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Helen of Tobacco a Joan of Addiction

It's common for new ex-smokers to reflect upon how, when and why they became hooked. Eighty to ninety percent started as children or teens. It's also common for new quitters to encourage loved ones to quit. But few brave beyond family and friends. It's what makes the quests of smoking's Joan of Arc all the more remarkable. and all the more tragic.

Helen Bradford is a former 30-year New Zealand smoker who quit on December 10, 2007 at 9 p.m. Then 46, she smoked 15 cigarettes a day. Below is Helen's story. It's followed by a before and after chronology that allows a closer look at this endless giver, whose parting wish is make a difference in the life of a smoker while still time.



My Story

by [Helen Bradford](#) - September 9, 2011

On October 13, I will have been quit for four years. I'm not sure when I took that first puff, maybe around the age of thirteen or fourteen. I recall that my nearest sister and I used to share smokes sometimes. She never did get to quit smoking. She died suddenly after surviving a heart attack and beating breast cancer. I used to share smokes with friends too. Just puffs in the beginning. We almost never smoked a whole cigarette.

I had no idea when I took that first puff that I would end up [addicted](#) for thirty years. But the tobacco companies [knew the truth](#) about the addictiveness of smoked nicotine. They wanted to hook me and knew that if successful that it would probably shorten my life.

Slave to an addict's priorities, I dropped out of school as soon as I turned sixteen. It was then that buying my own packs just seemed like the natural thing to do.

Looking back, I didn't know anyone who smoked Benson and Hedges. I can only put my choosing that gold pack down to clever tobacco company advertising. Eventually rich colors and clever slogans wouldn't matter. Each time the price went up I switched to a cheaper brand, eventually switching to the cheapest of all, roll-your-own.

I managed to quit for six months when pregnant with my oldest son. But fifteen years later I couldn't even cut down for my second son.

I tried hypnosis once before they invented NRT but it only lasted until the next tough time when I decided to have just one. We all know how that one ends.

I used NRT twice, the first time was maybe about fifteen years ago. My friends and family were all on my case to quit. My mum had died from breast cancer. Although she never smoked, she had people smoking around her all her life.

I used the patches for the full three months. Then, when it was time to stop using the patches, I started smoking again.

The second time I used NRT was when my sister was diagnosed with breast cancer. She really got on my case. She was constantly reminding me, "Helen, smoking causes cancer!"

This time I wasn't able to stop smoking even while wearing the patch. Each week the quitting nurse I was working with would tell me to not smoke while wearing the patch but I just couldn't stop. In the end we just gave up with each other.

I really really wanted to quit so I started looking on the internet. I went to a New Zealand site and someone there was talking about [WhyQuit](#), so I went and had a look. I downloaded [Joel's book](#) but it was about a week before I started reading it. But once I got going there was no looking back.

It made me so happy to find out that I really could stop smoking and stay quit. NRT had nearly left me convinced that it was impossible to quit, that I was going to have to smoke for the rest of my life.

When the doctors, nurses and media kept telling me that the patch [doubles my chance](#) of quitting I believed them. These guys are the professionals so they must be right. I'm the dropout so it must be all my fault that I can't stop smoking. So instead of jumping up and down and complaining that their product is faulty, I went away resigned to having to smoke for the rest of my life.

And now nearly four years later I wish with all my heart that I had stayed quit that very first time when I was pregnant with my oldest son. If I had, I probably wouldn't be living through this hell right now.

I went to the doctor because I had swollen hands, feet, ankles and knees. She sent me for all

sorts of blood tests and x-rays. The last was a chest x-ray that showed a shadow on my left lung. The doctor suggested that, considering all my symptoms, it was probably lung cancer.

I couldn't believe this was happening to me. I was so frightened. I spent all night and all of the next day crying. It was so hard telling everyone. I didn't want to believe it myself but every time I said I have a shadow on my lung and it's probably lung cancer, it became more real and more frightening.

I had to wait ten days to get an appointment with the respiratory specialist so that he could refer me for a chest scan. Then I had to wait three and a half weeks for the chest scan. Then came a snow storm that snowed us in for two days, so that held things up a bit. It felt like a year, to think that cancer might be growing in my lung. I just wanted to know so that we could do something about it. And then I got my wish.

The scan suggested that cancer in my lung had spread to my bones. They found a large lump on one of my ribs in my back. They said I'd have to go back and have a needle biopsy in the lump to confirm that it was cancer. Then another snow storm shut the city down for three days. So I had to wait two and half weeks for biopsy. It confirmed that I have lung cancer and that it has spread to my bones. Now I was told that I have three lumps in my ribs and chest.

I had to wait another two weeks to meet the general oncologist - the cancer doctor - and find out what the treatment plan is going to be. It has been driving me crazy, all that waiting knowing that I have lung cancer and nobody seemed to be doing anything about it. I have the most terrible pain in my back and the best their pills can do is just take the edge off it.

