

NEWS OF THE WORLD



Bernie Nolan: 'Take one breast, take them both, I don't care, I'm fighting this'

Tragedy hits Nolans again as third sister battles disease

EXCLUSIVE by Douglas Wight
April 25, 2010

Defiant Bernie Nolan last night spoke of her brave fight against breast cancer.

The lead singer of The Nolans is the THIRD sister to be diagnosed with the disease.

But courageous mum-of-one Bernie vowed to beat it.

"Cancer's a scary word but it can b****r off," she exclusively told the News of the World. "I don't care - just get this s**** out of me."

"I'm going to see my daughter grow up and I'll fight it with everything I have."

The cancer has already spread to her lymph nodes and the former Bill actress, 49, faces a gruelling course of treatment - including chemotherapy and a mastectomy to remove her left breast.

Sisters Linda, 51, and Anne, 59, have both successfully battled the killer disease within the past ten years.

So far Loose Women star Coleen, 45, Maureen, 55, and Denise, 58, are clear of it.

As a result, Bernie will now have genetic tests to see if they and her ten-year-old daughter Erin are at risk of developing breast cancer.

It is the most common cancer in the UK, claiming the lives of around 12,000 women every year with 125 new cases diagnosed every day.

Bernie, who was runner-up in the ITV1 singing contest Popstar to Operastar, was diagnosed this week and told the cancer is already in her lymph nodes. She has been forced to pull out of a sixth-month tour of the comedy play Mum's The Word and prepare for treatment.



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Experts will tell her on Wednesday whether they plan to perform an immediate mastectomy, or give her a course of chemotherapy first to contain the cancer cells before removing her breast.

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Either way, Bernie insisted: "I'm fighting this. I'm going to kick its ass. Take one breast, take them both, I don't care. I'm strong and I'm not going to let this defeat me. I'm not going to sit back and let that happen."

And as she faces the prospect of chemotherapy, Bernie added: "I'm going to lose my hair - they've told me that because they know the strength of chemo they have to give me.

"I'll look a b****r with no hair, but I don't care. I'll wear a wig."

She went on: "It's about seeing my child grow up and having more fun with my sisters and life with my husband."

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Bernie hasn't had a chance to reveal her cancer ordeal to the cast of her play Mum's The Word - including former Corrie star Tracy Shaw - since being diagnosed on Monday.

She sighed: "This will all come as a big shock to them. I'm sorry girls but I haven't even been able to get my head round telling anyone."

The actress, who previously starred in The Bill and Brookside, had just started the national theatre tour when she decided to get a lump on her breast checked out.

She first discovered something was wrong at Christmas but dismissed it as a harmless cyst, which she had previously suffered in 2006.

Bernie - famous for The Nolans' biggest hit I'm In The Mood For Dancing - had just completed a sell-out tour with the 80s sisters' band and went on to star in ITV1 contest Popstar to Operastar earlier this year, narrowly losing out to Darius Campbell in the final.

All the while she had breast cancer but Bernie admitted: "I had no idea. I was so involved in the TV show and loved every minute of it that perhaps I put it out of my mind. You don't think it will ever happen to you." But after the series finished, Bernie made an appointment to see her GP and she was quickly referred to a breast screening clinic on April 12.

She recalled: "They did a mammogram, an ultrasound and took biopsies. Suddenly I thought, 'This is quite serious'.

"They said to me that I should come back to the clinic for the results as opposed to having them over the phone and I immediately thought, 'It's not good then'."

A week later doctors gave her the devastating news that she and husband Steve Doneathy, 49, were dreading - that she had breast cancer and, worse, it was already in her lymph nodes.

Reeling, Bernie said: "I was so shocked. I thought I was invincible. I went to the car with my husband and I completely lost it."

A few days later, on Thursday, she met a surgeon at the Royal Surrey Hospital in Guildford, who confirmed the cancer was progressive, meaning it is spreading.

Bernie shuddered: "That was scary. I have a node cancer, not a hormone cancer. This affects 15 per cent of women and is harder to treat. It's in the lymph node so it's already on the outside of the breast and could spread."

Bernie will also find out on Wednesday if her cancer is HER2 positive or negative - which means whether it will respond to Herceptin medication and could be treated with hormone blockers.

But she already knows she will face surgery and chemotherapy.

Bernie and drummer hubby Steve had to face the emotional task of breaking the news to their daughter Erin. They wanted to wait until after her 11th birthday tomorrow, but the youngster guessed something was wrong.

Bernie explained: "Her first question was, 'Are you going to die?' I said, 'No', but she's scared and it's awful.

"The best thing about having a child is I have the extra strength because I want to see her grow up and I have to be strong for her." But despite Bernie's courage and determination, she revealed the cruel reality of the situation dawns on her as soon as she wakes up every day.






"Mornings are the worst," she said. "I always wake up thinking, 'This isn't happening. But then I think, 'Oh, I've got breast cancer.' There's a cloud over all our lives now.

"But I'm really strong. I haven't cried on my own yet." The support of her five sisters is helping her. She instinctively turned to big sister Maureen who broke down after already helping Anne and Linda battle their conditions.

Bernie said: "She lost it. She was devastated but my sisters have all been so supportive even though they're climbing the walls with worry. I can't believe I'm putting them through this again."

The devastating news is just one in a series of tragedies to hit the Nolans in recent years.

Anne was diagnosed with cancer in 2000 and had a lump removed. Six years later Linda, 51, had a mastectomy and in 2007 - while she was being treated - her husband Brian Hudson died. The same year the sisters' mum Maureen died from Alzheimer's - ten years after they lost their father Tommy to liver cancer.

