



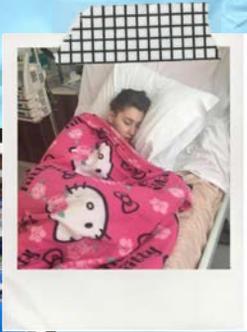
CANDID CANCER COLLECTIVE

ZINE  
Issue One

candid cancer collective



cait



brontë



kimia



2013



ccc

# ABOUT US

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Hello and welcome! We are Brontë, Cait and Kimia, or Candid Cancer Collective.

We are former young cancer patients and wanted to create this zine to bring you real-life candid experiences of cancer rather than inspirational stories.

The three of us were diagnosed with cancer as young adults; in Brontë's case, with Acute Lymphoblastic Lymphoma (ALL) at the age of 21, and Cait, with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia/Myelodysplastic Syndromes (MDS), aged 17, and for Kimia, with Burkitt Lymphoma, aged 21.

We created this community and zine with the help of Rose at Drawn Poorly, Ellie at Still ill Ok and the team at Sex with Cancer, and Contact. We are very grateful for the help of these wonderful people who have all worked with turning experiences of chronic illnesses and cancer into creative projects.

All of our thanks go to Rose, Ellie and the teams at Sex with Cancer and Contact, without whom this project would never have happened. And we also thank all of the amazing people with experiences of cancer who kindly submitted their work to the project.

- Kimia Etemadi, CCC Co-Founder



# CAIT WILDE

CW: Mental health



What is the specific type of cancer you had/have, and at what age were you first diagnosed?

I had Acute Myeloid Leukaemia/myelodysplastic syndromes (MDS) in May 2018, when I was 17 years old. I'm now 20.

How did you notice you had it—for example, which symptoms did you first have?



I first noticed bleeding gums. I had been going to my GP since I was 15, and over time, I developed new symptoms such as migraines and even little red dots under my skin; I was extremely pale and suspected I was anaemic, but I had a GP who kept dismissing me and telling me to just exercise and change my lifestyle. But the red-flag symptom that made me determined to get a diagnosis was extreme night sweats.

Are there any experiences of treatment you would like to talk about?

I had many misconceptions about cancer and treatment. I didn't realise that my weight would fluctuate, and regarding the hair loss, I lost ALL of it. I'd joke around, saying that I had free Brazilians all year round and I didn't have to buy shampoo for 12 months.

What are the side effects most difficult to deal with?

Personally, the bone pain was the worst, and I've ended up with IBS after my treatment. I can't enjoy a KFC anymore as I can't tolerate certain foods now. A side effect that I like to warn newly-diagnosed patients who will be having chemo about, is to not trust a fart! I thought it was embarrassing and I carried a lot of shame, but soon learned it happens to everyone and is not my fault. I had many, many accidents but you learn how to get around it and avoid future incidents.

# CAIT WILDE

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How has cancer affected your overall quality of life and ambitions in life?

I was at college, studying Media, Graphics and Photography. The cancer diagnosis completely changed my life. Unfortunately, I've had to give up some of my hobbies, but I'm someone who loves trying new things, so I'm constantly looking for new interests and hobbies that are possible for me to do. I miss doing my photography, but now I'm disabled due to treatment I have to pre-plan my journeys and check if it's possible to do in a wheelchair. I knew I wanted to work in the media/creative industry. I no longer have my independence. I rely on my mum and other family and friends to help me out. I also had to drop out of college and still haven't managed to return to finish my education. It's affected my friendship circle too; cancer teaches you who's really there for you. I can't drink alcohol or go clubbing, so I never get invited out anywhere.



What do you hope would be a positive thing to come out of creativity such as making a zine, or any other creative things you do?

My life is so medical already, yet despite it being cliché, doing something creative helps me to “escape” from that side of my life. When I finally do a piece of art or get writing done, it feels like a massive accomplishment for me.

If you wish to talk about it, how has cancer changed your love/sex life, intimacy and so on

It had a massive impact. My treatment put me into chemical menopause. I've not had a period in three years, which might sound like a glorious thing, but it's actually not. Since my ovaries were affected, so were my hormones; I had no sex drive and my womb had shrunk due to going so long with oestrogen deficiency.



# CAIT WILDE

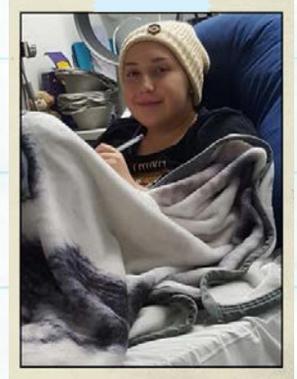
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The idea of being sexually active after treatment was really daunting for me and even when I tried to pleasure myself, I hurt myself in the process. I had to discover my body all over again.

It took a lot of courage, but I sought sexual health advice specifically for cancer patients. Since there was a lack of information, I wasn't provided with a lot at the time, but luckily, the nurse I saw had set up a women's health clinic and she provided me with enough education to give me a little bit of confidence back. I found a Facebook group for menopausal women which was extremely helpful since it's full of specialist advice.

