

The Man

Tony's story told by Barbara

*"You are my garden
my world and my sky"*



A couple of months before Tony was diagnosed he kept going to see the doctor. He thought there was something wrong with his tongue. The doctor kept telling him he had tonsillitis. In the end he said "I'm going to ask for a referral".

He was sent to the hospital. He said "Mom, I want you there with me". When he came out he said "I've got cancer". I started crying.

When we went back the doctor said to Tony "you can have an operation or chemotherapy. If you have chemo you may have six months, if you have the operation you could have up to five or six years". Tony said to me "what'll I do Mom?" and I said "Tony, don't put that on me". The operation entailed cutting down under his chin and throat and putting a vein out of his arm under his tongue. He decided to have the operation.

Four days later he was down in the operating theatre. The first operation lasted seven and a half hours. That wasn't totally successful, so he had to have another, which was another seven and a half hours. It took him five hours to recover. There were pipes coming out of him. He was in critical care for a month. We nearly lost him. He had a heart attack and a stroke. You could only kiss him on one arm. After a month they pulled him up in bed and he winked one eye. We all applauded.

Tony had no saliva after the first cancer. He couldn't talk. I would be his voice. I'd talk for him. The first time he managed to say thank you I was so happy. On one occasion the man in the next bed to Tony told me Tony couldn't say yes to a cup of tea, so he had to wait for me to come and visit so he could have a drink.

He came home and his girlfriend looked after him for six months then she walked out on him. About a year later Tony said "Mom, I think I've got a lump in my leg. He went to the hospital. "I'm sorry" they said "you've got cancer in your leg". They put a rod in his leg from his knee. He walked on sticks. Another year passed and Tony found another lump in his leg so he had to go into another hospital. They had to put a stainless steel new hip in. He had

120 staples. He never complained.

I used to drive with Tony. He'd had a heart attack and a stroke. I'd keep my legs and arms crossed. "Oh well, if we crash, we go together" I'd think. He drove to all his hospital appointments.

I had a stair lift put in. "Mom" he said "I don't ever want to be on my own again". I said to him "you won't ever be on your own again my lad". For five and a half years from then on I slept on his settee. I used to get cramp in my leg but it didn't bother me. I got to like sleeping on the couch after a bit.

I had him a nice shower and bathroom put in.

The man from the council came. "Has he got any savings?" he said. "He hasn't worked for thirteen years. He's had a serious car accident and he's got cancer" I said. "My son could be dead in four months".

I had to wash him the best way I could.

My Tony had thirty-seven lots of radiotherapy mostly on his neck. It burned him deep into his neck.

He had twelve lots on his leg.

They'd put X marks on him and still cheerfully he'd say "look Mom, another tattoo". Even though he was on Morphine he'd still drive to the hospital.

Even when he was ill my son fetched the old man Patrick's medication from the chemists. He was very ill himself. I'd go to the hospital every day to see Tony. Tony went from seventeen stone to ten stone. He was so ill.

Manjula (from Bridges) was my best friend when I was going through it all. What helped was she'd phone and see me and we'd just talk.

The doctor hadn't seen Tony for nineteen days before he died. To release the death certificate they were talking about having to do an autopsy. "No. My lad's been cut up enough" I said.

The Human Rights woman helped me fill in a form for a carer's allowance. The carer from Hospice at Home got him £200 for a new wardrobe because he had lost so much weight and she also got him a microwave. That really helped.

He couldn't help it but he couldn't go to the toilet for nine days then it would go everywhere. We'd laugh so much. 'Plop plops' we'd call it. Tony would have his games and his telly and sometimes he'd just stare. He was his own person. He was just like that.

When Tony died he was watching telly. "Go and have a lie down Mother" he kept saying. Bert my husband said "I'll look after him". I remember hearing "Barb, Barb, Tony's gone" and I thought "where's he gone?"

There was blood everywhere. I stopped with him after. I wanted to have him to myself. I wanted everyone to go.

He went quickly in the end and not from cancer. The undertaker cleaned up. There was so much blood. He said, "don't worry about anything like that darling". They were wonderful. My comfort is that he is with my dad.

I'd clean Tony's ears with toilet roll. He'd say "give that here!" and he'd get stuff out I couldn't. We used to laugh about it. I'd sometimes change his sheets twice a night. He wouldn't let anyone clean him except for me.

He only wanted me to touch him. When he had to have a pipe in his stomach he had to have seven stitches around it. One day I looked over the nurse's shoulder. I said "it's gone septic". We had to take him to hospital. All the stitches had to be taken out.

Tony was in that much pain when the cancer came on his liver. His brother phoned for an ambulance. I came from the pub. I was there within minutes. Tony was lying on his side. The ambulance man kept saying he had to move him but he was in so much pain I stopped them. "When he's ready I'll tell you" I said. I gave him four lots of Diamorphine and then he was able to go. I was really upset about it. After a while they said they'd have to operate to see what was wrong with him. Tony squeezed the doctor's arm and said "please get rid of the pain for me".

The consultant was nice. "He's got cancer on the liver" he said. I started to cry but I never cried in front of Tony. I knew if I cried he would. I waited for two whole weeks for him to tell my son. When that doctor came I knew what he was going to say to Tony. The Macmillan nurse knew too and she came and held my hand.

Tony went from seventeen stone to ten stone to seven stone.

The doctor broke the news to Tony and Tony just shrugged. I knew when the doctors were telling Tony that it was too tiring for him to travel to the hospitals that there wasn't much more they could do for him. When he went to the toilet and it went everywhere I knew it was his body clearing out before he died. He never complained, not even at the end.

My son was 'THE MAN'. Tony was a wonderful man.

Tony is buried with my dad. What gives me a bit of comfort is knowing they're together. On the grave it says: 'Safe in the arms of Grandad'. Sometimes I see Tony and my dad together in a meadow full of flowers sitting on a bench.