



# Cancer survivor's wild ride

Cancer survivor Fiona Johnson's first book, *My Wild Ride*, has just been published and the author hopes her life story will inspire others to live their lives. Now, ConnectPink writer DONNA KELLY caught up for a chat.

At 25, Fiona Johnson was enjoying "a great life".

She had married her boyfriend, Matt, 18 months earlier, and the couple had just returned from a holiday in Thailand.

Fiona came back with a bit of a travel bug but despite visiting numerous doctors and a vague diagnosis of glandular fever, it "just wouldn't go away".

"Six weeks later I had really gone downhill and I went to hospital and they said I had malaria," she said.

"But the next day they said, 'No, it's not malaria, we don't what it is'."

Fiona found herself being transferred to a Brisbane hospital where doctors performed a biopsy and told her she had an aggressive form of cancer - acute myeloid leukaemia.

"I was in a bit of disbelief. I had gone in with a virus, not cancer. And then I asked them when I would start treatment and they said 'today'," she said.

"I am a pretty positive person but there was only a 30 per cent survival rate so I cried for about three days and then I realised that

wouldn't help so I decided to concentrate on getting better."

Fiona spent the next six months in hospital but once she was out of intensive care, and not "really, really sick - if you can understand that", she started writing.

"A range of things happen in that situation - I felt sadness, fear, frustration, anger - so writing was my coping mechanism," she said.

"I started writing about all the positive things, about my great childhood, and it cheered me up in a way.

"Then I just kept going."

After six months, Fiona was in "remission to a point", had finished all her treatments and was told she could go home.

But with just a 50 per cent chance to survive the next five years there was no way she was going to waste any more time.

"I grew up riding horses, being with a pony club, doing dressage, it was a very English way of riding," she said.

"But I always wanted to do rodeos. I had been to a

few and they just felt electric.

"So once I was through the treatment I thought 'now's the time'. Matt bought me a rope for my birthday and I just chased it with everything I had. We were on the circuit for nine years and had a great time.

"I did win a rookie calf roping competition but I wasn't there to win. My dream was just to get out there and do it. I think your priorities change (with cancer) and being able to just participate is so important. You don't need to be the best in the world."

Along with her riding, Fiona kept revisiting her "story" adding to it as she became pregnant with the couple's daughter and then their son. She had been told pregnancy was no longer an option.

"As things happened I added them into my story. It became my life story - for myself and my family," she said.

"So when I became pregnant I wrote that in because I wanted my daughter to be able to read that one day.

and know that we weren't meant to have her but we did.

"And it evolved over the years and I kept pulling it out and then shelving it."

Finally, while speaking at a Leukaemia Foundation event about 18 months ago, a published author told Fiona her story was amazing and that she should write a book.

"I told her I sort of had, and she asked if she could read it. She said it was really good and passed it on to her publisher," she said.

The result is *My Wild Ride*, published by Allen & Unwin, available now.

Fiona said she was just starting to get publicity for her work and it was "a bit strange".

"But I just hope that I can inspire people and give them hope," she said.

"If people are going

through something like me, like cancer, then I hope they see there is hope, and people survive and go on to chase their dreams.

"And I hope that people realise that life isn't definite. It all ends at some time so chase your dreams. Now."

Fiona said after 11 years in remission she has "as much chance" as anyone else although she still finds herself with "a mental challenge" that sees her worrying when she finds something like an unexplained bruise.

"I have to accept the fact that I'm OK, to be rational," she said.

"I did have counselling years ago because I had been a very positive person but after the cancer I felt a lot of sadness and pain.

"I had to learn and accept that a positive per-

son does feel the pain, it's just that they can rise above it."

With her first book about to be released, Fiona is already thinking about a writing career, although moving to "nice" fiction stories.

"When I was younger I never aspired to be a writer, although I was always good at English and creative writing," she said.

"But I enjoyed writing the book and now I am the point where I think maybe I have another book in me."



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