Each pill I take creates side effect making something else worse. So now I'm taking pills for the side effects too. Between the cancer and all the pills I get so tired that I sleep all night and most of the day as well. I have gone from being on my feet all day as an active mother and teacher's aid, plus taking an hour walk each day, to being flat on my back with no energy to do anything.

Even sitting here at the computer typing these words exhausts me. I need to go and have a sleep to recover. I have gone from a healthy fifty-two kilos (115 pounds) to a frightening forty-five kilos (99 pounds). No matter how much I eat and sleep it doesn't seem to make any difference. It kind of makes those two kilos (4-5 pounds) that I made a big fuss about gaining when I quit smoking look pretty silly now.

But now I have been to the oncologist things are really starting to happen. I met with the radiation oncologist and had a bone scan. On Tuesday I see both oncologists and get measured up for radiation. Then on Thursday I start radiation which we are all hoping is going to stop this terrible pain in my back.

I blame the tobacco companies for all of this. Continued smoking was never my choice, it was [my addiction](#). I am hoping and praying that this isn't the end of my story.

Helen

Helen Bradford Before and After

June 12, 2009 - Thank you for starting WhyQuit and Freedom. I could not have quit without them and all of you wonderful people there. I know because I tried and failed lots of times. Thank you again. Regards. Helen

June 14, 2009 - Hi John. What you said about others reaching out to you or you might be dead got me thinking that I am lucky to be alive too, and not just because I smoked for 30 years. I am feeling like it is time to give something back. If there is any thing that I can do to help I would be happy to give it a try. Helen

June 16, 2009 - We have a local newspaper that lets you advertise for free. The girl I spoke to kept telling me she shouldn't but she has put an ad in for every second Friday for ten times. It just says "Free quit smoking education and support at www.whyquit.com" I hope that was OK to do. I can always undo it if it isn't. Also would it be OK for me to trim the eight pages of quit tips down to one page for a start? I just feel I would have a better chance of getting support/sponsorship if it was smaller. It feels a bit like the whole cow, and I could maybe manage a steak. :) I would send a copy back to you before I did anything with it in case I leave anything important out. Helen

June 18, 2009 - The ad has gone into the Christchurch Star today so you should hopefully start getting some Kiwi visitors sometime soon.

June 26, 2009 - Is it ok with you for me to use this notice? It's not the quitting tips that you suggested but hopefully it will point people in the right direction so that they can read them at WhyQuit. I could put it up on notice boards and in waiting rooms. I have used 'quit smoking' rather than 'nicotine cessation' because I am pretty sure smoking is the only thing we can do with tobacco down here in New Zealand.

July 4, 2009 - I didn't get off to a very good start with my notices. The local health clinic didn't want one in their waiting room because 'they have their own quit smoking program.' I was taught to smile and say thank you just in case there is a next time so I did just that. But it has frustrated me a bit because my own experiences with their program were complete disasters. The first time I got through the whole three months of using the patches without having a single smoke, but the first day without them I started smoking again...just one...at a time...after the other. The second time my 'quitting education' was being taught by the nurse that I would probably feel like crap for a few days and that it would be okay to gain weight because I was tiny (I wonder if she tells over-weight people they should loose weight because they are big?). Then I would go back to the nurse a week later and tell her how many I had smoked and she would tell me you're not supposed to smoke with the patches on and then we would do the same thing again the next week until I just gave up giving up. It worries me that these health professionals with the best of intentions are putting smokers through the nicotine replacement torture and putting them off quitting or worse still making them believe that they will never be able to quit. This experience hasn't put me off trying to help though. I'm sure I can reach the same smokers from the notice board in the fish and chip shop around the corner. And for that one person who said 'no' I

have found six others who were happy to help.

September 9, 2009 - I have had a tidy up of the quit smoking notices and sorted out the borders. They work best if you print them using the borderless setting under paper layout. I had put the notices in 7 fish and chip shops around my area and when I went back to check them today all of the addresses had gone except for one that had four left on it. It seems like there are a lot of people out there who want to quit smoking or lots of people who know someone they would like to quit smoking. I was reading your article about the teen quit program at WhyQuit. The poster idea sounds really great.

September 10, 2009 - The flyers were there for a month before I went back to check them. Two of them I had replaced for a second time. I have had all of my family hanging the flyers for me, even the smokers! One of my sisters works at Christchurch hospital and she put a flyer in the waiting room where patients can see it right after they have had the lecture about quitting. She has had to replace it several times, even though the patients are offered nicotine replacement torture for \$5 week. I hadn't really expected her to display the flyer. I was just hoping she might go and have a read herself. If it wasn't so sad that she is still smoking it would be really funny that she has helped more people find WhyQuit than the rest of us together. She is happy to keep replacing the flyer though because she said that the patients have a right to make an informed choice. She also told one of the nurse aids that she knows the WhyQuit way really does work because her sister has been quit for nearly two years. I just keep hoping and praying.

