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LITTLE

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INSPIRATIONAL MUM FIGHTS TO SAVE LIVES

Lily Allen songs in my head were clue to brain tumour size of an orange



BRAIN tumours kill 4,000 people every year in the UK – more than any other cancer.

Yet the condition gets just one per cent of all cancer research funding.

Mum-of-two Nicole Witts had eight wrong diagnoses before scans showed a tumour the size of an orange in her brain.

Had it been caught earlier Nicole might not have been left with epilepsy, which means she is unable to do things other mums take for granted – like cooking, and bathing her children.

But despite her two-year ordeal, she remains incredibly upbeat – even taking part in a Calendar Girls-style photoshoot to raise awareness for Brain Tumour Research.

And on the right is part of her moving “bucket list” of things she decided she wanted to do before she died to prove her life was worth fighting for.

Nicole, 39, from Leighton Buzzard, Beds, has two daughters, Megan, five, and Ellen, one. Here she tells Sun Health her incredible story.

“A washing machine was forever whirring inside my head. Then I started getting skull-splitting headaches and mood swings.

It was when I started hearing voices and Lily Allen’s record *Allie in a loop* that I really knew something was wrong.

I had already seen seven different GPs, all of whom fobbed me off with some useless medication to treat the wrong issue.

And when I called my surgery and spoke to a locum doctor on the phone he laughed down the phone and asked if I’d been taking drugs or drinking. He said to call back if the symptoms didn’t go away, slammed the phone down and I just fell to the floor and wept.

Nobody would listen to me. I hadn’t even told my husband Gary, 40, as I didn’t want him to think I was mad.

But soon after that Gary saw the sheer terror in my eyes when I quickly turned around hearing my daughter Megan behind me – then realising she wasn’t at home. I told

By MATT BARBOUR

Gary the whole story, handed in my notice at work and that very afternoon I had my first full-blown fit in front of Gary, Megan and Ellen.

I bit my lip so hard there was blood everywhere, my eyes were rolling back and I was shaking violently.

Gary sent Megan out to a neighbour’s house for help but she was so affected by it she was found in the middle of the road shaking and crying.

I was taken straight to Luton & Dunstable Hospital by ambulance but while waiting to see a doctor I started hearing Lily Allen again and had another fit.

Doctors pumped me full of anti-fitting medication and gave me a CT scan which showed a big lump in my head. Then I had a more detailed MRI scan.

Unfair

Sitting in a corridor outside with all sorts of people walking past, a doctor approached me and dropped the bombshell for the first time that I had a brain tumour and, although he couldn’t be sure, it was likely to be an aggressive, malignant tumour.

He walked away and left me there alone to absorb my death sentence. I’m not religious but ran to the hospital chapel where I fell down on my knees and started shouting angrily: “Why me? I’ve got two kids. What have I done to deserve this?”

It just seemed so unbelievably unfair.

I had a week of sitting at home alone, thinking these could be the last few days I would ever see my children, before I was admitted to the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead for my first consultation with a specialist.

The neurosurgeon there told me the tumour was as big as an orange, had been growing steadily for nearly ten years and if it continued to grow I’d be dead by August. I needed to have it removed straight away.

He also told me it was benign, a less aggressive type of tumour, so there was some light at the end of the tunnel. He explained nobody comes out of neurosurgery without being affected in some way.

There was a chance I would die and the surgery could easily catch a nerve leaving me paralysed, speechless, blind or deaf for the rest



BATTLE... Nicole in hospital, left, orange-sized growth, above, and, main pic, nude* snap for charity

“Doc just laughed and asked if I had taken any drugs or been drinking”

of my life. I can’t explain it but I felt I was in safe hands and signed the form in a flash. I had to fight. I wanted to see my children grow up. It was my only chance.

I had the nine-hour operation in March 2008 and within an hour of waking up knew I was still me. I wasn’t paralysed.

I could talk and I knew who all my family were. But sadly, I was left with pretty severe epilepsy and my short-term memory was almost non-existent.

I was told I had a 30 per cent chance of the tumour coming back so, lying in the hospital bed, I started putting together a “bucket list” of all the things I wanted to do before I die.

One was to raise awareness of brain tumours. I was just so angry at how, if it had been picked up earlier, I might not have had complications during surgery and I wouldn’t have lived through those traumatic weeks planning my own funeral.

The original list had 30 pledges and I achieved all of them before my first yearly check-up in March 2009 – raising thousands for the fantastic Brain Tumour Research, which has 18 charities under its wing.

So I’ve started adding to the list. On March 14 this year I achieved number 53 – to be photographed nude to raise awareness. I was petrified, but there’s nothing I won’t do to spread the word.

● To find out more about Nicole’s bucket list or to make a donation, go to braintumourresearch.org.

GET A NEW HEAD OF HAIR LIKE

JASON GARDINER’s new head of hair cost him £22,000 – but can ordinary folk tackle the problem more cheaply?

Celebrity surgeon Dr Craig Zierning, who operated on the Dancing On Ice star, left, says there is an affordable option for everyone.

