next I remember was going down to the shops with my Mom, and I asked her what was going to happen to me. Her face went white, and she pulled the car over and told me the whole horrible story.



Rebecca and Darryl in Alton Towers

That day my Mom and I shopped till we dropped. It was the type of shopping that every girl wanted. I was shopping not just for all girly things but also for things that I needed for the hospital.

At this stage my friends didn't know. The reason why I hadn't told them as it was one of their birthdays that weekend. But the night of her birthday I didn't go as planned. I started feeling sick and went home. That night I was rushed into hospital. I was kept in hospital for tests for a week, then went home for a week. When I went into hospital it was explained to me what was going to happen. I was told that they would remove part of my tongue, but they didn't know how much. Also they would have to remove the floor of my mouth, and to fill that in they would have to remove part of the skin from my hand, and place it in my mouth called a flap. I would also have a tube in my throat to help me breathe. The day before the surgery I was shown Intensive Care and the High Dependency Unit where I would be after my surgery.

I was told for my last dinner I could eat anything I wanted, so I had my favourite meal in Eddie Rockets, chicken taco, strawberries and cream. It never came to my mind what was going to happen until the night time drug round, when the nurse gave me a sleeping tablet. The next morning I woke up feeling really sleepy and my Mom was there to help me get ready. It was so fast it felt like minutes, and I was on a bed on my way down to theatre. The next thing I remember is waking up in Intensive Care hearing my parents. I started to panic because I couldn't see them, just hear them because my head was so swollen and I

couldn't talk. I started to struggle and I forgot that I had a plaster on my arm and I hit my head. I was in Intensive Care for one day. I'd wake up every so often and because I was half breathing for myself with a machine if I stopped an alarm would go off. To this day I still hear that noise and it scares me. It felt like a lifetime but the next day I was moved to HDU. A few days later when they changed the tube the nurse wanted me to get up, but me being me, I was stubborn – I didn't want to move. She came over to me and I told her that I would hit her if she came over to me. It's not in my nature to hit, but my first instinct was to protect myself. I felt that I couldn't move, I felt that something could go wrong, but she got me up, she was fantastic.

When I was sent up to the ward I had to learn how to talk all over again. I was never a studyier but I have always been a talker, so it came naturally. I have always been vain, so I wanted to see what I looked like. My hair was cut like a boys and when I looked in the mirror all I saw was this thing that was supposed to be my face but it wasn't me. I would see me, I felt so ugly and I was. As the days went on the doctors said the flap wasn't taking and I had to go back down to theatre. This time it was more scary because I knew what I was going to be going through. It all started again. This time, the time I spent in Intensive Care and HDU flew. Now my face was cut more and I had plaster of paris on my both arms. I couldn't talk or write.

Now that all the surgery was over my next step was to learn how to talk. I didn't like me speech therapist very much, but by God

do I love to talk. A few weeks went by, it was Easter Sunday and as children all over Ireland were getting up to their Easter eggs, all I wanted was a drink of water. Everyone was asleep, there was a jug of water and a glass left on my tray. I poured the water, and tasted for the first time in a few weeks. Of course my way of doing things I didn't think should I, or could I, I just went ahead and did it. To me one glass of water was like the most expensive bottle of champagne, it was like pure silk. When I had finished I called the nurses and told them the exciting news. Their faces turned white, panic set in, they thought I could have done some damage. My surgeon was rushed in to check me over. I knew and he knew that I was ok. The time in hospital was very hard, I hardly slept and I couldn't walk very far. I had so many plans in my head, but all I wanted to do was to go home. I knew every programme on T.V, and every person and nurse.

The one thing I was looking forward to was my 20th birthday, but not at home as I wished but in hospital. The only thing that had been fed to me was through a tube. The morning of my birthday the doctors decided to take the feeding tube out and I would do a swallow test, which meant I could eat yogurt on its own without a glass of water. But I failed the test, and they had to put the tube back in.

Days passed in hospital, and eventually I was given liquidised food and soup. In May I was released from hospital. After a few rounds with my mother she got me eating my first steak and veggies and potatoes. It may have taken me two hours to eat it,

but it was the best meal I ever tasted.

Even though the surgery was over I still had to go through Radiotherapy which started in July. The radiation was hard because it meant that I had to put a mask over my face and be pinned down with a mouth piece. That took six weeks to get over and done with. The side effect of me having cancer, the operation and the radiation is the saliva in my mouth is not fighting the bacteria that causes tooth decay. So that means that I have to go to the dentist every week.