September 23, 2009 - Hone Harawira is a member of parliament here in New Zealand. He has spoken out about the tobacco bosses being responsible for peoples lives. The link to the story is below. I really want to write to him and tell him that NRT isn't helping either.

September 28, 2009 - Helen sends excellent NRT letter to parliament member.

October 2, 2009 - Thanks for your help with the letter. I was a bit nervous. I have never done anything like that before. I haven't heard anything back yet.

October 23, 2009 - I think this might be why the rest of New Zealand believes in pharmacology. We see it on TV and hear on the radio that "using nicotine products doubles your chances of quitting." Even the doctors believe it. I don't see how that could possibly be true.

December 25, 2009 - I had a smoking reminder yesterday and it reminded me how grateful I am for my quit.

January 20, 2010 - I'm having a bit of a hard time at the moment. My sister died on Sunday morning. I am having these self destructive thoughts. I don't really want to smoke, I just don't want to feel this bad. I can't get away from smokers either. I am missing her so much. She would have exactly the right words to put this all in perspective. I don't know what I am going to do.

January 20, 2010 - You are right, she would be mad a me if I gave it all away. I am dreading her funeral today but I will get through it.

January 21, 2010 - Thank God! I was offered two and smoked none. Helen 2 Addiction 0

January 23, 2010 - It is frightening how easy it would have been to pick one up and smoke it at a weak moment.

January 25, 2010 - I have shared, I have led by example, I have nagged, I have printed off stuff and I have emailed stuff. I have stood holding their hands while we were gathered around my little sister's bed watching her take her last breaths. I told them not to let it come to this, don't leave it until too late like she did. And they have all these medical professionals telling them quitting is too hard without NRT. It is breaking my heart and doing my head in.

February 1, 2010 - Thanks for the studies. I have done nothing to deserve the title of activist for a while now. My son, 15, had a burst appendix and we had to spend three days in hospital. Then my nearest sister in age collapsed suddenly and I spent another two days in hospital with her before she died. I'm afraid I won't be able to get any more flyers put up at the hospital because it was my sister who was putting them up for me. My son goes back to school on Friday so hopefully I will have time to get active again. What can we do to let these experts know that you can't legislate some one out of their addiction? Putting up the price never made me smoke less either, it made me smoke more because it stressed me out worrying about how I was going to pay for them. They already pay \$15 for a pack of 25 tailor made smokes. Helen

February 3, 2010 - There is a local radio announcer who has been getting a really hard time because everyone knows that he smokes. He tried to quit sometime last year but relapsed or never really quit in the first place. He was saying ... it was his choice to smoke. When I heard that he was going to quit for New Years I sent him an email in December and just said that I had smoked for 30 years and had quit with the help of WhyQuit. That doesn't seem to have helped him so I thought I would try again. (Since I have a title to live up to:))

Kia ora Jason

I heard you saying today that it was your choice to smoke so I just wanted to share a little education with you. You don't smoke because you choose to. You smoke because you are addicted to nicotine and if you don't keep that nicotine level topped up every hour or so then you go into withdrawal and that doesn't feel good. So really you aren't choosing to smoke you have to smoke or else feel bad.

Here's the good news. The worst of the nicotine withdrawal only last for three days, then after two weeks of refusing to put nicotine into your body, the physical fight is over. Then it's just a case of ignoring those little reminders in your head for about three months. Then you are good to go for the rest of your life.

If you don't believe me then try not putting any nicotine into your body for two weeks and see what happens. I did and haven't had a smoke for over two years thanks to the support and education at www.WhyQuit.com

Helen

February 5, 2010 - I had forgotten about how bad I was when I was smoking. I never had the money to smoke but I always bought them. I rolled my own because it was much cheaper and I usually skipped meals so that I could afford tobacco. A cup of coffee and a cig were my meals. I really struggled with eating properly when I first quit and with the weight gain that went with eating real food.

February 5, 2010 - Just as horrible but true is feeding the boys my own nicotine tainted milk. No wonder my oldest son is still hooked thirty years later. I really don't enjoy these trips down memory lane.

April 23, 2010 - Thirty-one years ago when I was pregnant with my oldest son I didn't know the damage I was doing, but fifteen years ago when I had my youngest I did know that I should quit. I just wasn't able to. I wonder if I had been able to quit if he would still have autism. The packs here have graphic pictures on them but it doesn't seem to have much effect. My Gran had a stroke but she survived for another twenty years having to rely on other people to do everything for her (I would hate to be stuck in a body that wouldn't move). Granddad died of emphysema. They had to keep unhooking him from the oxygen that was helping him breath so they could wheel him out for a smoke. Dad has had two open heart surgeries and he has COPD. My brother had a heart attack when he was forty-five. My sister had a heart attack when she was forty, breast cancer when she was forty-four, then when she was forty-seven her heart just stopped.

April 29, 2010 - Do you talk to people as well as what you do at WhyQuit and Freedom? I would really love to be able to help. It's just a bit scary.

