

## GRIEVING MUM'S DETERMINATION

# We lost my daughter to cancer...but miracle stem cell treatment saved me

By **Jaymi McCann**

WHEN Louise Finan first started feeling sick she initially refused to go to hospital.

Her daughter Sam had been suffering from adrenal cancer and her son-in-law Daniel had been diagnosed with testicular cancer, so she had other priorities.

Having taken time off from her job at Sainsbury's to care for them, when she got pneumonia Louise felt paracetamol would be enough to help her.

But the situation took a shocking turn when one afternoon in 2011 Sam entered her mother's bedroom to see she had turned blue and was struggling to breathe. Just moments later Louise suffered a heart attack.

She was still reluctant to leave her family, but after paramedics forced her to attend her local Northwick Park Hospital, she had a second major heart attack.

"My stress levels were through the roof, it was an awful time,"

## 'I didn't realise how bad it was'

says Louise. "They were both so young and I didn't want to be emotional in front of Sam."

"When the doctor said I'd had a heart attack my first thought was, 'I haven't got time for this'."

"I just didn't realise how bad it was. A lovely nurse told me, 'Louise, you've had a major episode, your life is going to completely change'. She was right."

Always passionate about her job and travelling, Louise, of Northolt, west London, was devastated when she was told she would have to give everything up.

She could barely walk up the stairs at home or find the strength to put a brush through her hair.

She started experiencing pulmonary attacks and was back in hospital every couple of months, but was told she was not viable for a heart transplant.

Louise tried her best to look after her family. Sadly Sam died in 2012, aged just 28, but her son-in-law Daniel, married to her second daughter Rebecca, survived his illness. It was Daniel who found the Heart Cells Foundation and they decided to do everything they could to give Louise the best chance possible.

On discovering she was a perfect candidate, Louise underwent

**NEW LEASE OF LIFE:** Louise with new granddaughter Amara; below, daughter Sam and Louise in hospital with a celebration cake



stem cell treatment in November 2018 at St Bartholomew's Hospital in London.

After a week of injections, stem cells were harvested from her hip bone and used to repair the damage in her heart. "I was made aware of the risks, but at this point there wasn't any other viable option out there."

"When I got home it was the most amazing feeling of relief, adrenaline rushing through my body. Every day I just started feeling better and better."

"I went from barely being able

to walk to running up the stairs and going shopping again. Slowly everything seemed to improve."

"I feel like a new person, like I have been given my life back."

As part of ongoing trials in the UK, Heart Cells Foundation has helped 400 patients receive the new treatment.

It was founded by Jennifer Rosenberg OBE and her husband Ian, who had heart failure.

After Ian was given just months to live, they found a surgeon in Germany who was conducting the pioneering procedure and

Ian's life was extended by three years before he died in 2006.

The treatment is given to people who have come to the end of what conventional therapy can offer and are not expected to improve. The unit at Barts has seen a 60 per cent symptomatic improvement in patients.

Now the charity is raising funds for a larger clinical trial. If the results are positive the treatment could be rolled out on the NHS.

Ms Rosenberg, chairwoman of the Heart Cells Foundation, said: "My husband was given just

weeks to live, but this treatment gave us a wonderful extra three years. When he realised it was not available to other UK patients he became incensed."

"We started this charity and have seen hundreds of people whose lives have been changed."

At 58, Louise now has a new lease of life. Her granddaughter Amara was born just weeks after she received the treatment and they made the decision to have her stem cells frozen, should she ever need them in future.

Louise does not know what her exact prognosis is now, but like her daughter Sam she wants to live each day to its fullest.

She says: "Sam inspired me. The way she lived her life, she was off to Australia, off to New York. As a mum I was worried, but she would just say, 'It's OK, you get one shot at this'."

"I really believe life is about seeing things, experiencing things, and I intend to live it."

● Visit [heartcellsfoundation.com](http://heartcellsfoundation.com)