

My Pre & Post Cancer Story (1993 - Present)

1. Introduction to my Pre-Cancer life

I had lived with Ulcerative Colitis for over 25 years. Had really bad times and really good times too - through either remission or it being under control with intravenous immunosuppressant infusions every 8 weeks (2011-2021). 2019 was not a good year with Mum's health deteriorating, 20+ hospital visits and my very frequent 200 mile, each way, trips to see and help her. Giving up her beloved dog and home in the August/October and going into a nursing home...then her passing on 23rd December.

My 21 year relationship, also, ended in July 2019, which was amicable (and still lived together for a further few months) before moving into my own flat in February 2020.

Was off work for 2.5 months with physical, mental and emotional exhaustion and within 3 weeks of returning to work, lockdown 1 happened.

I then shielded (due to the immunosuppressants that I was on) and worked from home.

This was the most mentally healing time for me and re-evaluated life choices and people and definitely what/who was important...and what/who wasn't. **I needed to become my true gay self, as my relationship, was more a gay couple living a very "straight life" (no Prides or frequenting gay establishments!)**

The year progressed and optimism grew...started to enjoy long walks and more photography. I also started joining Zoom chats with gay groups around the country and USA/Canada and networking and becoming friends with many people.

Then in late autumn 2020 I started to feel "off".

I thought my colitis had flared up (or had haemorrhoids) so got some over the counter medications and also my consultant increased the dosage of my infusions in January and March. This didn't change symptoms and so had a sigmoidoscopy to investigate (there was "something untoward"), biopsies were taken and then was referred and subsequent MRI, CT and PET scans taken



Then the bombshell...

2. Cancer

Had a consultant appointment, 26th May 2021, and was told that my colitis had gone into remission....**BUT**...I had Colorectal Cancer, due to the many years of having ulcerative colitis - **I was in shock**.

Then after another consultant appointment, was told more details. I have a **10cm** tumour, but being where it is located (right in the middle of my pelvic area) and the risks of spread, not having chemo or radiotherapy (as this could trigger off my colitis again and then I would need emergency surgery) but having my colon, bowel, rectum, bladder and prostate removing in a long, planned operation and then having plastic surgery (2 long strips of muscle cut from inside of my inner thighs and fed inside to form a frame to support the remaining structures) to reconstruct me. I would have 2 stoma bags (wee & poo) for the rest of my life but will be cancer and colitis free!!!!!!

I was told that I would have many months of recovery and rehabilitation, new diet, toilet routines and strengthening my legs so to be able to walk again (because of the leg muscle surgery and the fact I would be on bed for some time leading to some muscle wastage)

So, on 15th July 2021, I had my surgery.

12 hours and 5 surgeons later!

I was in Intensive Care for about 2 days then moved to a specialist ward.
Thus began my month long stay in hospital.

Was a bit of a struggle to begin with. On strong pain relief, morphine and an epidural (initially). Frequent stoma nurse visits to change my bags and examine the contents and to make sure things were starting to work down there. Physios started to help me to walk again as my legs were really weak and I was really shaky on my feet! Eating and drinking was interesting. Mushy foods, water, salt. Different types of food to be taken at different stages of the healing process.

Thankfully, my bestie, Chris, (who at the time, lived a few doors down from me) acted as my PA. He relayed my recovery updates to friends (Cathy my dearest workmate for work and Chris, himself for all my other friends)

Work was great popping to see me on the ward for occasional visits, as were my other besties, David, Shane & Stewart, so as not to overwhelm me.

Wasn't too great for a few days in late week 2. Throwing up constantly. So I was on a saline and glucose drip and drinking loads of water.

My weight fell off. I was 16.5 stone when I went in and when I got home I was 11 stone 13 (over 4 stone lighter)

As week 3 progressed, I was off all pain relief and starting to eat light soft foods and starting to feel more "Me" again.

Week 4, I was twitching to get home as I was walking better (with a stick) and managed the stairs. The stoma nurses were also confident that I could change my ileostomy and urostomy bags unassisted.

So, on the 17th August, I was discharged and came home.

3. Recovery & the makings of my new gay life

So that was the start to a new way of life.... It took a few weeks to get my confidence and strength back to walk down my stairs out of my flat and walk around but I managed it, fairly quickly.

My closest friends and a couple of workmates were a godsend, all the way through my journey back to health, getting my shopping, doing my laundry and taking me places in the car.

I have found, since my speedy recovery and rehabilitation, an inner strength and positive attitude which has led to a complete re-evaluation of my life and priorities This I use so I can help others that may need support, and/or struggling, especially with cancer. It is also why I started my Facebook group "**Gay Men with Stomas**" in January 2022. [\(2\) Gay Men with Stomas | Facebook](#)

I have chatted, and met, some amazing people (some have now become good friends) who have, or have had cancer, which has led to having to have stomas.

I have changed my TV viewing habits completely and don't watch negative or depressing programmes (that includes the news) and watch a lot less of it.

My Zoom chats with gay groups around the country and USA/Canada continued. Friendships expanded dramatically and this was the start of my "soon to become" fabulous gay new life!!!!

