

Two Peas in a Pod

Lenford's story told by Babs

*"Like the sunshine breaking through on a bright summer's day
the lovely fragrance fills the air"*



1998. Len told me twice he'd been to the toilet and seen a streak of blood. I told him we should keep an eye on it. So we went to the GP and he said that to be on the safe side it should be checked out. I asked for Len to see the consultant at the hospital. I knew him because by profession I am a theatre nurse.

The following week they checked him out with the camera and the week after that they did a biopsy. "I'm sorry, it's colon cancer" the doctor said. Len went in on the Tuesday and had the operation on Thursday. He was still in the recovery room. "Come and have a coffee" one nurse said. Another nurse gave me the thumbs up. She had scrubbed up for the op.

The consultant said to me "he's a lucky man. I think we caught it just in time". A friend came with me for the result. "There's no point giving treatment because there's nothing to treat" the doctor said.

It was 9th July 1998. They said they would check Lenford every three months.

In the January we went on a cruise. You see after the operation Len decided to retire so that we could spend more time together. We were like two peas in a pod. Lots of people said that. We decided to go places together. He was doing so well.

In June 2004 Len had a pain in his shoulder. At first he put it down to mowing the lawn. After two weeks of spraying it and rubbing it we went to the NEC to see an exhibition. We had to stop the car because the pain in Len's shoulder was so bad. "It could be a trapped nerve" the doctor said.

A fortnight later the doctor saw him and said that to be on the safe side he would send him for an X ray. They said they'd phone us in seven days, but that same day they phoned us. We picked up the message from the surgery...

For three years they had been doing check-ups. The colonoscopy in March had been clear.

Then the doctor said “I think the monster has raised its head again.”

We went to the hospital and saw the doctor. It was June. “There’s a shadow on the lungs and if it is cancer I don’t know if it is an old one or a new one. To make sure, we need to do a biopsy” he said. That Monday he went in for the biopsy but the result was inconclusive.

Then they did a second one. We waited. It came back inconclusive.

We asked why it was coming back ‘inconclusive’. “We are so sorry we have to put you through this again” they said.

Len was sent to a doctor at the chest clinic. “I want you in on Monday. We’ll do a bronchoscopy – we’ll go in through the nose” he said. We went back on the Friday and again we were told the result was ‘inconclusive’.

We were told they needed to continue the investigations. We were sent to see a specialist at another hospital. They said that they would have to cut Len all the way around the back to get the biopsy. They told us that they would get him into hospital within two weeks. Within a week he was in hospital. They sent off his specimen there and then. It came back – ‘inconclusive’.

More samples were sent through. Len saw the doctor on 25th July and was told that he did have cancer.

In November he started on chemo tablets. When he went back after three months he had a bone scan. He was put on a different chemo. The good news was that Len hadn’t been sick and the cancer had started to shrink.

After another twelve weeks the hospital told us that they weren’t happy. It wasn’t working as well as they liked. We were told that they would put Len on an intravenous chemotherapy and tablets and that they would have side effects - numbness and black spots on the skin.

Every time Len went the cancer was not getting any bigger, but it wasn’t shrinking either.

The numbness increased and it got worse when Len stood up. He couldn’t feel his feet. It was difficult for him to shave because he couldn’t feel his fingers. He would drop the razor.

Lenford went back and had another twelve sessions after that.

You see in our relationship before all this when I had been ill and Lenny worked he’d leave me a tray of water and a flask of soup before he left for work. He’d run the bath for me when he got home. He’d help me and he’d cook dinner. If I woke in the night in pain he would come to my side. That was the kind of person he was.

It was the 26th October 2006. “There’s good news and bad news” the registrar said. “The cancer hasn’t got any bigger, but it is also no smaller. The numbness is getting worse so I will have to take you off this treatment. For a few weeks we will keep a check on your blood and we will see you again on the 12th December”.

Len's weight was going a bit but it wasn't too bad.

By 5th November that year it was a struggle for Len to come down the stairs. I remember jumping up to help him – his legs were going.

On the Sunday night, he started to vomit. Right through his illness he hadn't had that problem. Only once I had had to take him to the hospital with a high temperature. It was a urine infection and he was OK after three days.

I told the doctor and the emergency district nurse came. Then they came with special bed equipment.

Len was meant to go back on the 12th December but the doctor from the hospital rang and said he would see him before then at the hospital.

I asked for an ambulance for when they measured him up for radiotherapy. They measured him on the Thursday and gave him the radiotherapy treatment on the Friday.

