

## My daughter was dying... and so was I.

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**G**rowing up, my daughter Sam was such a bright and happy girl. As she became a young adult, I was so proud of the woman she was growing into. She was kind, smart and incredibly adventurous.

Working in a bank, she had her dream career, and in her personal life, she loved being with her friends and going away.

Sam had an infectious smile. She could brighten up any room she walked into.

Only, when she was around 23-years-old, she began to feel unwell. "I feel bloated and my stomach is swollen," she told me.

It was so unlike Sam to complain of being ill, and so she booked an appointment with the doctor.

We never expected it to be anything serious, but in 2007, my world changed forever.

Doctors found a large tumour in her adrenal gland.

"I'm afraid the life-span of adrenal cancer is around five years," doctors told us.

It was devastating. My little girl was dying.

My heart was breaking into pieces, but I knew I needed to stay strong for Sam.

She was so brave and insisted early on that she wanted to make the most of life.

Sam needed major surgery and chemo to remove the cancer, but it wasn't looking good.

For the next four years, she was in and out of hospital having treatment, but it wasn't going away.

The cancer was too aggressive.

However, despite all the treatment, my Sam remained her happy, upbeat self.

She was still so young and just wanted to live her life while she could. And that's exactly what she did.

She went on holiday with the girls and even jumped out of a plane.

She lived life to the fullest. When on holiday, she even wore bikinis, despite the scar running from her chest right around to her back from the surgery.

"It's my shark bite," she would tell me.

That was just Sam. She was full of life. I tried to care for her as best

# LIFE IS FOR LIVING

as I could, but I was also looking after my son-in-law who had prostate cancer.

Life was tough, but Sam and her sister Beckie, gave me the strength to keep going.

If they could smile through it, then I could, too.

Only, I'd be lying if I said things weren't tough.

My stress levels were through the roof, and I was struggling to cope. I have type two diabetes and I couldn't control it.

I refused to cry in front of Sam and it meant that all of the stress was building up.

Then, one day, in 2011, I suddenly came down with what I thought was the flu.

"I think I'm going to have a lie down," I told Sam and Beckie. I didn't feel

right at all, and the girls came to check in on me. "Mum?" they both asked in horror. "Your mouth is completely blue!"

Not sure what was happening, I felt dreadful.

"We're calling an ambulance," I heard them say.

I had no idea what was going on, but when the paramedics arrived, the severity of the situation became clear very soon.

We need to take you to the hospital," they told me. Only, as I

caught sight of Sam, I just knew that wasn't an option for me.

"I'm not going anywhere," I told them, sternly.

I tried to convince myself I was fine, but the decision was taken out of my hands as I was rushed into an ambulance.

And when I arrived at the hospital, they informed me I'd had a heart attack.

I couldn't believe it.

I hadn't felt anything at all.

And more than that, I just didn't have the time for a heart attack.

I had Sam and Dan to worry about – not myself.

"I'm going home!" I demanded.

Only, just as I sat up in bed, I had another major attack – this time, knocking me out completely.

The next thing I remember was lights flickering above me as I was wheeled through the hospital.

Doctors needed to transfer me to Harefield Hospital for more specialist care, but it would take an hour to get there.

Within that time, my heart was giving up as I suffered a major cardiac arrest. I couldn't believe

this was happening to me.

I was only 48.

Thankfully, doctors managed to bring me around, but I was in a critical condition.

The next morning, when I tried to get out of bed, it hit me just how bad of a state I was in.

I couldn't move at all.

For the next few weeks, I remained in hospital while I recovered, but things would never be the same.

I needed an implantable cardioverter-defibrillator inserted into my chest and my health was now at an all time low. However, so



My beautiful angel

The staff gifted me a cake!



was Sam's.

Dan was thankfully on the road to recovery, but Sam wasn't getting any better and I needed to be there for her.

I put all my strength into caring for her.

I just had to get on with things now.

Unfortunately, Sam's health was getting worse by the day, and on 5 December 2012, my beautiful girl was taken from this world at just 28-years-old.

My world was completely broken.

Some days, I was unable to get off of the sofa or out of bed.

The grief cast a dark cloud over my life, but I knew Sam would want us

all to be happy.

She lived her life to the fullest and I wanted to do the same.

Only, as a result of my heart attack, I began having pulmonary attacks – a dangerous build-up of fluid in the lungs.

They could drain me if not caught early enough.

I'd just lost Sam and now I was on the edge of death, too.

Some days, it felt like I was just waiting for it to come.

I was in and out of hospital. A slight cold could of killed me within hours.

However, after seeing Sam

fight so hard, I knew I had to do the same with my health.

I wanted to live my life.

I still had Beckie, and now Dan was in the all-clear, they were trying for a baby through IVF.

I wanted to see my grandchild come into the world.

And it was Dan who came across the Heart Cells Foundation, who offer stem cell treatment for patients with heart disease.

You have to meet a certain criteria for them to agree to take you on, but thankfully, they saw how bad things had become for me.

I needed to have a week's worth of injections before the surgery, but finally, in November 2018, I was wheeled down to theatre at Barts Health

NHS Trust.

And by now, Beckie was just weeks away from giving birth!

She was massive, and we all joked beforehand that she couldn't go into labour while I was under the knife.

"You bring her back to me," Beckie told the surgeon, seriously.

It was a dangerous operation, but we knew this was my only chance

of living my life.

I wasn't even nervous. I was roaring to go.

The operation only took a few hours as the surgeon repaired the damage in my heart with my own stem cells.

It's truly a revolutionary operation.

And thankfully, the results were as well!

Within



Beckie has been my strength

weeks, I was back on my feet.

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

Suddenly, I had a new lease of life, and I even got to

see my granddaughter Amara come into the world.

Now, three years on from my surgery, and life is amazing.

I haven't had an attack since, and my health is so much better.

I can breathe and walk around without any issues.

But the best part? Amara is now two-and-a-half and I get to play with her every single day.

I'm living my life and I owe it all to the stem cell surgery.

Next year, for my 60th birthday, I'm planning on a Caribbean cruise, and I am so excited for the future.

Losing Sam taught me anything, it's that you have to live your life and stay positive.

She never let anything bring her down, and she smiled right until the end.

I knew my life was hanging in the balance, but I had to carry on – for Sam.

She may not be here in person, but she's with us every day.

I live my life for her. She'll always be with me.

Visit: [heartcellsfoundation.org](http://heartcellsfoundation.org)

Stem cell surgery gave me my life



I got to see Amara into the world