

My Story

by Ginny Fraser

It started with a skin melanoma and orthodox medical treatment. Then, a few years later, cancer was found in my lymph nodes, and I started doing the Gerson Therapy. Five years after that I was diagnosed with five or six tumours all around my body and brain. I was really up against it. With radiotherapy suggested for the brain tumours and nothing else that was very effective for the tumours in my body, it wasn't a difficult decision to take a naturopathic route.

Eight years on from that last diagnosis, and cancer-free, I write regularly for **ICON** magazine and coach people who have had a cancer diagnosis.

I was sweeping up leaves in the beautiful gardens at the Findhorn Community when I was overcome with fatigue and simply couldn't continue. It was the third day running I had found my chores just too exhausting. I knew something was wrong – I could no longer wear my contact lenses and one eye was beginning to close. The doctors had diagnosed an auto-immune disorder (myasthenia gravis), but that didn't account for why I was feeling so exhausted.

The tiredness was really interfering with my plans. I had just rented out my house in London, given up my job as a facilitator and coach and headed for Findhorn, a well-established community in the north of Scotland, where I wanted to experiment with communal living away from the smoke and hassle of the city.

After three weeks, I'd had enough. I just wasn't myself. I was perpetually tired, my vision was decidedly squiffy, and I was anxious and withdrawn. The myasthenia gravis medication just wasn't working and my symptoms were getting worse. I returned to London, reclaimed my house and began trying to find out what was wrong.

One thing that had always been vaguely at the back of my mind was the possibility of cancer. I had had two bouts of melanoma. The primary was a mole on my arm back in 1993, which I briskly had excised (along with a chunk of my arm). Keen to get on with my life, I didn't stop to consider why I had got cancer in the first place, and what I could do to make sure it didn't come back.

Then, three years later, a tumour was found in the lymph nodes under my right arm. After surgery to remove the affected nodes, I realized that I could no longer ignore the fact that I had cancer. I researched the options (not that there were many!) and chose the Gerson Therapy, which I followed intensively for two years to make sure I was really clear.

So, when I went back to the Marsden in the autumn of 2001 on my return from Findhorn, five years after starting the Gerson Therapy, neither my doctors nor I were really expecting any melanoma to be showing up to account for my symptoms. I was CT scanned, and went back a few days later to get my results. I went alone, totally unprepared for the news I received.

I had tumours in my brain, lungs, spleen, hilum (at the entrance to the lungs) and stomach. I was expected to live around six months.

I reeled out of the doctor's office and stumbled into a cab home, torn between mute fear and hysteria. My life had changed dramatically in the course of that rather abrupt meeting. It had

been simplified down to one simple question: would I live or would I die?

I was pretty quickly put on to 16mg per day of dexamethasone (steroids), and went away for Christmas to contemplate my next steps. My spiritual beliefs have always played a big role in my life, and the Christmas break included a retreat on the gorgeous Monterey coast, which provided a great opportunity to muster my inner resources and develop the self-belief and determination to do all I could to get better.

While I was away, the steroids began to kick in, with what were, for me, horrific side effects. I couldn't sleep. I was 'speedy'. Worst of all (for a vain creature like me!), I started to bloat. First, I found I had a ravenous appetite – I would eat anything, at any time. Secondly, everything swelled up. I developed a huge moon face and felt very self-conscious. Friends didn't recognize me, and one visibly recoiled when he saw how changed my appearance was.

The quest for the best treatment began shortly after my Christmas break. I enrolled friends in researching the Internet for melanoma treatments (there is so much out there, and a lot of it is quite upsetting to read, so it's a great task to delegate). I ended up with a shortlist – the Gerson Therapy again; the Kelley-Gonzales enzymes approach; and an American naturopathic clinic.

At the same time I was researching radiotherapy (the only possible allopathic treatment for brain tumours) and fighting with the doctors to try and get stereotactic radiotherapy (a beam is finely focussed on the tumour) instead of the whole-brain radiotherapy they advocated. I was loath to have WBT because of fears that it can cause early Alzheimer's and brain damage. The hospital insisted I should have the whole-brain treatment.

As I prepared for the radiotherapy I kept getting setback after setback. First the Gerson people in Mexico told me that their therapy doesn't work with brain tumours. Then Gonzales also refused to treat me. The American clinic just stopped responding to my calls and emails. All of these were gut-wrenching disappointments. My determination

to do everything I could to fight the disease was really tested. In the end I opted for pretty much the only remaining option – naturopathic treatment with a London-based doctor, Etienne Callebout. With hindsight, and eight years on, I know him to be quite an extraordinary man, and clearly a perfect choice. Back in early 2002 he seemed like the short straw.

In February I embarked on a course of radiotherapy to my brain – daily, for two weeks, with weekends off. It was easy, painless and it took just a few minutes to be 'zapped'. But, as with the steroids, the side effects were not so pleasant. I could only walk like an old lady – very slowly. I felt sick. And my hair fell out. I was totally exhausted, and would usually sleep all day and evening, then wake at 2 a.m., ravenous. On the occasions when I was awake in the evening, I would often talk complete gibberish to Stacey (my dear friend and housemate) for ten minutes or so, then get furious with her because she didn't understand me, before gradually returning to rationality. That was very frightening, for both of us.

As for the body tumours, the Marsden could offer me no treatment – aside from radiotherapy - that had any decent chance of success. There were some chemotherapy agents available, but they had such limited effectiveness that even my doctor told me not to bother.

