



My Story

Where it all began !!

I had always been a healthy, active child and had never been poorly with any childhood illnesses, however that all changed in the March of 2014.

I began to notice a change in my voice, a hoarseness. I used to sing and dance but could no longer reach any high notes when singing. My Mam took me to see my GP initially a viral infection was diagnosed. My voice did not improve over the following 12 weeks and was gradually getting worse, throughout those 12 weeks I visited my GP a further 6 times and at each appointment was told a viral infection or possibly Laryngitis.

After 12 weeks my GP advised I needed to see an Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist. My Mam made an appointment at a Private Hospital for me. The Specialist performed an Endoscopy, he explained I had "a rather large vocal cord cyst, sat on the right vocal cord which was extremely rare for a child of my age and was 99% certain it was benign". He explained I would need surgery to remove the cyst however as I was under the age of 16 the private hospital would not operate on me and I would need to have surgery under the NHS. My Mam agreed to this and I continued under his care.

To cut a long story short from the March of 2014 to September 2014, over a period of seven months I was never seen by this specialist again, my appointments were either with his Registrar or Speech Therapist, again more cameras down my throat, video images taken and continual diagnosis of a right vocal cord cyst requiring surgery. In that time I never received an appointment for surgery but in the September received an appointment to see another speech therapist, she asked what my symptoms were? By then I could barely speak, I couldn't breathe properly and I told her I could feel an obstruction/lump inside my throat. She suggested it may be psychological.

My Mam and I could not believe what she was suggesting and demanded a referral to another private hospital as soon as possible. From then on things moved very quick, the new Consultant I saw wasn't happy with what he could see when he put a camera down my throat, he suggested I was seen by a colleague, one of the top ten leading Throat Specialist in the UK a Professor at the Freeman Hospital. A lady rang my Mam the following day and asked if she could see me, we attended that night. The Professor performed a further Endoscopy and explained there and then it was NOT a vocal cord cyst

and never had been.

She wanted to perform a biopsy as soon as possible , the biopsy was taken and an appointment was made for two weeks down the line.

Two weeks later on Tuesday 21st October 2014 I met with the Professor again, when walking into the room there were other people unbeknown to me they were Nurses/ Oncologists.

With tears in her eyes she delivered the news "I'm so very sorry Alex you have Throat Cancer". A rare form of Throat Cancer that statistically only effects 1 in 100,000 children. You see it had NEVER been a cyst I had been MISDIAGNOSED time after time for over seven months!

What happened after that to be honest is a bit of a blur, a few things I recall: sliding down the wall sobbing in the corridor; on the drive home asking my Mam "Am I going to die?", to which her reply was " you're going nowhere". I was numb, in disbelief and feeling scared. Something which I had never experienced before and NEVER wish to experience again.

My Mam received a phone call asking to bring me to the RVI Great North Children's Hospital six days later I had to meet an Oncologist (Cancer Specialist) on a cancer ward for Children. How I got through those six days I will never know.

I'll be honest with you my thoughts were "why me?", "what have I done to deserve this?", "will I die?" "what if I lose my hair?" I was distraught, just numb, empty inside, hollow !

On Monday 27th October 2014, my Parents, Grandma, Uncle and I met with a Team of Specialists, Oncologist, Radiologist, home care nurse etc. They explained my cancer was Stage 4 the outlook wasn't good! My god these people that had misdiagnosed me for so long were costing my life, my life hung in the balance of the Team I was now under.

They had a plan well two options

- A total removal of my voice box NO WAY I said NO WAY
- We can hit you hard with an aggressive dose of Chemo-radiation 5 days a week for

6 weeks, an adult dose that had never been used on a child for this type of cancer, would it work I asked ? We have no idea I was told, but you will be very ill, by week 2 you will need to be in hospital permanently.

The side effects they explained were horrendous and the long term lasting effects not good either but what choice did I have? As I was under 18 years of age my Mam had to sign a consent form to allow treatment that would make me so very ill but she had no choice she needed to do it for me to survive.

On that same day I was taken on the Teenage Cancer ward where I would become an in-patient. My god I was going on a cancer ward, I really did have cancer it wasn't just a bad dream.

We were shown around the ward, the nurse explaining everything to me, treatment rooms etc but I couldn't take it all in, what I saw will stay with me forever two young children around 4-6 years old, no hair, feeding tubes coming out of their nose, tubes hanging out of their chest , sunken eyes, white pale colourless complexions yet these beautiful children were happy, smiling, giggling pulling each other around the ward in a Lego cart.