As much as the past five years have been difficult, a statement that my Mom used to always tell me – “one step forward, two steps back,” has helped me. It’s the two steps back that are bad but that one step forward always makes it worth your while. Cancer did not kill me or my will. There’s a power inside all of us that we just need to find and because of my family and friends that I am still here today. Even writing this story I have forgotten the worst parts of the whole ordeal, because as time goes on you have to live and move on and that’s where CanTeen came along. Because of CanTeen I could talk to people who understood and got me through it. Still to this day I don’t think that I will ever be able to repay them.

Rebecca Craughwell.

Accentuate the positive

Hi! My name is Rossa Hurley. I was diagnosed with a brain tumour in 1990. I was nine at the time. I can honestly say I wasn’t at all scared at the time strange as it might seem, and believe me that does seem strange!

I would probably have been a lot more scared if I was older, but being a child, I didn’t realise how serious it was. I just figured if I was sick I would go to the doctor and they would make me better. Wouldn’t it be great if we could always carry this childhood innocence through our teenage years and on into adult life. I started getting sick during the summer holidays following fourth class. The summer started out great, Ireland had qualified for the World Cup for the first time, and the weather was great. For me to be saying this is really something, as anyone who knows me well, will know that I have no interest in soccer whatsoever, and I’m not too fond of the sun and hot weather!!

I was getting very severe headaches towards the end of June. I was also getting blurred vision, dizziness. At first my Mum thought it was the weather as it was an exceptionally hot summer, and the heat had never really suited me. She took me to our GP, who at first thought I was suffering from sinuses and gave me medication for it, which had no effect. So we went to him again, and then he

tried me on medication for migraine which also had no effect. He then sent me for a CAT Scan in St. Vincent's Hospital.

I can remember having the scan on a Friday afternoon sometime in August. That evening my GP called to our house. He told my Mum the results of the scan, and gave her a prescription for steroids which I had to start taking as soon as possible. He also told her that he had arranged an appointment for me to see a Consultant Neurologist the following Monday. So my Mum took me to see the Consultant, and I was officially diagnosed with a Hypothalamicastositoma, i.e. a brain tumour. Don't you just love the way doctors have these fancy names for things like salt "Sodium Chloride" and what's with those Nil by Mouth signs?



Rossa

What would be wrong with a sign that just said "Fasting"? nothing that's what! Anyway I'm starting to ramble on.

I was admitted that day and went on to have three operations. The first one was to remove as much of the tumour as was possible, and to send it off for a biopsy to establish whether it was malignant or benign, which is just a doctor's convoluted way of saying bad or good. The second and third operations were to insert two thin rubber tubes which would run internally from my brain to my stomach, draining excess fluid from my brain. These tubes are called shunts. I still have these in. The biopsy turned out to be malignant, which meant it was cancerous which was bad. So I had to have Radiotherapy. Talk about a misleading name! I thought I would be listening to music on a Hi-Fi, not a great big machine which looked like a satellite dish! I had this in St. Luke's Hospital daily for about eight weeks. I went back to school in 1992. I joined CanTeen in 1993, and haven't looked back since. I'm finished school, and am an apprentice cabinet maker. What else can I say, I'm beginning to feel like that kid in the Wonder Years, going on like this! By the way Winnie and Parl finished school too. Just kidding.

I attend my surgeon for check-ups once a year. I also attend an Endocrinology Clinic once a year for check-ups. An endocrinologist is a hormone doctor in plain English. I attend this clinic because my tumour was on my hypothalamus gland, "some gland in your brain, which makes hormones." Sure my life isn't perfect, but I don't think it would be life worthwhile if it was. For

those of you who are newly diagnosed and reading this story and indeed this book, my advice is have a laugh while you're in hospital, try to keep in good spirits even on those days when you're feeling rotten. Humour is a great medicine. Enjoy having a laugh at your doctors egos. I believe there's a song about that "What if my doctor was one of us, just a soul like one of us!" So accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, and don't let cancer get you down. Also while in hospital you'll get Lucozade and grapes from visitors. Don't drink or eat them. I have a theory that they make you sicker! Think about it, any time you visit anyone what did they have? Grapes and Lucozade!

Rossa Hurley.