So everything at this point rested on the success of the radiotherapy. If it had worked on the brain tumours, the doctors could try it on the other tumours. A few weeks after the treatment finished I got the results. They were not good. According to the scans, the tumours had not responded.

That was a tough meeting. You always know when it's bad news by the look on the doctor's face the minute he or she comes into the room. The good ones deliver bad news with compassion and empathy. The bad ones either overdo the phoney caring or don't even try. I had a good doctor for this bit, luckily: Hugo Ford – a genuinely compassionate man. I had two close friends with me, Stacey and Bindy. When we got the news we all reacted with hysterical laughter. It was quite extraordinary. I'd heard of this as a response to bad news, but

to experience it was quite bizarre. We laughed like drains all the way home.

Thinking back, I suppose this strange reaction gave my brain time to take in the news and adjust to the likelihood that I would die, seeing as the only treatment available seemed to have failed.

Emotionally this whole time was very different to anything I could have imagined. I felt very strong. I felt incredibly supported. Friends wrote and visited - including four friends who separately travelled from the US to spend time with me. People gave me money. And Stacey chose to spend her time taking care of me. I felt very spiritually connected and supported. I was brought up a Christian and felt a very intimate source of support from Jesus. My mother wrote to dozens of contemplative Anglican orders and asked the nuns to pray for me. The esoteric church I belong to also provided huge energetic assistance. I really felt Grace was extended to me in a big way. I had a new sense of serenity. It was as though all the things I normally obsessed about - money, men, work, was I good enough?, was I pretty enough?, was I clever enough? - seemed suddenly unimportant in the face of this huge challenge - would I live or would I die? I actually felt very happy, despite the physical difficulties I was experiencing.

Regardless of the bad radiotherapy result, I knew I couldn't give up, and I began Dr Callebout's regime a month or so after radiotherapy ended. He is a qualified medical doctor, homeopath and a specialist in alternative treatments for cancer. He admitted he hadn't treated anyone with my level of cancer before but said he would give it a go. I signed up for the whole shebang.

My regime consisted of a combination of diet, juices, coffee enemas and a high level of supplementation. The diet was based on as much organic produce as possible, and excluded anything processed, sugar, dairy and wheat, tea, coffee and alcohol. I was allowed protein in the form of organic chicken or fish, but it could only be consumed at lunchtime and no later in the day. I consumed six 8oz juices a day (in three lots of doubles), either carrot and apple or a mixture of lettuce,

watercress, parsley, green pepper, chard, red cabbage and apple.



The most difficult thing was the timing. I had a total of 122 pills a day, all of which had to be taken at specific times. Timing it all proved a real task and I was lucky to have a very methodical and well-organized helper in Stacey. Going out at all was difficult to manage but do-able with advanced planning. Since I couldn't work in the early days of my treatment, I was able to devote myself full-time to the regime. As I recovered, as a freelancer, I was able to start doing some coaching work from home and adapting the regime to fit in.

I didn't find the programme too difficult, to be honest, which is strange, considering my natural inclination to choose chocolate over carrot any day. But because the stakes were so high, I was prepared to do whatever was necessary, including odd physical treatments like Epsom salt baths, castor oil rubs, footbaths of mustard and cayenne pepper, and ice packs and hot-water bottles on various parts of my body. It sounds wacky, but each thing had a valid and understandable function, so I did it all. And the coffee enemas were great - total privacy three times a day, perfect for reading and just escaping!

As for the tablet part of the regime, it is not something that can be copied as everything was specially selected by my doctor for my particular cancer and symptoms. His philosophy for me was one of detoxification of the system, excellent nutrition and supplementation to boost immune response, plus the metabolic therapy of B-17 (laetrile) and pancreatic enzymes which break down tumours.

It was a tough regime, but it felt great to be the one responsible for my own well-being. The sense of empowerment far outweighed the hassle of what was physically involved. But, best of all, it worked.

I had a CT scan around four months later that showed that all the tumours had either reduced significantly or disappeared altogether. The hospital took credit for the brain tumours (radiotherapy effects often take a while to kick in and they claimed the previous scan was done too early to show a true result), but they were flabbergasted by the reduction in the other areas where I had had *no* conventional treatment. For all their incredulity, however, they were not interested enough to ask me in any detail exactly how this had been achieved. The term 'spontaneous remission' was used – which I have since learnt is a commonly heard blanket term used by unenlightened doctors for any improvement not caused by conventional medical treatment!

I continued working on my 'spontaneous remission' for a further seven months, and a scan in November 2002 showed that everything had gone, bar a small abnormality in my spleen. When I originally wrote this article – in March 2003 - I still had some cancer cells in my system, and was working to be rid of every single one of them. I continued on my rigorous regime, bit by bit slowly edging back into the world. It took a while to lose all the weight from the hideous steroids and a year on the sofa, and my hair will never really be the same again after those powerful rays directed right on my head, but as I write today at the end of 2009 I have been clear of melanoma ever since.

Since my recovery I have climbed mountains in Kashmir, sailed in the Caribbean and walked the Camino de Santiago de Compostela in Spain. I moved to the countryside and live in a beautiful village with green all around me. I work as a coach and facilitator with individuals and organisations, and I also coach people with cancer.

I am very grateful for my life and also grateful for the opportunity to sit down and review what I wrote to update it for my website. It is very easy to become sucked back into the hurly burly of life, of work, of the daily grind, so it is good to be reminded that my life is a precious thing – and all the more so because I so nearly lost it.