This virtual socialising became the real thing (initially locally) and within weeks of my homecoming, I was strong and confident enough to travel further afield and actually meeting people whom I have chatted to, online, for a long time.

I am enjoying life more and doing things "now" and not procrastinating about things.

However, the only downside to my surgery, was the subject of my "**downstairs area**".

Since my surgery removed a lot of structures, including, the bladder and prostate, (and a lot of nerves cut), I cannot get erections. This was a possibility as the nerves grew back, but, unfortunately, they did not. I have had to learn (and have done so) how to explore other means of pleasure and as a gay man who is a "top", this is incredibly important.

4. 2022-Present - My New Life

Life, in general has been good for me as I have embraced life and enjoy as much of it as I can.

Since my recovery, my gay social life has exploded and have made some amazing friends from all over the country and world. I have attended many Pride marches across the country, become a member of many groups and a popular and well-loved, respected and an inspiration to many people.

Unfortunately I had some devastating news, on 17th May 2025, my younger brother, Jeremy, passed away, as I was still struggling with a major chest infection which wiped me out.

All recovered now from my chest infection and the funeral has now been (2nd July) - Still doesn't seem real.

The Service was a celebration but tinged with the overwhelming sadness that Jeremy is no longer with us.

But, on the flipside, reconnecting with Jeremy's partner, Jane and their son (my nephew) Fenn, has been a joy. Especially now getting to know, and hopefully supporting Fenn (as an Uncle), after many years apart.

Recently I appeared in the South West Cancer charity (FORCE) magazine, highlighting my story. [Force-Matters-2025.pdf](#) (see Page 7)

Currently, I am trying to get creative ideas for an exhibition/platform, in London, to relate my cancer story and how it affected me as a gay man. Mine, along with 9 other people from the LGBTQIA+ community, will display our unique stories, in whatever format, in October, then will be put into an archive, for posterity.

I am also about to be in talks with one of my friends, in Bristol, to have a radio interview to explain all this, on ShoutOut Radio.

All exciting and positive stuff.

Onwards and upwards!!!

LIFE REASSESSMENT

MY BESTIES

NEW PRIORITIES

LIFE EXPLODING

SUPPORTING OTHERS

CANCER



CANCER



OLD LIFE IMPLODING

COLITIS



MUM'S HEALTH DECLINE & PASSING



COVID & LOCKDOWN



LONG RELATIONSHIP ENDING



RESTRAINED

LIFE ON HOLD

UNFULFILLED

NOT MY TRUE GAY SELF





NEW FRIENDS

MY LIGHT / AURA

LIFE BLOSSOMED

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THE FLIRT



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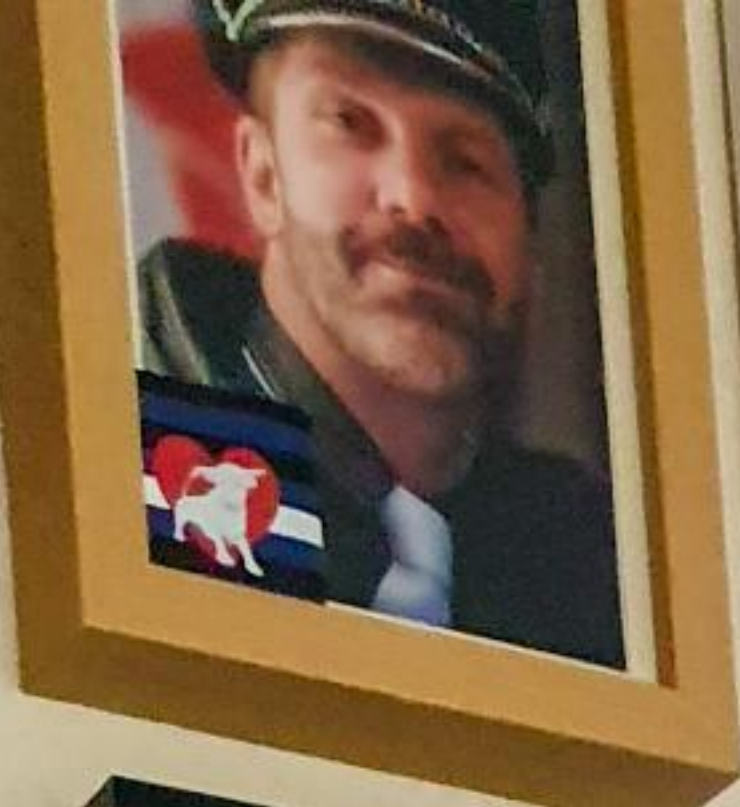
LIFE BLOSSOMED



POSITIVITY



THE FLIR



MY LIGHT / AURA

NEW FRIENDS



LIFE BLOSSOMED



I INSPIRE OTHERS



POSITIVITY



REDUCED STRESS



TRAVEL



NEW PRIORITIES



ES

EXETER PRIDE
11th May 2024



NEW LIFE EXPLODING





LIFE REASSESSMENT

MY BEST

SUPPORTING OTHERS



Paul Izzard
Hi to all my friends and family
Thank you for all your support



NEW PRIORITIES



COLITIS