He added: “It’s an organ transplant. It’s a procedure where you act as both the donor and recipient. We take hair from the back of the head and replant the follicles in an area where the patient has lost hair.

It’s his own hair, that is why

the transplant looks so natural. Nearly 13million people in the UK suffer from hair loss but now they can do something about it. Jason chose to have the op in a closed hospital but there are more affordable options.”

Here, Sun Health looks at the facts.

HOW DOES IT WORK? A strip of skin with hair follicles deep inside it is taken from the back of the head. Follicles are removed from the skin one by one and then implanted in an area where the patient has lost hair. It can take eight hours.

DOES IT HURT? The areas where skin is removed and where the transplant takes place are all numbed with local anaesthetic. After that there may be discomfort and some patients take painkillers for 48 hours.

WILL THE RESULTS LAST? Transplanted hair will fall out but the root bulb remains in the skin. New hair will start to grow from four months after the op. A patient will not go bald after having the operation.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST? Jason’s operation cost £22,000 but he had the top surgeon and the hospital he used was closed for the day. The average cost is around £3,000.

2 MORE PAGES ➔

LOVING . . . with Gary,
 Ellen and Megan

NICOLE'S BUCKET LIST

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Must not moan! 2) Make-up is really not important 3) Don't be scared of flying or worms 4) To raise money for brain tumour awareness or the Neurosurgery Unit at the Royal Free Hospital in Hampstead 5) Never ever get frustrated with my lovely children 6) Do not suffer fools gladly 7) Be direct and fairly honest 8) Don't be shy 9) Know that small boobs really aren't too bad 10) Know I can drink tap water, it does not have to be bottled 11) Hospital food is yummy 12) Get my brain back to normal 13) Really appreciate good friends and family 14) Enjoy walking everywhere 15) Try eating hot curries with Gary 16) Eat lots of mum-in-law's yummy trifle before anyone else digs in 17) Learn to enjoy getting up early 18) Clean properly under sofas and not go around them 19) Contact lost family and friends 20) Get out and catch up with friends every now and then 21) Get some hobbies again – reading and puzzles in particular 22) Make a huge and heartfelt thank you to everyone who's supported me at my charity events 23) Get into a newspaper to promote the charity 24) Wear a skirt for the first time 25) Get up on stage and sing 26) Go up in a hot air balloon 27) Sing songs on a mic at toddler group without knowing words 28) Go on stage in my underwear at a fashion show 29) Become friends with medical additions like the pee bag I was forced to wear 30) Don't be frightened to say directly what I think 31) Get my own group for brain tumour awareness started (Head 1st on Facebook) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 32) Get more members and some well known patrons (ex-boxer Billy Schwer and MP Andrew Selous) 33) Visit House Of Commons for brain tumour support and funding. 34) Get more press by going under professional umbrella group 35) Get my own website 36) Sponsor my own lower school football team with Head 1st bibs for Pulford Pirates 37) Organise and run a charity musical fundraiser 38) Get Waitrose to sponsor me (£360 in February 2010). 39) Get funds from local Ferrari group (got donation of £1,000) 40) Allocate a day each month to bond with Megan 41) With help of friends, revamp my image and push up a fraction 42) Get tattoo done saying "Courage over adversity" 43) Hold a snake 44) Conquer my fear of fairground rides (I came off one back in 1970s and was on the 9 O'Clock News!) 45) Get over my fear of spiders by holding a Chilean rose tarantula 46) Go Ape in Wendover and do a 120-foot zip fly drop 47) Approach a 99p Store to have my collection boxes on all their tills 48) Get recycled ink cartridge boxes for Brain Tumour Research into local print shops and schools to raise more funds 49) Put on second fantastic fashion show, Leighton Buzzard v Linslade, a success taking £3,500 50) Bare my bottom in a G-string on catwalk – may the ground open up! 51) Sing Hazel O'Connor on karaoke for the first time to start fashion show, along with a dance routine 52) Auction a random man from a local gym at the fashion show 53) Do a professional nude photo-shoot to get national coverage <p>STILL TO DO: Simulated skydive/ Get brain tumour leaflets into all UK's GP surgeries/Link with Mensa/ Get Lord Alan Sugar to do a charity Apprentice</p>
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myView
 By KEVIN O'NEILL
CONSULTANT NEUROSURGEON AT CHARING CROSS HOSPITAL

BRAIN tumours, very often deadly with the average survival time being less than a year, are on the increase (up two per cent annually). This could be linked to issues like radiation or mobile phone use. We simply don't know because the funding for the research isn't there.

The fact they are often misdiagnosed shouldn't come as a surprise – a GP is unlikely to come across more than one or two intrinsic brain tumours in their career and the symptoms often mirror other conditions. But if your condition is getting worse, always ask about a referral to a specialist and a scan. With the NHS scanning capacity now, it's not hard to pick them up and by the time extreme symptoms are observed it could well be too late. At Charing Cross Hospital we have a fast track scanning system but it is desperately under-funded.