

## Emily's Story

My Dad, we thought at first it was heart disease. He had been diagnosed with congenital heart disease, but once he was deteriorating quite quickly, and once we got him into hospital, we found he had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. He did get chemotherapy. The chemotherapy was working, but because of the late diagnosis, Daddy passed away in March 2000.

Eleven years later, my sister then, we discovered she had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. She went through chemotherapy, really had a really miserable time. I thought I was going to lose my sister, and then, a year later, I got a diagnosis, mine was uterine cancer, but I was one of the very fortunate ones. My GP was on the ball. Stage one, grade one, and all I needed was surgery.

I only discovered the following year what support was actually available for people as carers. There is carers' associations. Carers' days are absolutely wonderful because that day is for you. I'm a carer now in a different aspect, and there is one day a week, which I found at first this is selfish, I should be looking after this person. I now know that that day is – I use a Thursday – that is my day, that is my day for doing what I need to do. There is holistic therapies that are available for you, which makes you feel really good – reflexology, wonderful!

The thing that I used was art therapy. Everybody thinks art therapy is painting, just lovely little paintings, which I can't paint, right? I can't draw – I can do a stick-man. But this is art in a different format. Art is great for getting your emotions out.

Lately, I've been going to a sewing group, and a lot of the girls there are still going through treatment, but the craic, as we would say in Northern Ireland, is wonderful.

Counselling... A lot of people will go, "Oh no, that's not for me", but you're talking to somebody who doesn't have that emotional attachment to the person you're caring for.

When you're going with them, for any appointment, make sure that you have a notebook and a pencil, and, as I say, these days, we've got mobile phones, even record it - but please make sure that they know that you're recording it first. Don't feel stupid. I think some of us still feel they're the professional and we're not, right? Don't feel like that. They're people just the same as us. If you don't understand something, ask them to explain.

You can end up with conflict within a family. You have got family members who don't want to know. So, even though it's difficult for you, you may want to shake them and say, "Wake up and see what's happening here!" and that conflict, use the other side of your brain and go, "This person is actually...they just cannot face life without them", and maybe that's a better way of looking at it.

You need to take that time for reflection as well because life has changed, no matter what. You just can't go on as before, and you have to go with the change.