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The
New
Normal
Sally White on
living with
a brain tumour

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THE NEW NORMAL

Wife and mother Sally White, 41, was suddenly diagnosed with a brain tumour and given a few years to live. Prue DeAraugo shared some precious moments with this truly inspirational woman...

What inspires you every day? What pushes you to achieve? What makes you jump out of bed in the morning? For Sally White it's life and everything in it. And I'm not just talking about merely surviving to idly observe the humdrum of daily life. This woman has chosen to actually live life to the fullest... relishing in choice and freedom, taking time to laugh and cry, embracing new experiences, facing fears, making an impression - and why? Because when you're faced with the reality that it all might be taken away... life itself is all that you want.

So who is Sally? She's a mum, wife, daughter, sister, friend and colleague. Like so many of us she blissfully travelled through each day, unburdened by anything other than what she may cook for dinner that night or when the phone bill was due. As it should be, she loved her husband, delighted in her two growing boys, spent time with family and friends and looked forward to her next summer holiday down the beach. That was of course until her world came to a crashing halt and nothing would ever be the quite same again.

Today, after a turn of incredible events and one inspirational book later, the woman at the centre of it all shares her journey of discovery, the staggering success of her book and what the future holds.

That book, *Three Quotes from a Plumber: How a second opinion changed the life of a woman with a brain tumour*, is an extraordinary account of Sally's life after being diagnosed with a brain tumour. Initially, a bud of an idea to share her experience stemmed from the collection of journals Sally diligently kept during and after her intensive treatments.

"I had been so busy bargaining for my life that I hadn't really stopped to ask if that was fine with everyone else"

She wrote about her feelings, and expressed thoughts that at the time she didn't possess the courage to say out loud. But it was when Sally decided to seek a second opinion and, in a miraculous twist of fate, ended up in the Sydney consulting rooms of the brilliant and revolutionary surgeon, Dr Charlie Teo, that her modest idea really became a story.

And what a story it is! Truly a page turner from the very moment I picked it up, this first-time author's ability to deliver such a stirring blend of raw and honest content will forever be etched in my memory. Cleverly conveying humour, albeit with the odd jaw-dropping tale, Sally's style of writing quickly captures you and her personable approach ensures the connection is not severed. Every challenge, triumph and defeat is felt, and emotions of joy and despair run high.

Not surprisingly, the feedback from other readers is similar, as Sally explains: "The response to the book has been encouraging, I really wanted to connect and share my story because I know so many others have been there."

However, it's not just people living with Cancer that are touched by this book. To me, that is the key to its inherent success. This is not a book about Cancer. This is a book about confronting things head on, changing the odds, finding happiness and improving life. There is inspiration revealed in every facet of Sally's soulful journey, which anyone could apply to their own situation or experiences.

"Life is just moments in time, the moment doesn't have to be your ongoing story"

So if Sally is the soul of this book, then the heart of it beats firmly with her family and friends. The way she delicately portrays how each of them deal with the actuality of her illness is captivating. Sally masterfully reveals how each person, in their own special way, helped shape her, comfort her, motivate her or just lovingly baked her lasagne!

But it was Sally's husband David and her boys Josh, 13 and Ben, 11 whomaintainedsuchastrengthandpresencethroughout the book. In David's case it was his zest, boundless energy and determination, especially evident when he founded Blackwood8, a charity committee dedicated to raising funds for Cancer research. And of course Josh and Ben, who were a constant source of unconditional love and support, often presented in the form of belly-aching hilarity or wise-beyond-their-years guidance.

I asked Sally how her loved ones reacted to her candid yet sincere depiction of them: "Before it went to the publisher's, I asked my family and friends to read the excerpts I had written about them. I knew I was coming from a good place, but I had to make sure they all were ok with it".

As we chat, I'm completely enlightened by the resilience emanating from this incredible woman. She is not just 'coping' with the cards she has been dealt. But rather every nuance of her being is about positive strength and steely determination. Sally reveals early on in her diagnosis, this didn't come naturally and, as she touched on in the book, she has had to 'train' herself. "The mind makes things out to be more serious than they really are, it's just a thought...", adding that "...all it takes is to be able to see one positive thing in your day and remember that".

I remain in awe, but with the understanding that such poignant wisdom is only afforded to someone who has worked hard for their happiness and wellbeing, not just with the medical profession but with the aid of complementary therapies such as kinesiology, naturopathy, meditation and nutrition. Sally has made these seemingly opposing forms of treatment succeed cohesively for her benefit, creating what she refers to as the 'new normal'

Reading about Sally's acceptance of the 'new normal' into her life was a particularly insightful section of the book. It resonated with me because I think at this point she unearthed a true message about balance in her and her family's life. As she describes in the book, "...the new normal was having an impact on us all. I had been so busy bargaining for my life that I hadn't really stopped to ask if that was fine with everyone else in my world". Sally's revelation started her on her way toward understanding and creating happiness and wellbeing - "this life was to be lived no matter how long it would be".

Only after reading the book and talking with Sally can I truly grasp the tools one must acquire to prevail in the face of adversity. All too often the media brandish words like inspirational, heroic or courageous but who are they really talking about? Is it the women and men pushing through the barriers of pain, exhaustion and disbelief to genuinely fight the biggest fight of all and do more than just survive? For they are the real inspirational - heroic and courageous. These are people who want to live!

Three Quotes from a Plumber

How a second opinion changed the life
of a woman with a brain tumour



Sally White

That is precisely what Sally wants us to realise about her journey; the life changing, earth shattering and immense event that it is, is the same event that many others encounter every day, be it directly, as a patient, or as a carer, family member or friend. I think Sally sums it up perfectly when she says, "Life is just moments in time, the moment doesn't have to be your ongoing story and it isn't the beginning or the end. It's just something you confront with hope".

And it is with hope that Sally continues with the next phase of her journey. At the time of our meeting, she was about to embark on further treatment, as a result of a recent MRI scan has shown growth in her tumour. In a true show of her conviction and strength, Sally was still determined to share her story: "I feel even more committed to the lessons of my experience and the book".

I thank you for that Sally. For writing your beautiful book. For the gift of your insight. For sharing your most truthful moments. And I thank you for choosing life. Good luck for the future.
THE END

To experience 'Three Quotes from a Plumber: How a second opinion changed the life of a woman with a brain tumour' for yourself, pick up a copy at any leading bookstore or visit the website

www.sallywhite.com.au