

YOUR HEALTH



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DAILY ECHO

Making a journey

FORTY years ago, cancer was still a taboo subject. People whispered of "growths" and watched friends, relatives or neighbours fade away without ever knowing details of what was wrong.

Compare that with today, when celebrities such as Kylie Minogue, Wendy Richards, Trisha Goddard and Jade Goody talk openly about their cancer and even – in Goody and Richards' cases – the prospect of dying from it.

But such frankness may not be so easy for those around them, who often suffer in silence as they watch someone they love going through treatment. As Dorset author and mother of two Anne Orchard, 44, of Charmouth, explains: "The person who has cancer knows what their job is – to be completely selfish and do everything they can to get better."

"For the people around them, who feel they have to be strong, they have no-one to turn to, no-one to cry with, and no support network. It's not something that gets a huge amount of attention – usually the focus is on the sufferers themselves."

She warns: "Cancer takes no prisoners, it doesn't pick and choose. One in three of us will get it at some point in our lives, which means everybody is going to be one of those people on the sidelines."

Anne's first book, *Their Cancer – Your Journey*, is for those people left in what she calls the "cancer fallout zone." It was prompted by her own experiences of trying to cope when two people very close to her had to battle the disease.

Her mother was 53 when she started having headaches and experiencing difficulty reading.

"We were a family that hardly ever went to the doctor. At the beginning, they thought she might have had a stroke. She went for further tests. That was when she was told she had several secondary brain tumours," recalls Anne.

"I had never experienced cancer before mum was ill. I lived 200 miles away, so I was supporting from a distance. I always had second hand information. I felt helpless. In the early days I didn't think clearly that she would die. I always used to burst into tears at work because there was no other outlet."

"One of the difficulties was that everyone was trying so hard to be positive, having heard stories that



■ Author Anne Orchard

people can get better. It meant it was very difficult for her to find someone to talk to about the fact that she was dying."

Anne's mother passed away in 1991, eight months after being diagnosed. "We went through her 54th birthday party knowing it would probably be her last."

In time, her father remarried, but the loss has had an enduring effect on the family.

"We miss her terribly. She didn't see any of her grandchildren."

More than 10 years later, Anne's mother-in-law, to whom she is very close, was diagnosed with breast cancer following a mammogram at Poole Hospital. She underwent a mastectomy and chemotherapy.

"I was very much looking for books. That was when I became aware that there wasn't much out there. I only found information about cancer itself: I didn't find anything that was aimed at me," says Anne.

Joanna Codd talks to an author whose latest book helps loved ones deal with a loss from cancer

"I wanted more information. It was also about managing the children's expectations, about grandma looking like a pirate with her scarf."

"It felt like I coped well because I had already been through the process. I had become comfortable with the fact that it's not all doom and gloom."

There are positives about having cancer in your life, if you go looking for them, like making you value your own health."

Thankfully, Anne's mother-in-law has stayed cancer-free. Anne, who works as a mentor and life coach for people coping with a loved one's cancer, says: "One piece of wisdom I would like to pass on is to look for support. Find out who your support is and believe that you deserve to be supported."

● For more information about the book, see familiesfacingcancer.org. To contact Anne, email AnneOrchardCoaching@hotmail.co.uk or ring 01297 561591.

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