



My Story

By Pam Marshall

What have I been doing for the past 2 years? It's been a long list of experiences: starting with necrotising fasciitis, rectal and vaginal cancer, extensive radiotherapy, a stroke, major surgery and pelvic reconstruction, a compound fracture to the femur. Involving 4 separate hospital admissions, 8 anaesthetics and extensive rehabilitation - among many other things. In fact, within a 13 month period I spent 6 and a half months in hospital. I began to think I would never reach the end of this terrible journey. It has been a very long time getting back to near normal functioning. Here's my story:

How it Began:

In early 2017 I started to lose energy, lose appetite, feel tired and developed a problem with a sore base of the spine. I was finding it difficult to sit for long periods. I ignored the symptoms – foolish I know – but it had taken me years of hard work and risk to set up The Self-Sufficiency Shoppe, workshops, e-books, downloads, etc. and I didn't want to disrupt the flow. I had forthcoming workshop bookings and commitments and felt obliged to fulfil them. I started The Shoppe on very little income – bit by bit as money came in I added to what I had established. It was hard work but gradually it evolved to what I wanted it to be. Stopping now was something I did not want to face.

Reached the End of the Line

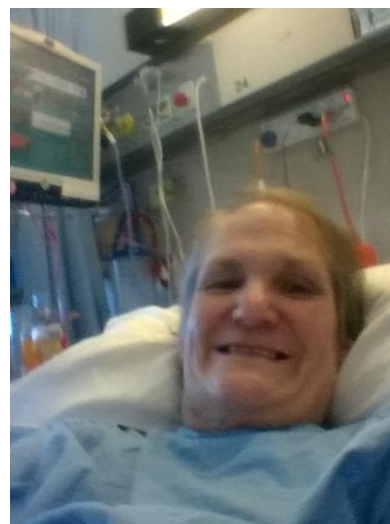
By the end of February 2018 my deteriorating health became too much for me. I cancelled workshops, talks and other activities due to exhaustion and lack of energy. Then on 1st March I called a doctor. He insisted I call an ambulance immediately. On arrival at Flinders Medical Centre I was moved very quickly to the intensive care unit. My immune system had completely broken down and as a result I'd developed necrotising fasciitis – a dangerous form of flesh eating infection starting on my buttock and moving into my genital area. I didn't know it at the time but I was gravely ill. I was incubated for three days whilst surgeons worked on removing the infected dead tissue to avert any further septic infection and investigate further the cause of the problem.

When I finally regained consciousness one of the surgeons visited and stated very bluntly, "You have cancer. You left it too long. You better get your affairs into order." At the time I had difficulty believing it was my time to go – my death knell. You see, I'm a victim of childhood sexual abuse – from the age of three and a half years to about 8 or 9 I was persistently and violently abused by an evil sexual predator. Although many people may not subscribe to this belief system. I immediately knew the cancer was a direct result of my horrific childhood abuse. The toxic start to my life was 'in me' - a part of me and now 'releasing' via the cancer. The 'trigger' being just before all my problems started I had, after 20-odd years, brief contact with my sexual predator. Of course I refused any further contact but it was enough to stimulate in me this process of 'healing'. More importantly the very areas that had developed the cancer were the ones most violated by my abuser. The saying goes: "Life has a way of catching up with you" - and in my case this was true. I truly believed that I had paid the price for my childhood pain and my life

ending through cancer caused by something out of my control when I was a small child didn't fit into my reasoning.

Dealing with the Cancer

Anyway, I was either right or very lucky because tests showed this very large cancerous tumour was still only localised – meaning it had not developed metastases and spread to other areas of my body. I had quite obviously been given another chance at life. However the journey was not over. I spent a total of 11 weeks in hospital, given copious amounts of very powerful antibiotics intravenously, endured seven weeks of radiotherapy to shrink the tumour to stop it from spreading, plus more surgery to redirect the bowel to create a stoma (as my rectum was damaged by the tumour). Surgeons then decided it should be removed.