Whenever I have treatment that lowers my platelet count, I'm not supposed to be sexually active, so I was basically banned from sexual activities. It was like I had a hypothetical chastity belt put on me. Between the age of 13-16 I had had a pretty wild sex life, however now that I'm menopausal, I don't crave it like I did back then. HRT has certainly helped but I don't think about sex constantly like I did during my teenage years. I've had partners after treatment and not all of them have been understanding about my menopause—some understand that it can be painful and that I can't have long "sessions".

Lastly, I used to hate lube but now I have no choice—I can't live without it!



# YOU KNOW YOU'VE HAD CANCER WHEN...

## BINGO CARD

When you don't  
know if it's  
pee or just  
warm

"My Aunt battled  
cancer three  
times/had that  
cancer - now  
she's dead."

"Are you sure  
you should be  
doing that?"

"Should you be  
drinking  
alcohol?"

Someone has  
tried to cure  
you with  
essential oils

You can taste  
this image:



"Have you tried  
Turmeric?"

When you know  
not to trust a  
fart

You've been  
told to  
stay positive

...DID YOU GET A FULL HOUSE?

THINGS

AREN'T

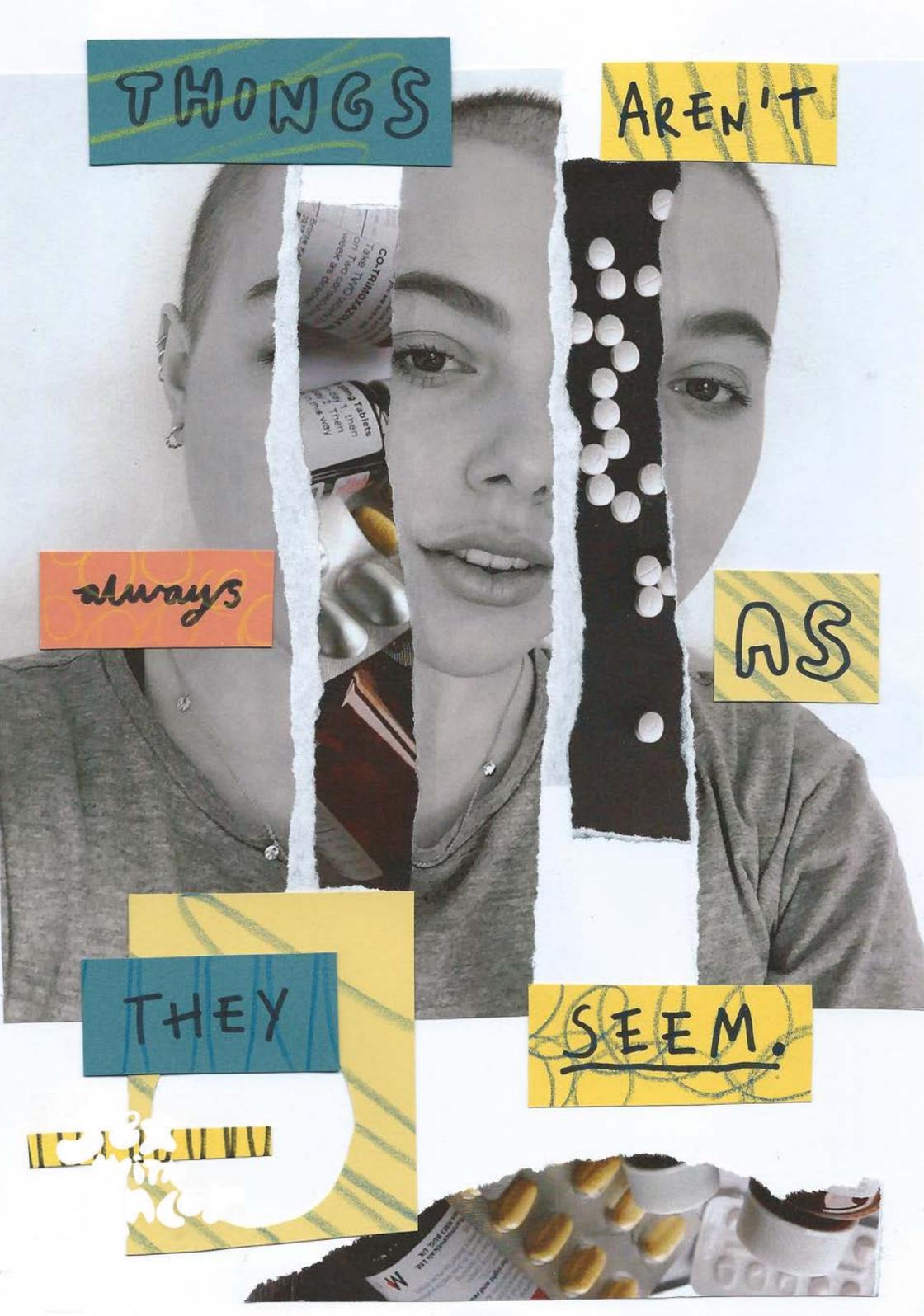
*always*

AS

THEY

SEEM.

