



Jacquie's Story

JACQUIE ROEDER, LAURA'S MUM

THIS CHARITY WAS SET UP AS A TRIBUTE TO LAURA, WHOSE BRIGHT AND BUBBLY, OUTGOING NATURE NEVER STOPPED SHINING, EVEN THROUGHOUT HER TERRIBLE ILLNESS AND WHOSE COURAGE AND DIGNITY, FOR ONE SO YOUNG, WERE ASTOUNDING.

"I believe that life is tough enough, in various ways, during our teenage years, without throwing cancer into the equation"

In the hope of ultimately protecting other young people and their families from the tragedy and trauma that we had known, I decided, the day Laura died to pick up the fight where she left off, hoping to raise approx. £10,000 a year to fund research, specifically into cancer in teenagers and young adults. The trust, however, passed its first £1,000,000 mark in little over 10 years!

Laura was greatly loved by both family and friends and at an age where she was on the verge of that inviting 'adult' life that the young so look forward to. In March 1995, aged almost 16, she became very ill and was admitted to Huddersfield Royal Infirmary, where an exploratory operation resulted in the removal of her left ovary. Even knowing then that she may have cancer, she was full of cheerful determination and optimism. The biopsy showed a malignant tumour, an 'immature teratoma', usually found in girls under the age of nineteen and in only about one in a million. She was referred to St. James's University Hospital, Leeds where the prognosis was that a 12-week regime of chemotherapy would, hopefully, bring a return to good health.

Half way through her treatment, however, after further examination of the removed tissue, it was discovered that Laura had not one, but FOUR kinds of cancer, three of them very aggressive. She had become one of only dozens of such cases ever reported in the whole world. There was no body of knowledge as to effective treatment and no odds could be given because of a lack of statistics. The prognosis now became much bleaker but as a CT scan showed some improvement, Laura's consultants decided to extend the same treatment regime. She had spent her 16th birthday in St James's and now a family holiday in Spain was to be cancelled. Laura had to get used to disappointment.

After four months of treatment, scans were still showing some improvement. After a short summer holiday on the Isle of Wight, Laura fulfilled her ambition to start at Greenhead Sixth Form College in Huddersfield on the first day of term along with all the other new students. Her first English assignment, 'Coping with Cancer' was an inspiration to all.

Laura refused to let her illness dictate to her and lived life to the full as much as possible. During the next 10 weeks, whilst studying hard at college, she helped as a volunteer at Kirkwood Hospice 'to give something back' in return for the aromatherapy treatment she had enjoyed at home through its Family Support Unit. For her Thursday afternoon college 'activity', Laura chose to help disabled children learn to swim.

Sadly, our story did not have a happy ending. After only 10 weeks respite, Laura had to undergo further surgery, during which her other ovary, her womb and part of her bowel were removed. Just 13 days later a group of us attended a New Year's Eve dinner together, where Laura danced the night away with her brothers, who only managed to persuade her home at 3.00am. She endured more, savage chemotherapy, losing her hair again, but never her sense of fun or her fighting spirit.

There was always something special planned for Laura to look forward to and a ball at Alexander Palace that she was to attend with her eldest brother Patrick, was a real highlight. Despite a week of complications she was there on a Friday night in April, wearing a beautiful evening gown and, for the one and only time, her long dark brown wig. (She had mostly worn a small black skull-cap or nothing at all.)

One of the happiest days of her life was her 17th birthday. So many events or treats had had to be cancelled when complications arose, but this was one which survived. After a weekend barbecue party at home, her actual birthday began with her first ever driving lesson with her brother Dan. The rest of her day was spent in going out to lunch with her boyfriend and out to dinner in the evening. Just two weeks later, on 28th May 1996, Laura died in Kirkwood Hospice, Huddersfield. The disease had finally taken her body, but never her spirit, which lives on to this day through her charity and the work it supports to benefit other young cancer patients and their families.

As I am re-writing these words in June 2009, now 13 years since Laura's death, our sense of loss is still indescribable. Many of Laura's friends went on to university and now have careers. Some are happily married and some have children. Laura's brothers have both become fathers and couldn't share their happiness with their sister - and their little ones will never know Auntie Laura, who would have doted on them. Laura was robbed of so many personal opportunities and I lost my teenage daughter and my best friend, my grown-up daughter and everything else she would have become.

Laura endured aggressive treatment and pain and indignity with such courage and she won the hearts of a great many people. She never bemoaned her fate, always caring more for those around her and sad about the pain they were feeling for her. One of Laura's consultants, wrote to me, saying, " Laura was a courageous and spirited girl who bore her terrible illness very bravely – a real example to all of us and one who will not be forgotten."

To brighten up their days and to help motivate these young people when they are feeling low, the charity also offers funding to UK hospitals admitting cancer patients of this age group, to provide age-appropriate recreational equipment and/or support staff who will be their activities coordinator, friend and confidante.

All of our work, both for research and in support of teenagers and young adults with cancer requires your generous and ongoing support. To keep abreast of our development and to read about many of our supporters, please request our free, 4-monthly newsletter, 'Momentum'.

