

Red Sky Ride 2014

Ride Ambassador: Julia Pangbourn

In August 2008 I noticed that something didn't feel quite right in my right breast, so I went to my GP for a check-up. From that initial consultation it became a whirl-wind of appointments - firstly a mammogram, then an ultrasound and finally a core biopsy of the breast. The results came back that I had multiple sarcomas and I was given the news that because of the number of lumps I would have to have a mastectomy. After this news sunk in I decided that "just in case" I would prefer to have a bilateral mastectomy as I didn't want to find cancer in my left breast at a later stage.



Within a matter of weeks I underwent a number of other tests to confirm that the cancer was contained to the breast before undergoing surgery. I ended up only taking 5 weeks off work, and was told that the operation had been a success and that it was a "no brainer" I would not need chemo or radiation. However, one year later at my annual check-up it was found that there had been a recurrence in the core biopsy tract, and that this was now a higher grade cancer than I originally had. I was immediately booked in to get the lump removed and within a fortnight from my operation commenced 6 months of chemotherapy and 6 weeks of radiation therapy. I have never found anything so confronting in my life as walking into the Ivy Suite at St John of God hospital and seeing the row of armchairs, with people of all ages and walks of life hooked up to IV drips.

On a positive note it was at one of my first visits to St John of God that I was introduced to the SolarisCare centre. This became a haven when I came in for my chemo treatments or the weekly pic-line cleaning, not only to just sit down and get a cup of tea or read some of the literature available, but also to take advantage of many of the wonderful "free" treatments on offer. And I certainly enjoyed trying out all of those treatments from the more conventional massage, acupuncture and reflexology to Reiki and Bowen therapy. The therapists were all wonderful people who put me at ease and made me feel better during this trying time in my life.

When my treatment finished I ended up moving across to NSW with my 2 children for 6 months to recuperate with my parents. It was during this time, in a small country town, that I decided that in order to make friends I needed to meet people and found out that the local bike shop ran social group rides on the weekend. I have always enjoyed cycling, and in fact I believe that what held me in good stead whilst going through my treatment was that I had come from a good fitness level, and whilst I was knocked around a bit, I didn't suffer as much as I expected. So off I went to the bike shop one Saturday morning and got hooked immediately. Not only was it a great way of meeting people, but it was good for my body and soul to get physically active again and like all good bike riders enjoy that well-earned cup of coffee and a chat after a ride.

When I returned to Perth I immediately joined a lovely group of cyclists at Bikeforce Joondalup and has ridden with them regularly ever since, making some wonderful friends, keeping fit and entering into a number of events around Perth. I have now been in remission for nearly 4 years and cycle 4-5 times a week, run a couple of times a week and walk whenever possible. I am probably fitter now than I was when I was in my 20's and 30's!!



So it has made very feel very proud and honoured to have been approached by SolarisCare this year to become their Ride Ambassador for the Red Sky Ride in February 2014. Having been through my cancer journey I think this is a great opportunity for me to give back to those that helped me along the way. SolarisCare is a wonderful organisation and I urge you all to support the good work they do and get behind the Red Sky Riders!