3  
the  
new





By Brontë Palmer

# KIMIA ETEMADI

CW: mental health, OCD, anxiety, survivor's guilt and death.

What is the specific type of cancer you had/have, and at what age were you first diagnosed?

I had Burkitt lymphoma, a fast-growing and aggressive type of non-Hodgkin lymphoma. My cancer was Stage 4, the final and most severe stage. I was 21 when diagnosed—it was just a few weeks before my 22nd birthday and graduation from university.



How did you notice you had it—for example, which symptoms did you first have?

I was going to my university's Graduation Ball with a few friends and decided to have my hair in an up-do. My mum took photos of us ready for the party before setting off from my house. When she later showed me the photos, she asked me why I held my neck in such a weird way. I said that I didn't. So she thought I'd just gotten fatter. But then she touched my neck and there was a lump. I hadn't even noticed it because I usually had my long, wavy hair down, but for this party, it was in an up-do. We went to A&E because we thought I had Mumps. After some biopsies, it turned out to be Stage 4 cancer. I wonder sometimes, if I hadn't worn my hair up for the Graduation Ball and Mum hadn't noticed, would I still be here today? Maybe I wouldn't have noticed in time. And since my cancer was so advanced and aggressive, if I hadn't started my chemotherapy as soon as I did (just a couple weeks after diagnosis), the doctor said, I would have surely died. Even with treatment, they said, I had a 50:50 chance of survival. As soon as the doctor said the word 'cancer', my mum burst out crying, but I started making jokes, saying that I couldn't die, because I'd already bought my diary for the next year. It was only later that evening that the reality of my diagnosis suddenly hit me and then I was really frightened, but tried to stay positive for my mum.



# KIMIA ETEMADI

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Are there any experiences of treatment you would like to talk about?

Since I suffer from really severe Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, and my chemotherapy treatment had to be as aggressive as my cancer and I had to stay in hospital for months, I suffered double because of the side effects of chemotherapy on top of my OCD. Many other young people on the ward only needed to come into hospital for the day, get treatment and then go home, but I was an inpatient for months and sometimes couldn't come home for weeks. The doctors and nurses, who were really lovely, joked that I had become a part of the furniture.

At first, I had to share a ward with other girls, and this meant a shared bathroom, which made my OCD really bad, because whenever I saw that any accidents had taken place, I would stop myself from using the bathroom. I have always had a fear of hospitals, too. I also had many accidents. The first time I woke up and realised that I had wet the hospital bed because of all the fluids I was plugged into all the time, and because of having asked for a sleeping tablet the night before as I found it hard to sleep on a busy ward, I was so embarrassed that I started crying, but the nurse was so lovely and gave me a hug.

There were other frequent accidents involving all sorts of bodily fluids, from the top and bottom. The chemotherapy being very strong made me very sick all the time, and there were many other horrible side effects, such as the *Clostridium difficile* infection that I developed which caused colitis, which still flares up often today alongside IBS and is very painful.

I had ulcers all inside my mouth and in all my insides, which made drinking even a sip of water unbearably painful, so I simply stopped drinking and only had fluids intravenously. It even hurt to speak. A nurse once came to ask me something, I forgot about my mouth ulcers and tried to answer, and blood started pouring out of my mouth. I also had such horrific migraines after painful lumbar punctures that I would have to lie down in complete darkness for hours or else feel such pain that I would faint.

# KIMIA ETEMADI

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What are the side effects most difficult to deal with?

No matter how many years have passed, I think all cancer survivors have the same fears every day. The smallest change in your body rings alarm bells. I still struggle with fatigue, and sometimes I worry that people just think I'm lazy, but the 'spoon' analogy is so true in that if I use up all my spoons in a day, I can't do anything else because I'm so exhausted. I have a constant lack of energy. For the entire duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, I've been on the government's shielding or 'extremely clinically vulnerable' list. My mum has had to do all my food shopping, and this loss of independence has been difficult too. Before the pandemic, I worked in China, and also previously in Belgium and France, so I lost a lot of independence but I knew I had to shield because of my history of blood cancer. My hormones have been out of control since cancer treatment, so I still have to visit endocrinology clinics regularly, and the side effects like excess hair, non-stop weight gain and low mood have all made me much less confident in myself and my appearance. I also know that I'll start menopause very soon, which seems unfair compared to other people my age who have years of fertility ahead of them.

How has cancer affected your overall quality of life and ambitions in life?

I realised just how short life can be, having sadly witnessed so many other young people at my hospital die, many much younger than I was. I still struggle with survivor guilt, especially when my OCD and anxiety are really bad. I often think to myself that it should have been those young people who survived instead of me. During treatment, I was so depressed that I often didn't want to live anymore. Every 24 hours seemed like an eternity, especially at night when my mum and other visitors had gone and it was just me in my hospital bed, crying.