May 6, 2010 - I had an opportunity to practice talking to a smoker today. I was chatting with my neighbor who has developed a terrible smokers cough. I asked her when she was going to quit and she told me that she was seeing a counselor and that she has one week to choose a quit date and that she was going to go on the patches. I have given her WhyQuit's address and told her that it is the nicotine that she is addicted to so using nicotine will only feed her addiction, and that it only takes three days for the worst of the withdrawal to be over. It turns out she is really scared because she is quitting alcohol as well. I told her it is doable because I have quit both though not at the same time. She told me she had quit before but she kept ringing her sponsor crying. I told her it is really hard to deal with our feelings without our drugs to hide behind but it can be done. I also told her that she is free to pop over to my place anytime she needs to have a rant instead of a smoke. I am really hoping that goes and has a read at WhyQuit.

May 10, 2010 - I have just put this on my Facebook page, is it okay to put it on WhyQuit's Facebook page too?

To those of you that I know and love who are going to quit smoking one day

Why: because the world is better place with you in it!

When: Monday 31st May, World No Tobacco Day

How: http://www.whyquit.com/joel/Joel_03_01_tip_sheet.html

www.whyquit.com

<http://ffn.yuku.com/>

Please copy and paste this if you know someone who is still hooked on nicotine.

May 18, 2010 - I do think that a cigarette free world should be the goal. I just don't think that banning them is right solution. If you ban cigarettes the problem might be temporarily solved but you can be sure if smokers can find another way to stimulate dopamine they will, whether it be buying cigarettes from gangs or growing their own or using a completely different drug. Where as if you educate them about the real dangers of smoking and the [Law of Addiction](#) they can make an informed choice to quit and to stay quit. Right now nobody here is able to make an informed choice because they are all being fed misinformation such as NRT doubles your chances of quitting.

May 23, 2010 - I have been reading at the New Zealand quitting site over the weekend and it took me back to about three years ago when my sister was diagnosed with breast cancer and I went there looking for help. I didn't think that smoking caused her breast cancer but she just kept saying to me that smoking causes cancer. So we decided we had better try again to quit. It's unfortunate that she took their advice and now she isn't here to tell the story. The only useful information I found there was when someone mentioned WhyQuit and I went to have a look.

June 1, 2010 - I just wanted to let you know that my posting about WNTD on my Facebook wall worked. My cousin that I didn't even know smoked is going to quit. He just posted on my wall that he is going to have his own WNTD on June 2nd. :)

June 20, 2010 - One of our politicians had a heart attack over the weekend and hasn't had a smoke since, so I sent him a get well message with a link to WhyQuit.

June 22, 2010 - I don't know how to say this without sounding nuts so I'll just say it anyway. The comment about 'The Long White Cloud' triggered another memory. It must have been at least twenty years ago, this strange woman come up to me at the pub and sat down and started telling me about this guy in America who knows that I live on the middle island of three in the South Pacific and that I have a son who is a bit special and that we were going to discover the reason for the name of The Long White Cloud or something like that. At the time I thought she was a nutter. Now I'm not so sure. I have been having the overwhelming sensation that I am heading towards my destiny at a hundred miles an hour and there is nothing that I can do to stop it. Sorry for inflicting my nuttiness on to you. :)

My sister sent me this job position because my youngest son is about to turn 16 and I am supposed to be getting a job. It would be an amazing opportunity to be responsible for the quit smoking program budget and because it's pregnant women I wouldn't have to argue the point about NRT. What do you think?

August 20, 2010 - My sister and I used to think that we liked smoking. We had some great times together when we were smoking. But then she had a heart attack so we tried to quit but we couldn't. Then a couple of years later she got cancer so we tried to quit again but we still couldn't. There was no choice and no free will. We didn't like smoking any more but we just couldn't make it stop. Then I came across this amazing site that taught me how to quit. My poor sister wasn't so lucky. She died trying to quit."

September 10, 2010 - This story about banning tobacco displays in all New Zealand stores was in this morning's news. I started a Facebook group "[Ban Tobacco Displays in Stores](#)".

Do you have any research about the effectiveness of not having power walls in stores that I could link to on the page? Also, I thought we could put a link to WhyQuit. I'm not sure if it will make any difference but at least I feel like I am doing something.

September 21, 2010 - I came across Graham Brown, a youth marketing expert, and I thought I could send him a message and tell him about WhyQuit and suggest if he ever wanted to use his powers for good he might like to suggest some ways that we could get the prevention message across to the world's youth.

October 1, 2010 - According to Tau Henares, "The Maori Affairs Select Committee are in the final stages of delivering their report to Parliament. It will be interesting to see what we say on this topic. Should be done by the 20th October."

October 27, 2010 - No news about the Maori affairs committee report yet. Parliament sits at 2pm. I can't wait to see what they have to say. [This was this mornings news](#). Makes you wonder if the tobacco companies will stop at nothing to sell their poison. I just finished reading a book by a famous Irish woman's author and she mentions smoking a few times and even mentioned a brand. [Note: Helen then writes the author sharing her concerns].

