

Smart Phone. Smarter Brain.



I thought I was having a nervous breakdown. I didn't want to have a nervous breakdown. I wanted it to be something physical. But I didn't want it to be this: a Grade 4 brain tumour that sounded like a Dutch footballer.

In April 2016 I'd gone on holiday alone to Israel when I began to notice that I was having trouble speaking. Then I noticed that I was having trouble reading and writing and that I was dropping things from my right hand.

One of the things I dropped from my right hand was my phone. Unfortunately I was floating in the Dead Sea at the time. Not everything floats in the Dead Sea. So not only was I finding it difficult to speak, read and write but now my phone was having similar problems.

Returning to the UK, my girlfriend said, "Things aren't right." She phoned my doctor who told us to go to the nearest hospital immediately. They did tests. I felt embarrassed. I didn't want to be yet other teacher suffering stress, I wanted something physically wrong with me to justify all the effort they were putting into my diagnosis.

"There's something up there," said the doctor, pointing to my head. "We need to find it what it is."

They soon found out. It was a Grade 4 brain tumour. I was put on steroids. I was kept in hospital. I was shown the scan of my brain; normal except for the large fried egg on its left hand side.

There seemed to be a lot of meetings. We emerged from each one with worse news than we'd expected. 'You won't be able to drive for two years.' 'It's incurable.' 'The average life expectancy is fourteen months.'

I had an operation during which I was awake; a neuro-psychologist showing me simple pictures of things which I had to name. When I couldn't say something like 'car' when shown a picture of a car, the neuro-psychologist would signal to the surgeon who was 'fiddling' in my brain behind my back who would adjust her 'fiddling' accordingly. It was tiring but not as strange as I'd expected.

I then took part in six months of radiotherapy and chemotherapy with none of the side effects I'd be warned about. Losing hair on one side of my head and feeling more tired than usual were the most of my difficulties.

After a few weeks rest from treatment, I began six months of chemotherapy; five days of tablets with twenty days off each thirty days. Again, I was lucky not to have any ill affects.

I kept myself busy: seeing friends, running, doing housework (!), making art, (reading and writing were still difficult and frustrating - this article has taken a long time!) and trying to understand all the conflicting diet advice floating around out there.

Every three months I have a MRI scan followed two weeks later by me sitting nervously in a small room waiting for the scan results. My last scan result was 'satisfactory'.

It is coming up to a year since I couldn't say 'Jerusalem' to a woman in a hostel who asked me where I had been. I've reached the time when ' . . . these tumours tend to grown back.' I have replaced my waterlogged phone. I can't replace my brain; I just want the one that I've always had to work properly and healthily for another fifty years.

In two days time, I'll be sat nervously in a small room waiting for the doctor to come in and tell me what my latest scan is showing.