# KIMIA ETEMADI

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As I finished chemotherapy and was allowed to come back home, this 'carpe diem' mentality took over, and I decided that as soon as I was better, I would start to do more of the things I love. And so I started travelling to more countries, learning various languages, trained to become a teacher and studied for two Master's degrees. Later, I also found the confidence to finally come out as bi which I knew I had been my whole life. It was a huge relief to get such positivity, acceptance and warmth from my family and friends. I wish I had done it sooner!

What do you hope would be a positive thing to come out of creativity such as making a zine, or any other creative things you do?

I realised just how short life can be, having sadly witnessed so many other young people at my hospital die, many much younger than I was. I still struggle with survivor guilt, especially when my OCD and anxiety are really bad. I often think to myself that it should have been those young people who survived instead of me. During treatment, I was so depressed that I often didn't want to live anymore. Every 24 hours seemed like an eternity, especially at night when my mum and other visitors had gone and it was just me in my hospital bed, crying.

If you wish to talk about it, how has cancer changed your love/sex life, intimacy and so on?

At first I was worried about dating again, but as my confidence increased after coming out as bi, I thought: this is me, and if prospective partners act weird about my cancer history, then fuck them (as in, don't!). As soon as people see my scars from my neck biopsy and also where I had my Port-a-Cath, they ask and I tell them the full story. Luckily, I'm in a loving relationship now with someone who doesn't treat me differently just for having had cancer.



# UNINVITED GUEST

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Two connected poems - the first written at first diagnosis, the second written off the back of a recent brain mets diagnosis

And from seemingly nowhere  
you made your grand entrance

Peacocking around my body

Loud, proud

Bold, brilliant

Secret, sly

A master of disguise,  
sinister in the shadows,

guest of honour at

a masquerade ball

How long had you been hiding?

Leaching goodness

How dare you have been

dancing near the cub

That was just a step too far

He never liked you

He gave me signals

He pulled off your mask

Bliss interrupter

Quietness disrupter

Joy snatcher

Sleep now, rest up

Your partying days are over

# UNINVITED GUEST TOO

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So, you're back at the party

Uninvited

Turns out you were hiding

Hiding in the shadows

of my mind

You're just a hanger on,

a leftover

I was pretty surprised

to see you

You of all things

I'm afraid you're not welcome

Not on the guest list

Not a plus one

You're going

Going to need to leave



These poems are by Emily Thomas / Not Much Rhymes With Cancer. You can find more of Emily's work on Instagram @NotMuchRhymesWithCancer.

# BRONTË PALMER

CW: mental health, anxiety, body image and suicide

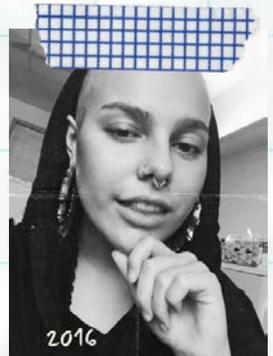


What is the specific type of cancer you had/have, and at what age were you first diagnosed?

I had Acute Lymphoblastic Lymphoma (ALL) which is a form of fast-growing, aggressive non-Hodgkin Lymphoma and I was diagnosed at 21.

How did you notice you had it—for example, which symptoms did you first have?

I was in my final year of university, and I started experiencing pain in my back/chest. Funnily, I thought it was the quality of my mattress and I was going on at my landlord to get me a new one. Then I got what I thought was a really bad cold and completely lost my appetite, which for me is when I know something is wrong (I love food). I became really breathless and couldn't walk up the stairs, but at the time we were looking after a friend's cat and I'm allergic to cats so I thought, 'This is why I'm breathless!' It became worse, and I ended up going to an emergency doctor on the weekend. They said that I had a chest infection, so I got antibiotics and started taking them. My mum came up to university to collect me and take me home to look after me whilst I got better. After a couple of days taking the antibiotics, I was only getting worse. The pain in my back and chest was so bad. I was being sick often and couldn't breathe properly at all. My mum called 111 and they asked me to come to A&E immediately. We spent a night in A&E having tests, and I was put on oxygen before I was moved to the respiratory ward. I had a collapsed lung and about eight litres of fluid was drained from my lung over the next week. They told me I had a 10cm mass in my chest which was pressing down on my lung which caused it to collapse. They had to take a biopsy of it, and when the results came back this is when I was told that it was cancer.



# BRONTË PALMER

Are there any experiences of treatment you would like to talk about?