October 29, 2010 - According to [this news article](#), it looks like Pfizer used emotional blackmail to get Champix approved by the NZ government medication agency, Pharmac. I can't believe that Pharmac would still accept it after noting the following. It's very very wrong. Is there anything that we can do?

"The committee considered that the safety signal is real, the number of adverse events is increasing, there are concerns with the safety profile of varenicline, and there is limited evidence that varenicline is more effective than NRT," stated minutes from a meeting last year.

November 1, 2010 - All this is like a really big game of chess with everyone making strategic moves, except that there are no rules and it's peoples lives that they are playing with.

November 10, 2010 - It is soooo frustrating. There are kids at this site asking for help and nobody does anything. I have been having discussions with these kids about tobacco company tricks and posting links to ban powerwalls, and it looks like they have been listening. I think I might still keep a eye on the kids there because I can send them messages.

November 11, 2010 - I put a post up about smoking to let the kids know that if anyone wanted help quitting they could find me on the ban power walls page and my post was deleted again. I found that a bit strange because they were quite happy for me to put links to ban power walls before. Makes me wonder if they might be feeling a little threatened that a free quitting method might be a threat to their funding, which it probably is because the Minister of Health said they were going to look at results not at activities. Makes me want to get out there and get some results myself.

January 27, 2011 - [Helen writes NZ prison officials as they transition to smoke-free

prisons advising them about WhyQuit's free materials, including video clips]

February 24, 2011 - I am feeling very lucky to be alive right now. I thought that I had survived some pretty tough earthquakes but this was the most frightening ever. The September quake was scary but my son and I were at home together so it was just a case of contacting everyone to check that they were okay. This time he was at school and I was at the supermarket buying groceries when it happened. It was really sudden and really, really violent. One minute I was looking for a can of salmon and the next dozens of cans were flying at me. Lucky that the shelves didn't come down on top of me and that I can run like hell while dodging cans and ushering screaming girls at the same time. Very lucky to be alive. I was shaking so badly that I could hardly text my son to let him know that I was okay too, and that I was coming to get him.

April 20, 2011 - [What follows is an email Helen wrote for Joel Spitzer, the author of [Never Take Another Puff](#), a free quit smoking ebook with more than 3 million downloads]"

Dear Joel: First, thank you from the bottom of my heart for sharing all of your quit smoking material and for the countless hours that you spend helping us nicotine addicts to quit and stay quit.

I smoked for thirty years and tried many times in many different ways to quit but it wasn't until I came across your material at WhyQuit that I was finally able to succeed. I was pretty desperate at the time because my closest sister had been diagnosed with breast cancer. She really got on my case, she just kept saying to me that smoking causes cancer. It breaks my heart to say it but she passed away January 17th 2010 at the age of forty-seven, still smoking more than forty menthol cigarettes a day. It is incredible that she knew what her smoking was doing to her. She had suffered a heart attack when she was forty and her doctor had warned her that if she didn't quit she was going to have a stroke. She knew what was happening to her when she had her heart attack but she still made her husband drive her to the hospital instead of calling an ambulance so she could smoke on the way. She was a very intelligent woman and not in the least bit suicidal. I can't imagine the torture she must have felt not being able to quit. I tried to tell her about WhyQuit. She had it in her head that cold turkey wouldn't work for her so she tortured herself with hypnosis and NRT and it ended up costing her her life. I guess working in a hospital with all of those health professionals saying that quitting cold turkey is too hard is pretty convincing. Why would she believe me over them. I often wonder if I had been able to give her a quitting book would she have been able to quit.

I was walking past the hospital the other day and there were patients sitting outside the hospital's walls in their pajamas smoking. It reminded me of when I gave birth to my youngest son. I had tried really hard to quit when I was pregnant but much to my shame I ended up smoking right through the pregnancy. Then when I was in labor they wouldn't let me smoke. They said I needed the oxygen. After five hours of labor and no nicotine I was beside myself, so as soon as he was born and they left us alone to rest I handed my baby over and snuck out the back door for a smoke. I was exhausted, in a lot of pain and bleeding heavily but I had to have that smoke. It is a horrible feeling having no control over your own actions like that. If only I had known then what I know now. It makes my heart go out to those poor patients puffing away outside the hospital and the only help they are offered is NRT which just convinces them even more that they can't quit because it turns

quitting into a form of torture. It brings tears to my eyes when I think of my sister smoking her way through a heart attack, a mastectomy and all through the chemotherapy treatments. I wish I was able to sit down and explain to these poor people how to quit cold turkey but that is an ability that belongs to other people.

I understand and respect that you don't want to accept donations but I do wish that there was a way to fund some quitting books so that these people could be offered some real help, especially at a time when they are feeling fully aware that they have no control over their smoking. Helen Bradford

May 22, 2011 - I have been at Psych Central's quit smoking page and there is a lady trying to quit smoking but she keeps relapsing. She needs to have a blood test on the 1st to make sure she has no nicotine in her system so that she can have reconstruction surgery. Would you have time to have a look at the thread please? I'm feeling way out of my depth and don't really know what else to say to her.