However I was very weak and under nourished. A combination of cancer, low immune system, lots of radiotherapy and disinterest in food and eating (mainly due to feelings of nausea) had weakened my system and ability to heal. On my first attempt to stand from the bed I just did not have the strength. It was decided to discharge me home to recuperate ready for major surgery.

Lifestyle is Important

The other very important factor is that I believe it very likely my healthy lifestyle contributed to the cancer not spreading. All the principles of The Self-Sufficiency Shoppe are an integral part of my everyday life: living a chemical free earth focused existence. It's a very powerful and highly challenging consumer focused society. My workshops, writings, philosophy are all about anti-consumerism. I practise and encourage others to connect with the natural earth by avoiding chemicals and using alternatives. My home and garden have very few chemicals or processed products – food, personal products, the garden and even my cats are as protected as much as possible from the bane of what's happening to our environment and the planet. Was I meant to get cancer? Yes – because of my toxic childhood past. Was it meant to develop metastases and spread to other areas of my body? No – because I adamantly believe there was nothing in me (no 'fuel') to accelerate that process. As they say: Our lifestyle is making us sick. Maybe if I was not so healthy: fit, chemical free and positive I might not be here today. Who knows! I do not subscribe to any particular theory or belief on the topic, but truly believe the least association we have with the toxicity of consumerism the better off we will be and most certainly the better off the planet will be. Things might change for me down the track but this is where I am at right now.

Small Stroke

After being home for only 3 weeks I suffered a small stroke, losing the use of my right hand and some other cognitive issues. I was readmitted to hospital for 2 weeks for investigations and rehabilitation to get my hand (and other processes) working again.

The cause it seems was a clot due to the medication I was prescribed. I was very lucky the stroke was not more extensive considering my health history so far.

Finally, I was home again preparing for the inevitable major surgery to remove the tumour. There was however another short admission for internal investigation to assess the extent of the tumour and an iron infusion in preparation for the surgery. On my first visit to the plastic surgeon assigned with the task of removing the tumour, he explained to me that because the tumour was entwined into the pelvic floor the entire area (pelvic floor, pelvic muscles, the rectum and vagina) would need to be removed, leaving a large hole. The plan was to take a large graft of muscle and skin from inside of my right thigh along with some artificial mesh and rebuild the pelvic floor. The process would take 8 hours or more of surgery. I was dumb-founded. All I could say was “Is this worth it”. Anyway on 19 July 2018 the surgery took place. I understand that because it was such a long surgery that would take the time of numerous staff resources, some of the professionals involved volunteered their time on their days off – including the anaesthetist, general surgeon (who removed the tumour) and the very clever plastic surgeon who had the huge task of reconstructing the area.



I am eternally grateful to all these wonderful people for their tenacity and dedication.

Having had the surgery and now ‘cancer free’, it was a matter of healing. But that wasn’t so easy. Radiotherapy (causing extensive tissue damage) and poor physical condition meant that the area was struggling to heal. It also had become infected, meaning large amounts of intravenous antibiotics (one of which caused an allergic reaction). There were two more trips to theatre in attempts to re-do the unhealed grafts used to cover the wound, neither of which were successful. On waking from the second anaesthetic a naso-gastric tube had been inserted to help build my nutrition and improve wound healing – much to my dismay. The surgeon was now contemplating more surgery involving another graft from my left leg to cover the wound. I remember thinking: “I’m not going to make it” – the thought of another massive surgery was just over-whelming. Luckily on second thought the surgeon decided I should first go home, recuperate and gather strength before I return for more surgery. After 7 weeks in hospital I went home with a large unhealed pelvic floor hole with the wound area being dressed daily by visiting nurses. Magically being home worked wonders and the wound started to slowly heal of its own accord – further surgery averted. In fact it took 1 year and 2 months of daily dressings before it was considered ‘healed’. During that time I learnt much about the type of nutrition required for the body to heal such a huge loss of tissue – when previous to this I gave very little thought to my nutritional requirements!