As a complication during my treatment I had a blood clot on my brain which caused a stroke and multiple seizures, from which I almost died. I want to speak about this because it's something I feel is not spoken about. The chemotherapy I was having to save my life was also what caused me to nearly die. I was told that if I were to not continue this specific chemo drug, my chances of survival and remission were extremely low. This drug had worked effectively without this side effect for most people—what happened to me was actually one-in-a-million, and there was barely any research for what to do when this happens. The doctors acted on what they learnt and told me what they believed is best. They cannot predict how each individual will react; they only know what has happened and what happens for most people, but that isn't to say that other anomalies won't occur. I lost control over the right-hand side of my body and had to learn how to use it again. Being young worked in my favour and I was able to regain complete control over time. I had an out-of-body experience during one of my worst seizures. I was floating over myself, looking down and watching myself contort, all whilst I could feel my body parts tensing, stretching and spasming out of my control. I lived my experience from outside of my body like I was frozen in time, whilst I was technically unconscious. This experience caused PTSD, as I was in constant fear of having another stroke and dying. I was lucky to have an amazing NHS therapist at the time that helped me work through it and create healthy coping and rationalising techniques.



How has cancer affected your overall quality of life and ambitions in life?

To be completely honest, cancer completely killed my ambitions in life. I was in university studying Fashion Communication and I had always dreamt of working for a fashion magazine or designer. Cancer made my career path seem stupid— I thought, 'What's the point in this?'



# BRONTË PALMER

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What do you hope would be a positive thing to come out of creativity such as making a zine, or any other creative things you do?

All the artwork I create now as an artist stemmed from my identity struggles when I was ill, so I guess my work wouldn't be what it is today without it. Art was the thing that kept me going through cancer. I made marbled papers and collaged for days upon days, made polymer clay jewellery, and started drawing abstract faces to represent how I felt. These processes helped to not only fill the days between treatments, but to take me out of my anxious mind and into the present moment. I appreciate my creative mind for helping me survive in a time of crisis. I hope to continue to use art as a tool throughout my career, and to hopefully help others in need in similar situations.

If you wish to talk about it, how has cancer changed your love/sex life, intimacy and so on?

It had a massive impact upon my sex life. Personally, for me, treatment meant that my libido was practically nonexistent; luckily, I was with my current partner, and he never minded or put any pressure on me. Because of the drastic changes in my body image, from losing loads of weight to gaining loads of weight from steroids, I lost sense of who I was and felt completely disconnected and uncomfortable in my physical body and identity. I think this was the main thing that impacted my sex life because I didn't feel sexy anymore—I saw myself as ill and I didn't understand why my partner would even want to have sex with me. I am lucky to have had such a supportive, amazing partner throughout my journey. Our relationship grew so much in all other areas outside of sex; he saw me at my weakest, most vulnerable points and still loved and accepted me, so our emotional intimacy blossomed.



# BRONTË PALMER

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Suddenly I didn't know what I wanted to do. Cancer was my life for three years, and it's really hard for that to not affect the overall quality of your life. Mentally, my maintenance period was the hardest because I was no longer in hospital every day like I had been for the past seven months. Hospital had become my safety blanket and my identity, and I didn't know who I was without it. I now had life beyond me again and all I felt was intense fear of everything. I developed agoraphobia and would have panic attacks every time I tried to leave my flat. My main ambition was just to be able to feel normal again to be honest, and start experiencing some sort of quality of life again. I was linked with an Occupational Therapist from the Teenage Cancer Trust ward, who helped me no end. I am forever grateful. All I can say is: if you are struggling with anything in life, there is something out there that can help you just by talking it through and creating small achievable goals. It's taken me years to feel somewhat normal again, and there are still parts of me that are not yet healed. Coronavirus has been a massive setback for me and any recent remission cancer patients, as once again, we've been told to isolate. I am used to this process so it wasn't a massive shock to me, but it has been very triggering, especially hearing so many able-bodied people complain about wearing masks and basic things that seem so minuscule in the scheme of things.

What are the side effects most difficult to deal with?

I really struggled with sickness throughout my cancer experience. I had to take really strong anti-sickness tablets which would basically knock me out, because you can't feel sick when you're asleep, right? I love food so much, so not being able to find enjoyment in food for years was really sad. My diet was plain white toast for months on end. I also really struggled with steroid side effects. I experienced light sensitivity migraines which meant I would have to lie in the dark for days, water retention specifically around my knees which was excruciating, as well as extreme rage, sadness and suicidal thoughts.





"I made this self-portrait after my other dog, a greyhound died. We both had cancer so I joked that we were two bitches on chemo."

Christy Lorio

# HAIKUS

By Kimia Etemadi

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My cells dividing;  
a massive lump on my neck:  
cancer of the blood.

Apt autumnal weather  
with crisp leaves, dancing,  
viewed from this hospital bed.

An afternoon breeze  
expels cold air, along with  
the fallen brown leaves.

# CANCER Q&AS

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We asked people to send in their questions to us over Instagram. We wanted to challenge taboos around intimacy, sex, treatment and life after cancer. Here were the responses...

## "Did having sex hurt during treatment?"

I didn't have a boyfriend and I had no libido. This is a bit weird but apparently common, I went through a phase where I thought I was asexual. I still wanted to be intimate and have cuddles with someone but I didn't desire sex unfortunately. Due to the intensity of my treatment, my consultant would've murdered me if I tried (not literally). I guess the best way to explain it is that I had a metaphorical chastity belt placed on me. If I even tried to there would have been dire consequences.