July 9, 2011 - I'm still trying to get my head around this, but the more I say it the more it is sinking in. A couple of months ago my ankles and fingers started swelling up. I thought it was just that I was eating too much salt so I cut back and just ignored it hoping that it would go away but by two weeks ago I had arthritis in my feet, ankles, knees and fingers and I was in so much pain that I couldn't sleep so I had to go to the doctor. I've had two weeks of all sorts of tests. The last one was a chest x-ray that showed I have a shadow on my lung. The doctor said it is probably lung cancer. She said that the shadow is at the top of my left lung and that my right lung is perfectly healthy. I guess that means I can make do with just one. She has referred me to the oncology department at the hospital to have a scan. She said it could be sarcoidosis but that affects your skin and eyes, and my skin and eyes are fine. I don't want to go to WhyQuit to read about lung cancer because their outcomes aren't good and I really need to hear right now that people can survive lung cancer. I really can't believe this is happening to me. I am so frightened right now. Here was me thinking that I had quit smoking in time. I sincerely hope everything is going well in your world.

July 9, 2011 - I'm not sure if it's confirmed or not. I'm pretty sure the doctor wouldn't have said lung cancer unless she was certain. She had ruled out everything else with the tests. She said it was a good thing that I have only had symptoms for a couple of months. She also said it is a good thing that my right lung is perfectly healthy. I would like to think that it is all just a big mistake but it feels like the battle has already begun. They are going to do a full body scan so I guess that will answer all those questions. I don't have any health insurance so I have to go on a waiting list to have the scan but the doctor said it should happen within three weeks. Smoking is the last thing that I want to think about right now. I'm sure the thirty years I did spend smoking are going to cause me enough problems. Thank you for your prayer. I love that you always have the right words to say. I can really use those hugs right now :)

July 19, 2011 - I went back to the doctor today because I was running out of the pills she gave me. I also have new pain in my back so she has given me some codeine to help me sleep. She said it could be muscle strain so I asked her straight did she think the cancer might have got into my ribs. She said that is the worst case possibility but I should mention it to the oncologists because they might want to scan my ribs. She is going to write them

yet another letter as well. I'm off to the hospital tomorrow for a breathing test, it feels weird because I don't have a cough and my breathing feels fine. Can't wait for this all to be sorted, all these doctors and drugs and tests are like my worst nightmare happening.

July 20, 2011 - I thought I was just having a breathing test at the hospital today but I saw the respiratory doctor as well. Apparently you can't skip straight to the oncologist and a full scan unless you have private insurance. I saw my x-rays. The one of my hands and feet showed some odd shadow things that don't happen with arthritis and that is why they sent me for a chest x-ray. He said the shadow on my lung and the other x-rays of my hands and feet and the results from the blood tests make them think that this is lung cancer. The next step is to have a chest scan and depending on the results of that there might be another scan with a needle to test the lump. (I don't remember much after he said needle). If it has spread to other places then we need another plan. He said if it hasn't spread then we can just remove the top half of my left lung. He said the the scan should happen within about ten days.

July 22, 2011 - It's weird, I don't feel frightened like I did at the start. I think I have just accepted that I have lung cancer although I believe in my heart that there are still going to be lots of tomorrows for us to embrace. I don't understand it but I just feel this peace about it, it feels like it is out of my control but there is a power much stronger than me who is looking after me. I am struggling to live life to the fullest. I am just so tired all the time. I can't believe how fast I have gone from hyperactive on my feet all day to exhausted and on the couch or in bed most of the day. But I am sure there are less active things I can do to make a difference in this life.

July 23, 2011 - It has been an emotionally draining year, really, with the frightening earthquakes that keep happening and now this. I read Deb's story last night. So sad. What a strong woman to cope with all that stress as well. I think it is terrible that she blamed herself for smoking. I regret with all my heart that I smoked for thirty years but we had no idea when we were kids what it was going to do to us. The tobacco companies on the other hand go to a lot of trouble and expense to get us hooked when we are too immature to make rational decisions, and when we are all ten foot tall and indestructible and nothing can kill us. I can promise you that they will never get another cent of my money as long as I live. I am so grateful that I am not struggling to quit right now on top of all this.

August 2, 2011 - I had my scan yesterday, but the specialist said that he will call me in few days when he gets the results. I had to lay on a bench thing and it slid back and forth through this big donut looking machine. They also injected iodine into my arm (more bloody needles).

August 4, 2011 - I have heard back from the respiratory specialist. He said that the scan showed a growth on the top of my left lung which he is concerned about. The next step is for me to have another scan where they will use a needle guided by the scan to take a sample from the growth. He said that should happen next Thursday, hopefully. He said I will need to be in the hospital all day and may need to stay overnight. He said it will take about another week after that for the results and I will see him in his clinic to find out what's next after all this. I asked what the scan showed and he said it showed the growth on my lung, and what was happening in the bone???????

