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"Yes! I've won my fight with the Big C.. they cut it out and I'm free of it"



Survivor... jubilant Bernie's in the clear

Brave Bernie Nolan talks exclusively about her inspirational cancer battle

EXCLUSIVE by Douglas Wight
October 24, 2010

BEAMING Bernie Nolan punches the air as she reveals she's won her battle with breast cancer and declares: "I'm so glad they've cut the bastard out of me!"

The feisty Nolans star has been given the all-clear following gruelling chemotherapy and a mastectomy.

Surgeons reconstructed her left boob and she is so delighted with it she's planning a spectacular return to showbiz - by STRIPPING OFF on stage in Calendar Girls - the play she was forced to pull out of when she was diagnosed.

Brave Bernie, 50, said: "It feels like cancer has been an interruption in my life. Now it's gone, I'm back. And I'm just so happy I've beaten it."

The singer's fight with the Big C has been exclusively told in the News of the World since she found she had an aggressive form of the disease in April.

The former Bill star was the THIRD Nolan sister to get breast cancer. And now - thanks to a pioneering op earlier this month - she is the third sister to have survived it.

Before and after surgery Bernie, who lost her hair due to chemo, filmed a series of candid video diaries from her hospital bed, which you can see here.

[Bernie's video diary](#)

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But her life-saving op on October 8 almost didn't go ahead when she caught a heavy cold four days before.

She said: "I didn't want it to be cancelled. I wanted to get it done and dusted.

"Thankfully my surgeon said: 'The show must go on.' They're all trying to be showbiz now!"

"Beforehand I was very apprehensive. I had a meeting with the surgeons and they went into so much detail to prepare me that I thought, 'Argh, too much information... just wake me up when it's over.'

"Knowing exactly what was going to happen upset me a little. It was a scary thing."

On the day of the op Bernie only had time for a quick farewell to her beloved husband Steve Doneathy, 49, who's been her rock throughout her ordeal.

Mum-of-one Bernie recalled: "He went pale. I remember staring back at him looking really worried as they wheeled me away."



The night before... 'I was scared of being cut open'

"Right before the surgery, I was lying in bed, looking out of the window, and I saw a great picture of a sunflower and it made me feel really lovely.

"I thought how nice it would be if everything was all right - that I'd be able to enjoy sights like these.

"The next thing I knew I was getting ready for the operation then I woke up five hours later and it was all done.

"I thought, 'They've cut the bastard out. It's gone.'"

During the op, Bernie's left breast was removed and reconstructed at the same time.

Brand-new techniques meant her own nipple was used for her new boob, along with an implant and as much of her own tissue and skin as possible.



Two days after the op... "How would my new breast look?"

And muscle from her back was brought round to her front to complete the procedure. Two cancerous lymph nodes were also removed but medical advances meant the remaining healthy 11 didn't have to go too.

None of these techniques were available for her sister Linda when she had her mastectomy four years ago.

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Bernie explained: "I'm very lucky. My surgeon - Mark Kissin at the Royal Surrey Hospital in Guildford - invented the lymph node scan to discover which need to be taken out. Lymph nodes help you fight infections so it's good to keep them.

"And it was he who recommended I had the chemo before the operation. I'm glad he did because by the time they operated, the cancer in the left breast was 'miniscule', and the right was completely clear.

"His name's Mr Kissin, and after the surgery I wanted to kiss 'im - a lot!"

Bernie was brought around in the recovery room before being wheeled back to her ward.

She recalled: "Coming round the corner I saw the only person next to my bed - Steve. The look on his face lit up the whole corridor. He was so pleased to see me. I said, 'All right, mate?!'"

Bernie's next big hurdle was looking at her new body.

She said: "When I woke up, one of the first things I thought was, 'What if it looks terrible?"

"When I first looked down I was absolutely gobsmacked. It looked completely like it did before the operation.



Six days after op... "Now I plan to strip on stage"

"I thought, 'I'm still me. I am still me. Nothing is different.' Emotionally it was a very strong feeling.

"The fact that you can keep your nipple, psychologically, is a massive thing. Mentally - and for my self-esteem - it's unbelievable."

Immediately after the op, Bernie was in a lot of pain. But, with her trademark humour, she says it wasn't so bad thanks to her morphine drip. "I kept pressing, even when I wasn't in pain! I loved it so much." For the first 48 hours Bernie had to lie flat in a "bear hug" blanket that was pumped with hot air to aid recovery.

"That part was unbearable and I couldn't sleep a wink because I was so hot," she said.

