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“There were so many drugs to take they hardly fit in a cupboard,” she said.

Despite feeling overwhelmed and devastated by Cheryl’s condition, the frequent 6 a.m. drives to the hospital for her treatment have never been dull and unpleasant for Phillip.

The intense treatment which lasted for nearly five months left her haggard, lack of appetite, and unable to control her bowels. But the expected hair loss did not bother her. Cheryl laughed her bald head off, telling herself that it was okay to smile or crack a joke.

What had been worse was she did not have the strength to lift a cup of tea or use the loo.

“I was a mess, and there was stuff coming out both ends. It was critical but I’m here to tell the tale,” Cheryl recollected the time with a sense of achievement and a beaming smile on her face.

Three days after the transplant was put back in her body, an unexpected tightness spread over her chest. Her stomach churned and she wanted to rip off her top. From there all hell broke loose. Cheryl ended up with heart failure and was transferred by blue light to another Hospital for better monitoring.

“I remember going into this room that was like a goldfish bowl. For two days and two nights, Phillip sat by my side and held my hands.”

To protect Cheryl’s body from falling ill, she was monitored separately in a glass ward as Chemotherapy stripped her body

of immunity to diseases and bacteria.

Strict quarantine rules at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic meant she wasn’t allowed to leave the ward until the five-week recovery phase came to an end.

“I felt like a prisoner to be in this one room where the only person I see is my husband. When the doctors told me I could go home, it was Euphoria,”

“There’s a place you can vent, ask questions, and develop friendships,” said Jill Campbell Connolly, who’s been fighting Systemic Scleroderma for ten years.

She helps run a support group for patients and caregivers struggling with Scleroderma on Facebook.

“Having a strong support network is vital. We have support groups based across the UK where people can come together to meet others affected by scleroderma and share their experiences,” said Laura Gibson, spokesperson for SRUK.

The matter-of-fact delivery of Cheryl’s diagnosis in 2021 still haunted Phillip to this day and left him struck by the acute unfairness of the world. He had lost his previous partner to the battle of fighting breast cancer.

“I try to keep strong for her because it’s not helpful for me to be in bits,” said Phillip.

While juggling work for the prison service and performing singing over the weekend, as a carer for Cheryl, It’s Phillip’s daily routine to get her dressed, apply

moisturiser on her body, and cut up vegetables for her to cook.

“Cheryl hid her vulnerability,” sighed Phillip.

When he got home at night, she was still on her feet, seemingly forgetting about the debilitating illness that’s taken away her freedom to exercise again.

The mobility restriction in her arms and eight of her fingers didn’t dishearten her determination to put food on the table.

When her condition triggered a mental breakdown, she didn’t talk about it. If the indignities of the condition dampened her spirit, she rarely showed it.

Wherever they visited, he observed the risks and paid attention to the little efficiencies she could lean upon, where a tired body could sit down and catch her breath.

He sized up distances and scenarios consciously; the elevation of the toilet seat, the location of a drawer, and the boxes on top of a shelf...making sure Cheryl could get on with her mobility as best as she could.

The unconditional love and care from Cheryl’s husband, hypnotherapy and the support

from Facebook communities had all given her the strength to cope with Scleroderma as if she’s been given a suit of armour to wear.

If the disease threw any arrows aiming to demoralise her, she accepted the challenges and turned the negativity into power. Through blogging every step of her recovery on Facebook, she hopes to bring some comfort and inspire anyone who’s in a battle against Scleroderma.

She planned to travel around Europe with her youngest son and Phillip, and live her life to the fullest, despite the uncertainty and hard times ahead.

“It’s all been debilitating but if I can, I’d love to be the bubbliest of lemonades.”

Do you struggle with



Scleroderma? Visit the website SRUK – Scleroderma & Raynaud’s UK | SRUK or call the helpline: 0800 311 2756* to get more support.