August 6, 2011 - I got another one of those letters that the specialist sends to my doctor and they give me a copy. It said that the scan confirms that I have a left upper lobe lung mass and widespread bony metastases. I guess that is about as cancerous as it can get really. I wish treatment was moving a little faster, it is quite scary knowing this is growing inside me and we aren't doing anything to stop it. So I make the most of everyday and live it to the fullest. It is my 50th birthday today and I will be spending the day at my father's with all of the family. It's going to feel more like a funeral than a birthday having to tell them about the secondary cancer though.

August 11, 2011 - The test went well yesterday. Everything went the way it was supposed to. They didn't actually put a needle into my rib, they put it into a lesion, that's a lumpy growth that was on my rib. Got home from the hospital about 3:30. I should get an appointment to see the specialist soon. I glad that is over now, one step closer to getting fixed.

August 13, 2011 - I am trying not to think about it too much but I think I have accepted that it is some sort of cancer. I am also pretty sure that my time here isn't over yet, that I still have lots to do. I also know even though I fall asleep all the time that I still have a lot of fight in me for what ever life brings. It's not the end, just the beginning of another journey :)

August 14, 2011 - It's weird. I haven't had any pain in my lung. My ankles and knees are stiff and sore and I have the worst pain in the top right-hand side of my back in this rib with the growth, but nothing in my lungs. I don't even have a cough.

August 18, 2011 - I have just received my appointment with the specialist to get the results of the needle test. It is on Monday 29th August. Not too much longer to wait considering we have just been snowed in for another three days.

August 19, 2011 - I don't have the biopsy results yet, I guess the doctor will tell me at the appointment and let me know what the treatment plan is. I hope he tells me what the treatment plan is, if he tells me I have to have more tests I might say some very bad words that would hurt his ears :)

September 6, 2011 - The lung cancer nurse phoned me yesterday to let me know that my first appointment with the general oncologist is on Monday. It sounds like we are going to discuss chemo and why I'm not going to have it yet. Then on Wednesday I have an appointment with the radiation oncologist. So I guess after that we get started on treatment finally.

September 7, 2011 - There has been a lot of bad language about how long it has taken. It is a relief to finally see a beginning to doing something about it. My poor 17 year-old son with Aspergers, he is worried about what might happen to him if I die. He sees me loosing weight and in a lot of pain and to him no one is doing anything about it. It will be good for him to finally see something happen. I don't know what to say to my oldest son. He lives in Auckland but has got a job back here in Christchurch for a couple of months. It is hard for him when he comes to visit he tries not to smoke around me but the stress is too much so he ends up smoking twice as much or he just leaves early. I told him I don't judge him for

smoking, I did the same thing when my sister had her heart attack because I didn't know how to make it stop.

September 7, 2011 - I have pain in my back where the cancer is on my rib. They have changed all my medications so my joints aren't so sore any more but the back pain keeps getting worse. They have me on the heavy duty drugs now but I hate taking them. It seems like every pill I take has a side effect that makes something else worse so I have to take a pill to make that better. They gave me some extra pills to take as well for the breakthrough pain and they seem to be working. The last medicine they gave me made me have horrible nightmares. I have gone from a healthy 52kg [115 pounds] to a scary 45kg [99 pounds]. It doesn't seem to matter how much I eat and sleep, the weight just seems to keep slipping off. Makes all the fussing I did when I gained a couple of kilos when I quit seem really silly now. The nurse said I am so tired partly because of the cancer, partly because of the drugs and partly because of the pain. I really hope the radiation will take care of the pain so I can stop the drugs.

September 9, 2011 - Helen writes "My Story" featured above.

September 12, 2011 - The appointment with the oncologist today was just talking about chemotherapy, what the drugs were and what the side effects were and that chemo isn't as effective as radiation when they are treating lung cancer. They have given me lots of information to read about the drugs and about fattening me up and about who's who, and who does what in the oncology department. I will meet with the radiation oncologist on Wednesday and the doctor I saw today has organized for me to have a bone scan at the same time. It sounds like the radiation will start very soon after that.

September 14, 2011 - Yesterday's visit with the radiation oncologist was much more positive than Monday's visit with the general oncologist. He said we will get on and do the radiation to sort out my pain then we can get on and have some chemotherapy to deal with my lung. The general oncologist left me with the impression that they weren't going to do anything about my lung. I have signed the permission slip for the radiation. There will be an appointment next week to measure up where exactly to do the radiation and I will get a tiny dot tattoo so they can get the right spot each time. The radiation will happen the week after. I will have five sessions, one each day for the five days and they will probably do two lumps at each session. I had my bone scan yesterday too. That was hard going, lying still on a sore back for twenty minutes. Glad it's over.