- Cait

Personally I experienced very low to no sex drive and vaginal dryness due to treatment. I did find sex uncomfortable sometimes - luckily I have an amazing supportive partner and we found we just had to get lots of lube involved to help us along. - Bronte

## "What did a friend do to make you feel loved during treatment?"

Honestly just coming to the hospital whenever she could and sitting with me even if i was asleep the whole time or throwing up. Knowing she didn't care, she just wanted to be there was so comforting and i knew that it was a real love and support - which is all anyone going through cancer needs.

- Bronte

# CANCER Q&AS

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"How do you get your libido back while on hormone therapy?"

After finishing treatment, I tried to pleasure myself and quite frankly I ended up injuring myself. When I finally started dating, it was like losing my virginity all over again. I basically had to rediscover my body again. It wasn't until I was on HRT my libido returned and I began thinking about it. Despite being on HRT it's still not at full capacity compared to my teenage years.

-Cait

I didn't have hormone therapy so i cannot comment on that but i think generally you have to be patient waiting fro your libido to build up again after treatment. Your body has been through so much trauma, the last thing you need is to add more pressure to yourself and your body to feel a certain way. I definitely think it's good to buy yourself a new sex toy and start experimenting and play with your body again. More than likely you're not the person you used to be, it's important to be curious with your sexuality and try and love and enjoy your body with yourself before expecting to be able to jump straight into having sex again.

- Bronte

# CANCER Q&AS

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## Advice and tips for coping with steroids?

I found steroids so hard to deal with and never really worked out how best to cope. But from my experience having the freezer stocked with ice lollies, hot water bottles for migraines, sunglasses constantly on, avoid synthetic white lights, black out blinds, a pillow to scream into and punch, tell everyone not to talk to you or say anything that might piss you off, cold flannels, cold foot baths, don't try to do anything important whilst experiencing steroid rage, don't exert yourself on a steroid come down (your body is basically withdrawing from the steroids and symptoms are worse here) talk to family and friends or health care professionals when the mental symptoms become too overwhelming, do not let it get too bad as your mind is working in overtime and though it can be vivid and controlling, be prepared to have horrible dreams - don't worry! It's normal.

- Bronte

Woof steroids are nasty, I'm still on them. Quite frankly DON'T fight the cravings. Whilst on steroids your cortisol levels are increased which is the stress hormone and if you try to fight the cravings you'll only stress yourself out more which is not good for your wellbeing. Also skin care is self care and steroids can make your skin dry. Dedicate time to pamper nights .

- Cait

# MENOPAUSE MATTERS

By Cait Wilde

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When I was 17, I was diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia, which I needed a bone marrow transplant for. I'm now 2 years post-transplant, but have found that the recovery after treatment has been the hardest part of my "cancer journey". I've become quite active in numerous campaigns since my diagnosis and treatment, but have focused quite a lot of my activist energy trying to push for more information and support for younger patients around menopause and sexual health. I'm currently a patient representative for the Teenage and Young Adult (TYA) unit at The Christie, as well as a member of the Youth Advisory Group for the Teenage Cancer Trust's (TCT) advisory panel, meaning that I get to really contribute to changes being made to the future of cancer services for TYA patients. When I finished treatment, I had Premature Ovarian Insufficiency, also known as POI, and as a result found myself going through menopause at the age of 17. I was met with a complete and total lack of knowledge regarding menopause.

I was interviewed and had my own feature in the Daily Mail in January 2021, which had a huge audience and therefore a great impact. I still always feel like I could be doing more to raise awareness of these types of sexual health issues, which can become more harmful the less they are spoken about. I really want to have a tangible, actual impact.

When I tried to masturbate after being discharged, I ended up really injuring myself by accident. I kept quiet about this for a long time and carried a huge amount of shame around with me. I had

no idea that my body was no longer the same and although I assumed that the treatment had had some physical implication on my body, I didn't know how or why. Since this particular incident, I have become passionate about the need for more sexual health resources to be readily available to young cancer patients, as not only are the few pieces currently distributed hugely out of date, they are addressed only to heterosexual couples and do not discuss masturbation, safety or pleasure. These outdated pamphlets completely exclude LGBTQIA+ individuals as well as any identities that aren't cis-gender. I'm determined to change this.

I've been working with two Teenage Cancer Trust Youth Social Coordinators; one from The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre in The Wirral, and one based at The Christie in Manchester on a project doing exactly this; producing some new, accurate and inclusive information about POI, menopause and sexual health to provide to teenage and young adult cancer patients. We have been going backwards and forwards between specialist oncologists, Endocrinologists, and prominent activists in the area, such as Diane Danzebrink (the founder of the #MakeMenopauseMatter movement) to development accurate and up to date information on menopause and sexual health during and after cancer.