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That same year, 1997, Bernie's daughter Kate was stillborn and she later also suffered a miscarriage. But stoically, she added: "We've been through a lot but many people go through these things."

Ironically, Bernie revealed recently that she'd nagged husband Steve to go to the doctor after he complained of an unusual ache in his groin - but little did she know she was the one who had cancer.

She said: "All the time I was worrying about him and it was me."

Brave Bernie chose to speak out in the News of the World in the hope other women take action if they discover lumps in their breasts.

She said: "Hopefully I might be helping someone. People need to go for mammograms. If they catch it early enough something can be done."

"I just hope my situation helps someone else or convinces one person to get themselves checked out."

"For me it's all about life and seeing my child grow up. I am going to kick this into touch as soon as possible and get on with my life. It makes you realise what's important in life. I am going to be 50 later this year and I am still going to have that party. I don't care what I look like."

"And I'm sure we'll do another Nolans tour next year. We might even call it the Survivors tour and try and give other survivors something to take their mind off their own situations."

For now though Bernie has been told to take it easy.

She said: "I should be in Rhyl in North Wales now on the Mum's The Word tour."

"They think I've got a bug and an understudy is filling in for me."

"But now I have been advised not to tour. I need my energy for the battle ahead."

And as Bernie prepares herself for the biggest fight of her life, she explained that she's having all her treatment on the NHS.

She said: "They have been wonderful. We've been fast-tracked, but it happens to everyone in this situation. We criticise the health system a lot but when you really need it, the NHS is fantastic."

"I'm not going to die. I'm going to battle with everything I've got."

Dr Hilary Jones

Bernie appears to have a form of breast cancer that isn't responsive to oestrogen blockers like Tamoxifen.

Surgery will remove the cancer and lymph nodes in the affected area.

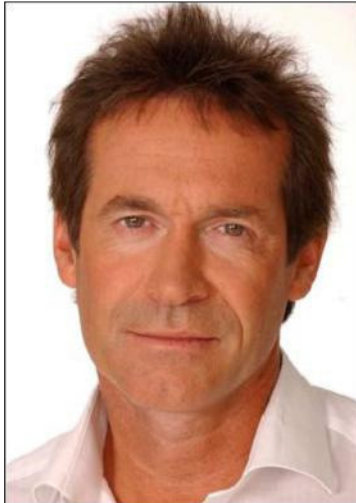
If the cancer has spread just to the nodes in her armpit then the outlook for Bernie is quite good.

But if there are secondary deposits in the liver the prognosis could be quite poor.

Bernie will inevitably have radiotherapy and chemotherapy as an insurance policy to mop up any other cancer cells in the body outside the reach of the surgeon's knife.

On the face of it, it's a very daunting prospect but Bernie has no option but to take it. Although we are seeing more breast cancer generally, better screening, earlier diagnosis and better treatment means survival rates are also on the increase.

In Bernie's case, now that three sisters have been affected by breast cancer the others would be well advised to get a genetic test to see if they have the gene that makes them more vulnerable to the disease.



Dr Hilary Jones

If more than two first generation relatives are affected it is significant and means there may well be a genetic predisposition.

The girls now



BERNIE is the third Nolan sister to get breast cancer. **ANNE** and **LINDA** were also struck down but beat it. Anne, who left the group in 1980, was diagnosed in 2000 and Linda had a mastectomy in 2006.

COLEEN is a Loose Women panellist and on Dancing on Ice last year. She split from ex-EastEnder Shane Richie in 1997 and is now married to musician Ray Fensome. **MAUREEN** has performed in Blood Brothers, Stardust and pantos. **DENISE** was first to go solo in 1976. Coleen took her place.

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i am so proud of you , the way you are coping with all this i did go to school with you a long time ago but you will not know me but i was in mrs taylors class and do you remember mr harvey the drama teacher . Mrs Cockeran is a volanter at the vic she looks just the same . Well take care you will come through this god bless ,

By barbara neath Posted September 18 2010 at 8:18 PM

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Ever since i was little i looked up to you. I used to LOVE watcing you in the Bill and your great story lines. I also LOVE your music and think your an amazing person. Thankyou for keeping my Wednesday and Thursday nights entertained when i was younger lool, and im sure you will be doin alot more for many many years to come :) ♥ ;xxxx

By Alice Posted September 7 2010 at 12:45 PM

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been a big fan of your,s for years.Loved your show in Cardiff.THUGHT YOUR INTERVIEW ON gmtv was very movin and brave.Very best wishes for a speedy recovery.

By graham foster Posted August 20 2010 at 6:02 PM

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i am n your side where cancer is concerned i fought it a few years back i am only 18 i had it when i was 15 so i am hoping you kick its ass i did and i feel better now than i did then good luck bernie hope you are well soon

By natasha whalley Posted June 13 2010 at 12:39 AM

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hi bernie just to let let you know i am going through the same as you having chemo for breast cancer .know how you are feeling .keep your chin up .xxxxxxx

By sally killick Posted May 27 2010 at 2:34 PM

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Bernie, so sorry that you have breast cancer but I'm sure with your attitude you will soon be back to a clear bill of health. I am at the moment half way through my chemotherapy after been diagnosed with breast cancer. I found the worst part is nausea,heartburn in the 1st week, and my hair. I've used the coolcap and my hair is very thin but still hanging in there. My treatment with the NHS has been brilliant and I couldn't get better treatment if I'd gone Private. Good luck Bernie.

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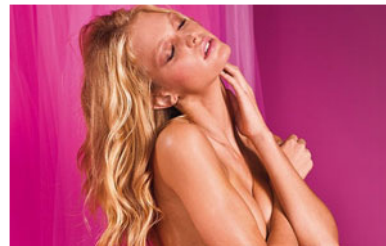


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