I noticed on the wall of the ward a WISH LIST, I asked the nurse what it was for she explained children and parents write their wishes on the wall i.e. Can we please have extra beds so both parents can stay with their child?, Or toys etc. I asked who funded these requests and was told Teenage Cancer Trust.

On the drive home all I could think was I needed to help these children and parents get their wishes, I needed to raise money to help.

I went up to my bedroom when I got home, closed the door and sobbed.

I had a goal I would raise money somehow despite my battle not yet even beginning. This is where Alex's Angels began.

I was about to embark on the toughest battle, hardest journey of my life uncertain at what the future held "would I survive", "could I beat this horrendous disease?" I thought to myself at that point I WILL WIN, I WILL BEAT THIS DISEASE after all CANCER is only a word and can be beaten but I needed to focus and be strong.

I began to think of my Grandad Ronnie, you see I never got the chance of meeting him as he passed

away before I was born but my Mam spoke of him all through my childhood, I felt like I had met him I knew him a beautiful, kind man. Strange as this may sound to some I knew then he was with me, I believed and still do to this day and always will he gave me strength to fight my battle, he was guiding me and watching over me. I thank him from the bottom of my heart x

I also began to think of other loved ones My Great Grandma and Aunt who had lost their battle with cancer. It was then the idea came to the forefront of my mind I would start a fundraising campaign and name it Alex's Angels, my angels were watching over me.

I set up a social media page and JustGiving page and designed my own t-shirts for people to buy. I asked for help from family, friends and strangers to help raise money for the Teenage Cancer Trust. In 24 hours £1,000 had been raised, I upped my target to £2,000 again this was hit in 48hours I upped it again to £5,000 in a week we had reached this goal. Why not raise the bar I thought lets go for £50,000. I dubbed my supporters TEAM ALEX and with the help from each and everyone of them we reached the target of £50,000 in just xx weeks. To date we have raised a staggering £53xxxx.

My Dad helped me endlessly with my ideas, his support and dedication to help me achieve my goal and he continues to do so. Thanks DAD x

Throughout the fundraising I became very ill from my treatment my Dad carried on with the fundraising for me until I was well enough to do so again. I never ended up as an in-patient in hospital my Mam nursed me from home and my bed became my hospital bed, I was fed via feeding tube from a drip stand, never ate a thing for over 4 months as I couldn't swallow , I was filling 20 sick buckets a day, I could barely bear my own weight on bad days, had horrendous burns to the skin on my neck, and lost over 2 stone in weight, I was gaunt and had that cancer look black sunken eyes, there is about a month that I have no recollection of as I was so very poorly and on huge amounts of morphine. I slept pretty much 24 hours a day, with my Mam by my side. My Mam and Dad never allowed people to see me during this time when I was so ill nor did they tell people how poorly I really was so to some people seeing pictures of me during my treatment etc came as a bit of a shock.

My treatment finished on 3rd January 2015, it took months to recover but, my taste buds had gone, I needed to learn to eat again, I was so very weak but I recovered quicker than any of the Medical Team had thought, the Professors handwritten card to me said " I am in full of admiration of you Alex , you have turned this whole thing around"

In January 2015 I received the best news ever , news I had hoped so very much for the Tumour had gone I was ALL CLEAR ! Almost 20 months down the line I am still in remission, just another 40 months to go before the final that's it remission over with your cured. My Grandad had answered my prayers x

What next I thought, I need to make a difference to these Children's lives who are battling cancer just like I was. Although I know the money TEAM ALEX raised for the Teenage Cancer Trust had gone to a good cause I felt I needed to do something on a more personal level.

I decided I wanted to turn Alex's Angels into my very own Charity. On June 3rd 2016 I became the Founder of my own Foundation, Alex's Angels Foundation a Registered Charity

You see the brutal fact is when you're faced with life or death it changes you as a person well it certainly has for me. I am grateful for life . Cancer has made me into the person I am today ,to many I am now known as Alex who had cancer, if that highlights Childhood Cancer Awareness then I've done some good. Some people say inspirational, brave, courageous, I'm just me, a 17 year old who is a survivor the children I see on the ward , those currently fighting their battle and those that have lost their battle (some of whom were friends I had made) we are all inspirational, all warriors, all courageous, and all brave. God bless you all x

A thank you from the bottom of my heart to the Medical Team who worked so tirelessly and gave me my life back I really do owe my life to you all.