I've now seen the booklet in its final PDF form, and the infographics look absolutely amazing! It is now in the last stages of approval, but I have been promised by my Youth Social Coordinator that I'll be the first to receive my very own copy. Naturally, it will have the Teenage Cancer Trust (TCT) branding on it, which is whose ward I'm on, but I've been told that lots of other units are really interested too, including the brain tumour and breast cancer wards. So, this wonderful toolkit will soon be handed out at cancer units across the North West NHS Trusts. I hope

it will be handed out to every young adult patient at some point in the next few months, as I'm so glad that a resource finally exists that anyone can turn to at any point in their journey. I've been quite open about my own struggles with sex and menopause after my cancer treatment, as I'm trying to break the taboo and encourage people to have those types conversations.

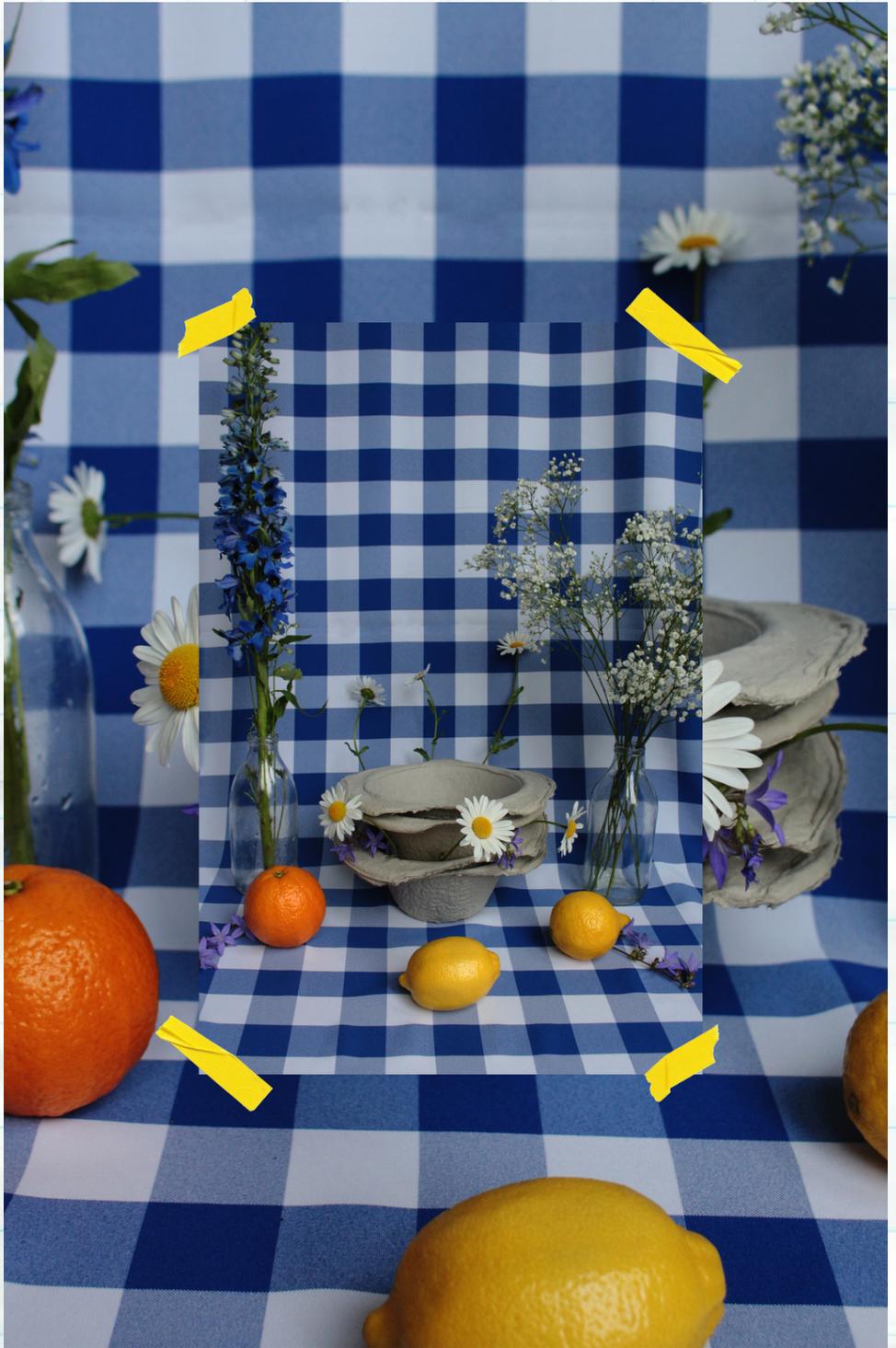
The next steps? I'd really like to create a workshop for one of the TCT's events, 'The Way Forward' programme and 'Find Your Sense of Tumour'. It was actually at Find Your Sense of Tumour in 2019 that

I attended a "fertility workshop", which left me feeling disappointed and infuriated. That's when I started researching information for myself, and that's when it really hit me how much of a struggle it is to find any accurate information around menopause symptoms and sexual health for teenagers and young adults who have had cancer. This whole thing started as small passion project because of one poor-quality workshop, then turned into something a lot bigger. I'm just hoping that all this work and campaigning will have a significant impact on life after cancer for future patients. I don't want anyone to feel as left alone and in the dark as I did, so even though my dad doesn't like how vocal I am about it, I'm happy to continue sharing my experience as long as it encourages other young adults to seek help.