The following Monday we went to see Len's doctor. We sat down. He said "Lenford, Lenford, me old buddy. I don't know how to put this. Now your mobility has gone, so all we can do is to make you as pain free as possible. What we'll do is see if we can get you in a hospice for a week".

Lenny was sad. The doctor assured him that the move to the hospice was not permanent. Len said "I want to go back home". "Look I've got a good team and we'll get things moving" the doctor said. Lenny said "I know Babs has been doing everything". That was the time that I just passed out, fainted.

The following day my daughter Jackie answered the phone to the doctor. "How's your mum?" he asked. I talked to him. "How are you feeling? You know it's probably exhaustion. It's probably as well to get things moving. Your first Macmillan nurse works here now" he said.

Lenny was really sad. "I want to come home" he said again.

The two occupational therapy people came and said that it wouldn't be ideal for him to go home until everything was set up for him.

The woman from hospice at home came and said that the mattress wasn't good enough. Things were shifted up to the loft and after a week new things came. "Thanks for getting me out of that place" Lenny said when he came home and he never stopped thanking me.

Back at home he was doing pretty well. They set up a syringe driver for over Christmas. He wasn't eating much, just sipping tea, energy drinks. Family from America came. He managed to open presents he wasn't too bad.

Days later he was crying out in pain. He was trying to pull himself up. I could see that the weight was dropping off his legs. I made sure of these things: that he had nice clean pyjamas on, that his body was creamed, and that he was shaved and after-shave put on.

At four o'clock on the Tuesday evening, even though he was dosed up that terrible pain came again. I had to ring the medical people up.

Wednesday he just about opened his eyes and that evening he called me to say the Lord's Prayer with him.

On Thursday morning his morphine drip was increased. The doctor said that at best Lenford had twenty-four to forty-eight hours to live.

I used a little syringe to squirt a bit of water into his mouth.

On the 6th January his breathing was shallow and his pulse was weak. I sat by his bed talking.

On the Saturday night Jackie and a neighbour let me have a break on the settee. I wasn't sleeping. At 7 am I went to the bathroom and to the kitchen for tablets. Jackie called me in and said his breathing was different. He was gasping for breath. I held his hands again and then the words came to me "Len, He's waiting for you. He's calling you home. You are very special and He's got work for you to do. Honey, can you see that light shining? Hold onto His hand. You won't fall. Don't worry about me. One day I will follow that light and be with you".

I said "Jackie, he's gone. Get the notepad and put the time".

We started to phone friends. The doctor came. He left a letter to take to the GP. The Funeral Director came to assess the body and he told us to turn off the central heating and to open the windows. I asked for a little more time because some friends were coming. He gave us a little time and then he phoned and said, "I'm sorry we have to take him now". I went upstairs and looked out of the bedroom window. It didn't seem real. When I came down I saw an empty bed and all the equipment. Is Lenny really gone? I thought.

He had been telling me how much he loved me and worried about me. When Jackie was little she had called Len 'Podgy One' and me 'Podgy Two'. A week before he died he said "my name is Lenford." He spelt it out. "You have to get it right for the funeral people" he said.

Lenny died on the 7th of January.

I knew Len wouldn't want anyone else to officiate at the funeral but our minister Glen was away, so we waited until he returned. I organised the funeral, which took place on the 2nd February.

He had a wonderful turn out. People I hadn't seen for twenty years came. I was getting phone calls from all over the world. Sometimes you feel like ripping the phone out, but you are also glad that they have wanted to call.

There were all these big boxes of flowers by the door. The place was like a shrine – arrangements and baskets. I'm glad some of the flowers arrived in vases because I wouldn't have had enough for them all. It was wonderful. I had £735 off people, which went to cancer charities. The whole place was covered with cards. I had phone calls from support groups, doctors and it did help.

My godson got married in Jamaica this year. They had the party when they came back. I was sad because Lenny wasn't there and it had been such a lovely day.

When I went to the opera on the 7th July I came home and wanted to tell Lenny what a wonderful girl the singer was, only twenty-three and such a magnificent voice. It's things like that. The house feels so empty. Even watching the tennis yesterday I wanted to share it with Lenny.

The good thing is I'm sleeping better. A month after his death I'd get up at about 1 am to make a drink. I'd just be sitting there crying.

Yesterday I said "Lenny, you'd be proud of me. I had lamb and three roast potatoes and broccoli for my dinner". I felt so full. At least, thank God, I've put a bit of weight back on. At church they tell me I'm looking well but my fears are still there.

Sometimes I go upstairs and I come down to lock up. There is such emptiness. Still in the morning I am in floods of tears and I say to myself "no, no, no, he's not coming back".

I am glad, blessed and thankful that I was there, holding my Lenny's hand.