Fractured Femur

Events did not run smoothly during that time. Having the pelvic floor removed, I was having difficulty with balance and walking. After struggling for four months at home with a walking stick I finally succumbed at 4am on the way to the toilet and fell. Unable to get up

I lay on the floor until 11am when someone arrived and called an ambulance. My top right thigh looked bruised but I hoped it was only minor. No, after X-rays at Flinders emergency – the result – “You have a very nasty compound fracture to the top of the femur. There was more surgery (to insert a rod, plate and pins) plus ANOTHER 9 weeks in hospital!

Unfortunately, because the area had had extensive radio-therapy, it had damaged the bone and nerves, making it fragile and more likely to break, plus prolong the healing process. I endured a long period of rehab and wound care before I came home with the help of a walking aid (but perilously unbalanced). My fear of falling (which I did twice at home – each time having to call an ambulance to get me upright) was enormously debilitating.



The Psychology of Childhood Abuse

Through all this many people have questioned: “Why didn’t you get help earlier when symptoms started to arise – then all this pain could have been avoided”. But for childhood abuse survivors the normal thought processes are not always there. In order to survive such trauma we learn to switch off, to ignore the symptoms either due to the secrecy and shame implanted by the abuser or due to a lack of explanation of what and why this was happening. In my case no-one believed what I told them during the abuse, I had no-one to confide in and no-one who cared, I was very much left alone with it and just had to cope. And the fact that I had had contact with my abuser triggered all those irrational responses from my psyche - it was a type of survival technique – but not a very rational or healthy one. I guess it was difficult for professionals to understand why I had suffered so long with obvious symptoms that something was wrong but did not get help. When the surgeon eventually informed me I had cancer with little empathy I sometimes wonder whether it was motivated by my apparent ignorance of allowing it to go on for so long without seeking help. But he does not know the whole story. A close friend who had also endured childhood abuse on hearing I was in hospital completely understood how I managed to get myself into my current situation said: “Because of what we went through we learnt to not to care about ourselves”. Her words made complete sense. I write this story because I’m an example of the consequences of abuse and mistreatment during those crucial early years of development. My life has been a frustrating psychological journey dealing with a ‘black cloud’ that never goes away. I hope my story helps others in a similar situation.

Battling Depression and Loss

Having trained and worked as a general nurse then becoming a mental health nurse of some 10 years before I established The Shoppe I’d read many books about the impact of abuse, so had thankfully gathered an understanding of my situation. It has certainly helped me significantly in coping. To say the least, life has now changed considerably: loss of independence, unable to drive my car for some 18 months (and still waiting), difficulty walking (fear of falling), doing the usual things I loved and that were close to

my heart (gardening, the company of my cats, countryside trips, long walks, coffee with friends, running my workshops, just talking to people about the environment and the need for change, etc.). As a result of my experiences I fully empathise with anyone who has lost normal body functioning and control – it's a frustratingly difficult journey. Not surprisingly I battled terrible depression questioning my worth as a human being. I remember crying incessantly during the third admission because I just wanted to go home but the wound was not healing and I was stuck in a hospital bed rarely seeing the light of day. That was the most difficult part. The system might be OK at healing and dealing with the physical side of things but emotional needs are rarely addressed. One of my main 'tools' was writing positive affirmations about my healing. I had accumulated a couple of exercise books with pages full of my words of aspiration. To fill in the minutes I'd do word searches or crossword puzzles. In the margins when thoughts would arise I'd write myself positive messages so as not to forget. I 'gave up' many times believing I would never get back to what I was doing before all this happened. In fact in some ways it would have been easier to give up and spend my days in early 'retirement'. Through sheer determination I decided I would not let it get the better of me – so here I am in the process of recouping what I have lost.

Though my experiences I fully acknowledge the 'system' is not perfect. During my time in hospital I witnessed and endured many of its flaws. What choice did I have considering I ignored the early symptoms of my illness which may have averted all this medical intervention? However it did save my life. I didn't personally agree with some of the treatments – for example at various stages I was heavily pressured into accepting chemotherapy which I did not particularly agree with, but luckily it was aborted mainly due to the fact I had an unhealed wound. At one stage a doctor arrived unannounced to insert an intravenous needle for a potassium infusion. I queried whether I could just eat more bananas or high potassium food along with oral supplements before ANOTHER needle is inserted – he agreed and it worked – my levels normalized through eating 1 or 2 bananas a day. Many of the problems during my illness were side-effects of various treatments – such as the effects of radiotherapy causing poor wound healing and fragile bones, poor nutrition (due to nausea) and a stroke (due to medication).