# 'Say you've had cancer without saying you've had cancer'

By Brontë Palmer





# SUNSHINE

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Lying starfish on the grass,  
gorging on golden goodness  
that polishes and shines  
my dampened body and mind  
Hazy rays reaching  
and stretching into every cell  
as they propel me from one  
sunshine thought to another  
Bones warmed, head hugged,  
face freckled, body embraced,  
safety from certainty  
that the sun will shine again

A collection of three poems

## BODY

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Body reclaimed  
Picked up  
like driftwood  
made into art

## EYES

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My eyes  
don't see  
my eyes

## FACE

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A weathered face,  
battered and cracked  
like a broken pot  
Lines map a story,  
but need to be filled  
Maybe, one day, with gold

# BACK TO THE HEART

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It's noisy out there  
But then  
it's also noisy in here,  
in my mind  
In searching for proof  
where is MY truth?  
Out there,  
there's a thousand  
stories and opinions  
In here,  
there's a thousand  
stories and opinions  
I'm looking for what sticks,  
the candle to my wick  
I'm a magpie  
for miracles  
But then trail  
other realities  
It's time to turn in,  
avoid the spin  
Just return to the start  
Go back to my heart



These poems are by Emily Thomas / Not Much  
Rhymes With Cancer. You can find more of Emily's  
work on Instagram @NotMuchRhymesWithCancer.

# THIS PROJECT

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Candid Cancer Collective was an artist commission thanks to Sex with Cancer and Contact. Over several months Ellie from Still Ill Ok? and Rose from Drawn Poorly supported creative activists Bronte Palmer, Cait Wilde and Kimia Etemadi to create a zine project focussed on the experiences of young cancer patients.

## SEX WITH CANCER

Sex with Cancer has been conceived by friends, artists and former cancer patients Brian Lobel and Joon Lynn Goh in dialogue with a Steering Group of community activists, creative thinkers and professionals across sex, sexual health and cancer care. Together Brian and Joon Lynn bring an interest in exploring changing and changed bodies; creating community owned assets; and finding practical solutions for pleasure and enjoyment.



@SexWithCancer SexWithCancer.com

## CONTACT

Contact is where young people change their lives through the arts, and audiences of all ages experience exciting new shows. From our sustainable creative building in Manchester, we produce events, host tours from some of the best theatre companies in the world, and develop the next generation of artists, performers and community leaders.



@ContactMCR ContactMCR.com

Sex  
WITH  
Cancer

**CONTACT**

# THIS PROJECT

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## DRAWN POORLY

Drawn Poorly provides creative opportunities focussed on illness and disability. Through zines, workshops and creative projects, we're dedicated to platforming experiences of illness and disability, providing space and connecting people. stigma and encouraging conversations about living with chronic illness, disability and mental illness.



@DrawnPoorlyZine DrawnPoorlyZine.co.uk

## STILL ILL OK

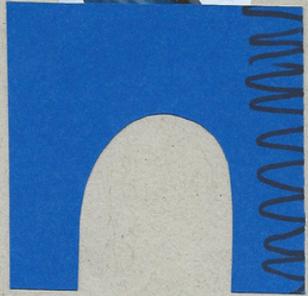
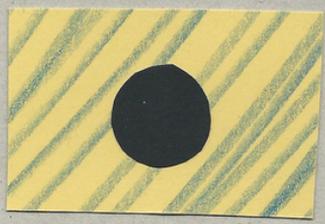
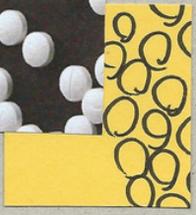
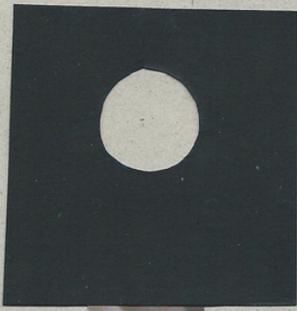
As a self-proclaimed 'art lack-of-movement', the primary aim of Still Ill OK is to spread awareness of accessible activism amongst the chronically ill/disabled/neurodiverse community. Spreading awareness to the wider public of issues that we face in these groups is certainly part of the whole, but truly enabling one another to really understand how we can be and are active, political and important from our small corner of the world, in our small corner of the flat, in our small corner of the bed-, that is what we really hope to achieve.



@Stillill10k Stillill10k

*Drawn  
Poorly*

STILL ILL  
OK?





Find more from us at:



@CandidCancerCollective

[www.CandidCancerCollective.co.uk](http://www.CandidCancerCollective.co.uk)

Cait Wilde



@CaitsWildeCake



@GraftVsCait

Brontë Palmer



@BrontePalmer

Kimia Etemadi



@Etemadi\_Kimia

All Candid Cancer Collective design was created by  
Brontë Palmer