September 20, 2011 - I had my measure up for the radiation yesterday. I've got three small tattoos the size of a pin prick. We saw the results of my bone scan yesterday too. There is a large tumor on my tail bone. So I guess you could say that smoking for thirty years has come back to bite me on the bum :) The radiation is just for five days. They will do the lump on my bum and the one under my arm and the one on my back each time I go. I also saw the general oncologist yesterday too. He said that chemotherapy will start the week after radiation is finished. I will have a dose once every three weeks. I am getting a bit nervous about tomorrow but I am really looking forward to getting rid of this pain and the pills.

September 28, 2011 - I had my last treatment of radiation today, thank goodness. Apparently, the effects keep working for a while though. It has knocked me around a bit.

The nausea is the worst. All I seem to be able to do is sleep. I had a rough day on Sunday so they made me stay back after my treatment on Monday to get rehydrated. More needles. Still it is all for good. I am going to feel so much better when this is all over. I have my first chemotherapy treatment next Thursday. I will be there for five hours. They are giving me two different drugs each time. That will happen every three weeks. The nurse said that it isn't that bad if you take all the medication properly so I will do my best.

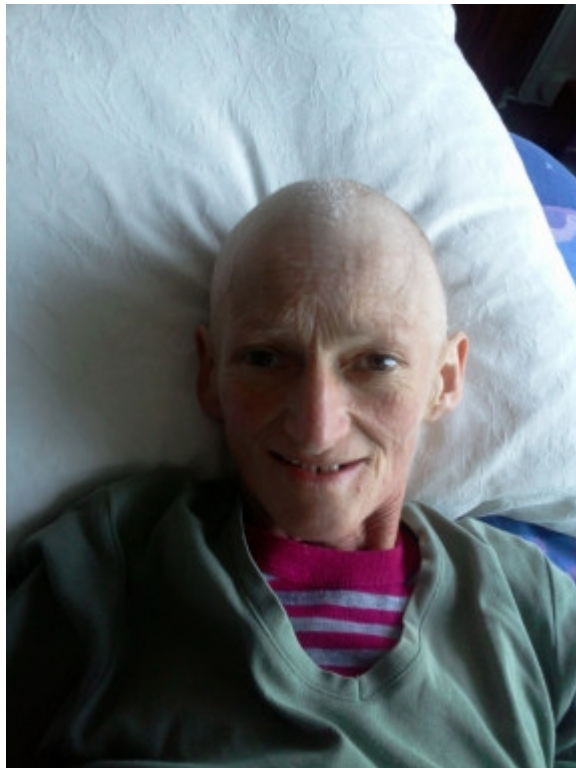
October 15, 2011 - Looks like I spoke too soon. I have just had the week from hell in hospital. The chemo really didn't agree with me. They said I will have to decide if I really want to carry on with the chemo. I don't want to have to spend a week in hospital every time I have a treatment. They did more scans and found my left hip has cancer in it so I have had another radiation on that. LOL, I did have really long hair but everyone complained about it getting in the way so I've had it cut up to my shoulders. I don't know if I will lose it all.

October 18, 2011 - I am not going to have any more chemo for now. The oncologist is pretty sure that it was the chemo that made me so sick and it has made me a bit anemic so they are going to give me a blood transfusion on Friday. The radiation seems to be working though, the lumps on my back seem to have shrunk and the pain is much less, thank goodness. It means taking less pain relief. They gave me another scan while I was in hospital and found that one of my hip joints has cancer in it and the muscles in the top of that leg have pulled away. So they did another radiation treatment. The pain seems to be less already. Keep fighting the good fight. There aren't many roses around here to sniff but there are lots of spring flowers every where. They always give me hope of warmer and better days ahead.

November 1, 2011 - My computer has been playing up is why I have been quiet. The treatment knocked me around quite a lot too and I spent over a week in hospital so we aren't going to do any more chemo. It isn't such good news. I asked the doc how long I could live and he said one to three months.

November 2, 2011 - Would you share it please on Facebook as well please. I forgot to tell you we are the bobbsey twins, I have lost my hair. Men do bald much better than women don't they. My palliative nurse reckons I can do six months. I think I prefer her guesstimate better.

November 6, 2011 - This is Helen's youngest sister. I am typing this for Helen as she finds it just too draining to sit at the computer and type these days. She printed your email so she could lie down to read it, I will write it in her



words: "There's nothing to forgive. It's not just about me, it's about my family, friends and everyone I come in contact with, that is affected by it. I have since spent a week in the hospital recovering from the chemo session they gave me. My weight has now slipped to 38 kgs [83 pounds]."

November 17, 2011 - Helen is not doing so well. I am her other sister. She has been unable to get out of bed for the last few days. Helen has further deteriorated overnight. They suspect that she may have had a heart attack. I have printed off your emails and she was very pleased to get them.

November 18, 2011 - Helen asked me to update you. The cancer has grown too big and it made the lung collapse. I took her to hospital in an ambulance yesterday. She will remain in there until we can get her stabilized.

Helen and her family are in our prayers.

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Helen's page was created on November 23, 2011 and last updated November 23, 2011 by [John R. Polito](#).