There is a light at the end of the tunnel

I returned to school in September 20002, after quite an adventurous summer, (which has its own story!) not quite ready for my Leaving Cert. Evening Study was hard and dragged my school days even longer. I started feeling very tired all of the time, which I blamed on being back at school. I didn't pay much heed to the rash I had under my arms all summer either. Then I noticed a lump on my neck at the end of October. "What could it be?" I thought, not considering cancer a possibility at the time. My mother insisted that I go to the doctor with her the next day. He seemed concerned, took blood samples and sent me to an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist in my local clinic. The specialist prescribed a two week course of antibiotics to see if the lump would clear up and told me he wasn't that concerned about it. After the two weeks the lump was still there, and my parents insisted on more tests to be done. I was then sent to Tullamore hospital where the same doctor did a needle biopsy, and put cameras up my nose and down my throat. They both showed nothing. I wasn't really worried at the time as I thought it couldn't be really serious, as I was generally healthy, apart from the common illnesses. I also thought my parents (like them all) worried too much. I was then

referred to the head Surgeon of the E.N.T department of the hospital who signed me into hospital the following week.

I had a biopsy under general anaesthetic, and I was sent home the next day. Two days later I was called back for the results. It still hadn't hit me that it could be serious until the surgeon started to explain my condition as Hodgkins Lymphoma- a disease of my lymph glands. I heard of that term before, but it didn't register until he explained that it was a form of cancer. I had a tumour, and it was malignant. It was a total shock. I was sent to an Oncologist straight away in Tullamore hospital. He explained that I was at stage 2A of the disease, and that I had to start chemotherapy the following week.



Sarah and Tara



Tara and Sarah

First I had to have a bone marrow biopsy to make sure it hadn't spread to my bones. Luckily it hadn't, and it was only situated in the glands in the left hand side of my neck. I knew I would lose my hair, but I still had to ask the question. And after my second chemo, my hair started falling out. It was hard as I had long curly hair, which was frizzy at times. To make things easier I cut it short and then shaved it off. I got used to having no hair then and I got a lovely hair piece that was totally different from my real hair. It was blonde with little plaits in it. I got many praises for it, and I know when I don't have to wear it anymore I'll miss it.

After my second chemotherapy my mother's friend gave me a CanTeen newsletter. As I read through it I realised I was not alone, and that there are many young people out there with

similar stories, and I got great strength from reading them. So I decided I'd join this group of young people, and I did so on their website. So far I've gone away on two weekends with CanTeen, to Alton Towers, and Shielbaggan in Wexford. Both times I had a great time, and my friend Tara enjoyed Shielbaggan just as much. I am very happy that I joined CanTeen, as it has helped me a lot. I've met so many new people and I've heard their stories. I now can't wait for the next weekend away.

Chemotherapy was hard but I was lucky. I didn't get violently sick from it. I felt sick alright, and very tired most of the time which was expected, and from being on steroids I gained an appetite and put on a lot of weight. On my good days I was just my normal self out and about. My positive attitude is what made me cope very well as my family and friends around me. I was admitted into hospital three times when my temperature got high. One of the times I had a really bad viral infection and a chest infection. I thought that was the longest week ever. I had six sessions of chemotherapy over six months. I thought that I would never see the end of it, but I did on the 14th of May last year (2003) and I have got the all clear numerous times since. I don't have to go back for a check-up until three months time. It is not long since I have finished treatment, but I am busy getting my life back together. My hair has grown back. I didn't get to do my Leaving Cert last year, but that didn't stop me going to the Debs! I've just done my Leaving Cert, and I'm lucky that I have very good friends in this class who have been very good to me when I was

sick. At the moment I'm very happy, and I'm positive everything will be fine. It's funny I'd never thought I'd see an end to my illness, but luckily there was. From having my illness I have learned many things, met many new people, and I am a much stronger person than before, and it is true to say "there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

Sarah Burns.

What happens happens.

I was fourteen nearly fifteen doing my Junior Cert, and I had it in my head that I would pass without studying, funny ha! It was just a few weeks before Halloween, and I had just returned from Wales after a singing in a competition. When I found a small, hard lump in my neck it never really bothered me at all. After time the lump started to get bigger, and at Halloween I remember telling my friends. They told me to get it checked out, and we did end up talking about cancer, but I just said to myself that would never happen, sure I'm young, healthy etc. It still took me a few weeks, but eventually I told my Nanny and then my Mum. My Nanny panicked and said I think it's the mumps! So my Mum brought me to my local doctor the next day. The doctor said it was probably just a cyst, but just to be safe we'll send you into Casualty to get bloods taken. I was referred to a new doctor in Mullingar and this doctor said the same "that it's probably just a cyst." He gave me antibiotics and painkillers and told me to call back to his clinic in about 10 days.