Another unpleasant aspect was not being able to go to the loo. She recalled: "I was using a bed pan but that was hell!"

"I was trying to shout for the nurse because I was having an overflow situation but they came too late. They had to change the sheets, the whole bed. In hospital your dignity goes out the window but I had a great laugh with the nurses, who were amazing.

I was using a bed pan but that was hell

"The time I was able to walk to the toilet felt like one of the best days of my life!"

While she was in hospital her sisters Linda and Maureen stayed at her house to help out and care for her daughter Erin, 11.

After six days, Bernie was discharged, which meant she could celebrate her 50th birthday last Sunday at home with her family.

Bernie said: "I was really tired when I got home - more tired than I've ever been.

"But my brother Brian and his wife Annie came then my sister Coleen (from ITV's Loose Women) came on Sunday, so Steve cooked dinner for 10 of us. It was really nice." Sisters Linda, 51, and Anne, 59, have also had breast cancer. Coleen, 45, Maureen, 55, and Denise, 58, have so far been clear.



Diagnosis... Bernie back in April

The close family are over the moon to have Bernie back home, and Steve and Erin have told her that they love her new figure."

Bernie said: "Erin has been amazing. She'd have been shocked if she'd seen me in hospital for the first couple of days but Linda took her into London for the weekend and they had a ball.

"I asked Erin if she wanted to see the results and she said I looked amazing."

For the next six months Bernie must take the breast-cancer drug Herceptin. But she says: "I'm so lucky to have it. Many women didn't have that choice."

Now she is planning for the future, including her next job - appearing in Calendar Girls from January. She said: "You couldn't make it up that this would be my first role.

"I was due to appear in it before I was diagnosed so I'm delighted they still want me.

"I will be on stage naked, but from the back, so people will see my scar. I don't mind though. I'm really proud."

As she looks to the future, Bernie says one of the main things that kept her going over the last

traumatic months was the amazing support she's had from News of the World readers.

And she said to them all: "I have been so touched by the letters and emails and messages you've sent me.

"I've been called an inspiration but it is you guys who have been truly inspiring. Thank you."

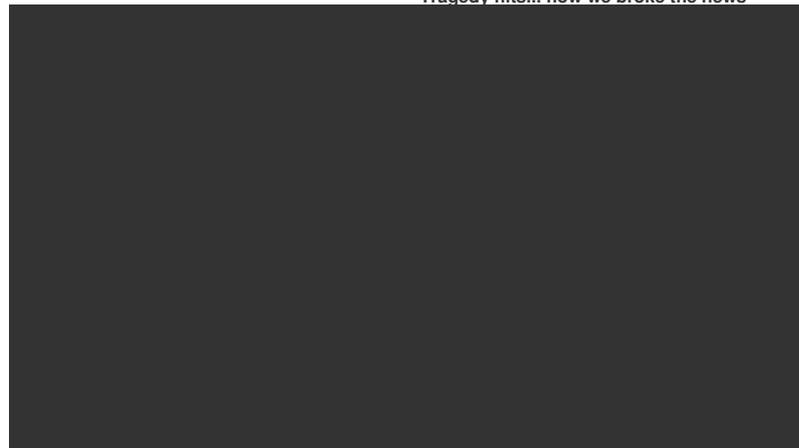
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you are brilliant bernie,looking forward to seeing you back on stage and hopefully on television love margaret xx

By margaret mcLoughlin Posted October 27 2010 at 7:27 PM

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By wendy haywood Posted October 24 2010 at 3:28 PM

Very pleased that you, and everyone else who is ill with any condition, are feeling better. As a cancer patient myself, cancer is only one of many, many very serious illnesses. But for some unknown reason the other illnesses do not have the same publicity and don't make the headlines.
- 2 0

By Catrin Rowlands Posted October 24 2010 at 2:37 PM

HUGE congrats Bernie!!!
- 2 0

By Katy Pearson Posted October 24 2010 at 2:23 PM

Congratulations Bernie that is such great news. and it won't be long before you've got more hair than steve!!!
- 4 0

By justin tailor Posted October 24 2010 at 1:36 PM

Go Bernie. You are truly an inspiration. I was moved to tears by your video diary. You are so brave
- 3 0

By Sarah Smith Posted October 24 2010 at 12:43 PM

I've grown up with Bernie Nolan I loved The Nolans!! I wish her well good on yer girl!!!!
- 4 0

By Lindsey Holmes Posted October 24 2010 at 9:43 AM

i have always liked bernie colan-well done!
- 4 0

By maxine douglas Posted October 24 2010 at 3:26 AM

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