Good Things Do Happen

Besides the fact the cancer had not spread (giving me a second chance at life) the best story I have to tell you is that my family of cats survived intact through the changes. One of my many and most important interests is that I take in and care for stray cats. Over the years with local council approval I've cared, fed, desexed and loved numerous little ones that have arrived on my doorstep. At the time of becoming ill I had, in my care, six little girls. Some lovely friends took over the duty of care for them (coming in once or twice daily to check on and feed them including organising vet care if required) during my various hospital admissions. Every time I was readmitted to hospital my heart would feel wounded – missing them terribly and worrying about their welfare



thinking that I might lose one if not all of them. Every time I returned home they were waiting for me – and sort of picked up where we left off. It was very healing – I felt they sensed I was unwell and would express that through their behaviour. One little girl – 13 year old Penny – would lay next me and incessantly lick me like she was attempting to make things better. Another little one (Daisy) has nose cancer, currently in ‘remission’, every night before falling asleep as she would lay next to me, I would say: “We are both cancer free now Daisy’. She would purr in response.

Thank you for reading my story. There’s so much more that I could tell you – so please do not judge me on these few words as they are just a part of the full story in a book I am currently working on for publication in the near future.

Are You Able to Help Me?

Now I have a special request for your help. Financially it has been very difficult to say the least. Unable to do workshops and other things that provided me with income my savings have dwindled very quickly. I’m now reliant upon government assistance. I have accumulated debts – about 6 months before I became ill I invested in a more reliable car (predominately for getting to and from my workshops safely) and other commitments. For the last 18 months or so have been making fortnightly re-payments plus insurance for a vehicle I’ve been unable to drive, which in the future I should be able to drive again. I’ve also over that time maintained costs related to The Shoppe website, domain, email provider (for the Shoppe Newsletter) and fees to the service administering my e-books to keep them on the site – all using the meagre money I receive from the government and in view that I will get things moving again and hopefully pay for itself. My previous income enabled me to do free talks and demos at public meetings, in nursing homes, schools, etc., to promote my concept of sustainability and doing what’s right for the planet and the future. I’d like to continue doing that in time to come because I consider it very



important in the current environmental circumstances. Much of my community work, such as running an Environmental Market, administering my local L.E.T.S. group, editing newsletters for community groups and even caring for my precious stray cats all relied upon in some way or another the money I earned from The Shoppe. Now I have very little income and struggling to make ends meet. A dear friend has, since the first day I entered hospital (and still to this day) has been financially supporting the care of my cats – from vet care, food, even flea and worm treatment. I am eternally grateful to her that my little ones have not suffered in any way! I’m also paying for services such as physiotherapy, home care as my age does not entitle me to aged care services.

How you can help:

1. Primarily **financial assistance** would be the first priority so that I can continue what I do and even build on it. I've set up a Go Fund Me page:

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/pam-the-shoppe>

Or if you prefer I have a personal bank account in which funds can be deposited: BSB 015-225 Account No. 5806 10197

2. **Purchasing down-loads such as my e-books, e-book sets, workshop packages** (so you can run your own workshops), etc. will provide me with immediate income to support The Shoppe. The Shoppe website address: www.theshoppe.com.au

3. **Help setting-up a base from which to run my workshops** without having to carry heavy materials to venues would enable me to re-start running the workshops.

4. **Help fulfil a long standing goal to establish a "Sustainability Supermarket"** to practise the true principles of sustainability.

A reminder:

Here's the link of my Go Fund Me page: <https://www.gofundme.com/f/pam-the-shoppe>

Here's the link to The Self-Sufficiency Shoppe website for down-loads:

www.theshoppe.com.au

Thank you so much for your kindness. Feel free to contact me if you are able to offer help in other ways. Email: theshoppe@tpg.com.au or pamshoppe55@gmail.com
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