In those 10 days I became very tired and felt drained plus the lump was still getting bigger. It was coming up to Christmas, and I wanted to get rid of the lump by operation whatever! When we came back to the doctor my Mum put a lot of pressure on him,



Yvonne

and he said he would keep me in and do a biopsy, but he sent me home the next day and said that he would do it for me on Monday. That Saturday I went to Dublin and got my Christmas outfit etc. On Monday I was very nervous going into hospital, but I wanted to be finished so I just got on with it. After the biopsy I was sore and had to go into hospital every day to get it dressed. On the 14th of December I had an appointment and was going to find out the results. I was really nervous going in and my mother and I joked "what would you do if it was serious?" I said that I would go to America, the country of dreams. When the

doctor called us in, he could not find the results, I was so angry. Then he called my mother out of the room, I was getting my dressing done so I didn't think anything of it!

The woman came back in for me, and she was being too nice, like hugging me while bringing me into the room. I was ok, but from the minute I stepped into the room I could feel the tension. I looked at my mother and she was crying, so I knew it was bad, and I cried before I even knew it was cancer. The doctor put it so nicely to me, but I was so scared. The worst part of it all was telling the rest of my family. We decided to try and keep it quiet, but by the end of the week nearly everyone knew. I didn't mind because that meant more cards and presents for me!!

On the 18th of December I went up to Crumlin hospital, where my new doctor diagnosed me with Nasopharyngeal Carcinoma. I had to start chemotherapy straight away. My chemo was divided into four blocks of four. I could not have an operation as the tumour was situated behind my nose, so I had chemo very fast. I only got a seven day break if I was lucky, and sometimes just a weekend. Because of this I never got to fight infections properly. Sometimes my chemo got delayed and I would just be on the road to recovery when I'd have my next chemo, and would have to start all over again!

I remember before starting chemo I read about the side effects and I was thinking a sore mouth, diarrhoea I can handle that. But then the hair loss I was like thinking NOOOO that would be the worst when in fact, in the end that was the easiest one. I never

mind being bald and I never bothered with a wig. I said to myself there was no point, I'm bald now and that's that, plus I loved the way people acted, it made me laugh, children are so cute!

I finished my chemo on the 26th of May 2001, and was the first person to have a going away party at the hospital. We got some of the children out of bed, played games and some of them even ate some sweets, which was really good. In July I started my radiotherapy and it lasted for 9 weeks. Every day Dad and I had to travel up and down to Dublin, which was really tiring, especially for my Dad. He had to go to work from 8am until 3pm, and then travel to Dublin for 5pm, and we wouldn't be home until about 8 o'clock that evening. I did get a sore mouth, but it was nothing compared to the side effects of the chemo for me.

I finished radiotherapy and all since September the 6th 2002, and my life and health have never been better. I got to do some amazing stuff – swim with dolphins, and meet some amazing people – Pierce Brosnan! I would just like to say a big thank you to all the organisations and people that helped me through my illness, and that made me a better and stronger person, especially my support group CanTeen, Make a Wish and the Barretstown Gang Camp. And I cannot forget my Brilliant Family and my Best Friend! Well that's my story, Weird but Wonderful, thanks for reading!

Yvonne Palmer.

What CanTeen Means To Me . . .

You can RELATE to others who have been through the same thing.

You are NOT ALONE and other teenagers get cancer too. EMPATHY.

CanTeen provides **GREAT BACK UP.**

Helps your SELF CONFIDENCE - people come out of themselves.

You can TALK THROUGH your problems.

Helps ACCEPT WHO YOU ARE during your illness and afterwards.

CanTeen is a SUPPORT NETWORK and helps BUILD your SELF ESTEEM.

Change of scenery from the routine of hospital, and home. Time to get away from it all...

CanTeen means Learning and Uniting.

Regaining Control.

Not Feeling Alienated.

Motivation and Life.

Getting Involved.

SUPPORT

NEW FRIENDS

FUN

ACTIVITIES

GREAT CRAIC!!!

A LAUGH AND A HALF...

A BREAK FROM THE REAL WORLD

CHILL OUT

RELAX

SPECIAL BONDS

CHAT

LATE NIGHTS...

CANTEEN DISCOS!

PIZZA

