



ILLUSTRATION BY ANNE MORTIMER

## THE WEE BEASTIE

Juggling family, cancer and a puppy

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My tumour markers are almost back to normal. "It is remarkable," says Katerina, the Prof's right-hand doctor, who is standing in for him while he is on holiday. "Whatever it is you're doing keep on doing it." I'm interested by her response because any other doctor would think it was solely the drugs that were having an effect.

The word "patient" is misleading. It is the one thing you can't afford to be in a situation like this. I like to think of us as being part of a team. The doctors are the experts working on the body but as we're all individuals it's up to me to sort out my mental approach.

A mother from my youngest daughter's school e-mailed me to say that I had to see Trevor, a cognitive hypnotherapist. "He will change your life." She's a sensible woman, not prone

to exaggeration, but I wasn't sure that I would follow her suggestion. However, before we got the puppy everyone said, "it will change your life" and they were right — and only for the better. So in that spirit, and because he approached me, offering to come and see me for free — "I never charge cancer patients" — I thought I would be open-minded.

One idea behind hypnotherapy is that it relaxes the body at a very deep level to let the drugs do their job properly. Now this could be a load of old nonsense and all in the mind but all I can say is that since I've been seeing him my tumour markers have continued to plummet and my attitude has changed. Before, I was determined to be realistic about my condition, to accept what was happening. Even now I know that just because the markers are dropping it

doesn't mean the cancer isn't there — it's just not growing and hopefully could be shrinking. We've still got a long way to go. But "BT" (before Trevor), acceptance was about acquiescence — giving in almost. Now it's about making the most, squeezing every minute out of life however long that may be.

Cancer is a very complex disease with many roots but there is a school of thinking that if the brain sends messages to make the cancer grow then why can't the brain stop it? So together Trevor and I have explored the possible emotional roots of why I might keep getting ill, why the cancer may have come back, and why is it predominantly on my left side — all those questions the Prof doesn't have the time or inclination to deal with, but the answers could help to make me better. I now think of the

chemotherapy not as converted mustard gas (which it is) poisoning me, but as a positive source of energy making me feel better. I've read of a phrase coined in America (where else), "Exceptional cancer patients", who at best are cured and at worst outlive their prognosis, if only for a few months, living full lives. I'd like to be exceptional.

So much of life is about approach. I can even see it when watching the puppy. A few weeks ago there were fireworks to mark the end of a series of outdoor concerts nearby. Initially the sound terrified Dizzy, but once I'd reassured her she sat at the open back door, head to one side and watched the bright colours explode in the sky, ignoring the booms and crackles. Call me a proud dog owner but that's what I call remarkable.

**Katie Pearson**

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