

May to November 2009

A selection of email updates and responses from 2009.
Containing some strong language.

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Subject: Some bad news!

[Matt to the people in the business 10th May 2009]

I am taking the possibly cowardly route to the dissemination of this information. I can't face the phone calls with all of you just at the moment. Also it's important that everyone knows the same facts (and they are a bit difficult to repeat).

On Friday I received what I am taking to be a diagnosis of cancer. The bloke said 'it looks like cancer to me'. I'm taking the view that that was the diagnosis and if it turns out he was wrong, then everyone can be happy.

The facts: I have a tumour in the epiglottal area around the base of the tongue, not quite on my vocal chords. I have a lump on the left side of my neck, recent blood tests showed nothing abnormal, they have taken some cells from the lump and will know more next week, I am having an operation on Friday to remove as much of it as they can. I have massive confidence in the chest and ENT specialist I have seen on Wednesday and Friday respectively. The bloke who is going to do the thing on Friday has published papers on exactly my condition. I told my Mum and Dad and my brother on Friday night.

There's a back story which reflects less well on me and the medical profession. I first presented to my GP having coughed blood in October. I told him I was worried about cancer. He sent me for a chest X-ray (clear) and told me to come back if my cough persisted. I mention this only because there is a massive learning point there. If someone as articulate, assertive and frankly well connected as me can allow something like this to go unnoticed for so long, what hope the normal person? I will probably be following this up with my new friends at Macmillan Cancer Support!

I need to ruin your weekends because I have a feeling that we are going to be relying on all of you massively work wise in the coming weeks and months. I'm sorry if that sounds like your reactions are being taken for granted. I suppose it's a function of my clear idea that there can't be many people in the world who work with and have the support of a bunch of people they connect so well with. Now, more than ever, I think we need to pull together to get byrne-dean through the next bit.

I know we can do it. Some (much) of the calmness and comfort that I am feeling as I face the coming days comes from knowing that the business will be fine, that you are the right people!

I am finding that the early stages of something like this feel like an information management exercise (and I could do with a Director of Communication just now). The recipients of this note are the key byrne-dean project insiders. You all know the truth as I know it.

For anyone outside this group (and of course I exempt here your families and stuff!!) we have decided to say the following:

'Matt has been experiencing some problems with his voice in recent months. For someone who talks for a living and shouts at kids playing cricket for a hobby this is a problem! He has seen a couple of specialists and is having an exploratory operation. He has been warned that, given the complexity of any surgery in the area, recuperation to full capacity may take some time - possibly extending into the summer.'

If you could all stick as close to that script as possible when talking to anyone who is not us, that would be fantastic. It's completely true and not misleading. You can probably understand that we are steering away from any mention of cancer. I am worried that for those who see this as a one man brand, that would be very damaging.

Laura will obviously be in charge of coordinating everything. Already she has been brilliant. It sort of goes without saying that this is one of those times when being in business with your partner is not exactly ideal. VJB's job over the next few months is clearly more difficult than mine. She has already talked about getting help with the boys to ensure that she can spend more time in the business. byrne-dean isn't just something that bears our names.

As I finish typing this it's 6.57am, I'm sitting on top of the South Downs with my dogs, the sun is shining, the birds are singing and the Weald is covered by mist. I sort of know that everything is alright.

Thanks for being part of something.

Michelle to Matt

[10th May 2009]

So, taking you at your word there will be no calling...I did really want to say a couple of things to you though. Not least, thank you for including me on this email. I feel honoured and deeply trusted that you have told me at this stage.

I am so sorry that this has happened. Obviously. That is one half of the 'goes without saying' bit. The other half is that if there is anything, absolutely anything, I can do to help you and Victoria on a practical/business level then just shout. I would consider it a privilege, and have (on occasions) a surprisingly broad network and a motley group of skills that lend themselves to times of crisis. I put all of them at your disposal and trust you will make use of me as you need and see fit.

Now, love, I know you hate the 'love-in' bit, but I am going to say it anyway (although I don't think I'm sentimental, so you will at least be spared that). Matt, you are one of

the strongest people I know. Going forwards you will need this more than ever. Equally, you have a capacity for kindness, clarity, integrity and vision that is extraordinary in my experience. And again, you will need to call on these inner resources perhaps more than you have before. I would only encourage you also to make use of those who love you and want to support you for the days (hours, minutes, weeks?!) when your strength is invisible to you.

Over the past year or so it has been helpful to me (and I share it only with that purpose - ignore it, of course, if it is irritating!) to remember that even the most painful times and emotions pass and there remains joy and beauty to be found. It too passes, but it is there. Life is life and, by definition, carries on regardless of our experiences of it...sometimes that feels like a blessing, and sometimes it's heart-breaking. If you need a safe place to talk you know where I am. Same goes if you want a laugh.

I hope the operation is successful and your recovery speedy. I will miss you whilst you are out.

With very much love, your friend, Michelle
xxx

Jay to Matt

[11th May 2009]

What a masterful cricketing performance from you yesterday. Full stop. Before we even think about the circumstances. I'm sorry I wasn't any help at the wicket!

I'm really grateful that we had a chance to speak before the match. By the same token, assuming that you didn't have a chance to speak to others yesterday, that's also fine. Before you receive a definite diagnosis, it's not as if you're hiding anything. I can't imagine a doctor saying, "That looks like cancer to me" unless he's pretty certain, but it's hard to know what to say to people until you get an undisputed diagnosis and discover the extent of the disease.

Many people are completely overwhelmed when told they may have cancer. Numb with shock, they tire quickly, are distracted easily, and cannot concentrate. On yesterday's evidence, there was a mass transference of symptoms from you to your teammates!

A couple of things to think about (if I may). For someone as successful as you on so many fronts, personal and professional, coping with cancer can be especially difficult because this isn't a challenge like any other: the physical disease is impervious to the qualities (e.g. smarts, persistence, sheer strength of will) and strategies with which we

confront other difficulties that life throws up, and this loss of control and autonomy can be incredibly hard to bear.

Related to this is the temptation to assure people that you're fine when the reality is that you're full of confusion, fear, anxiety, anger and resentment. That's okay as long as there is at least one person to whom you can talk about how you're actually feeling. It's natural to try and protect people and spare them upset, and you may not want to burden others, but you'd be surprised how isolating cancer can be, even for those whose 'support networks' are usually quite strong. So find someone with whom you can talk, no holds barred. And if the hospital offers some sort of counselling that you could access without too much hassle, think twice before deferring.

Sorry, Matty, you didn't ask for my advice but have been landed with it, anyway.

It was really good to see you yesterday, and your courage and evident calm are inspiring.

It was also wonderful to see Nedman. He was in great form!

Love to Boo, Harry, Clem and Ned.

We're thinking of you.

Laura to the team

Subject: Latest news [14th May 2009]

Matt has asked me to fill you in on the latest news following his pre-op appointment yesterday evening.

The surgery tomorrow will not be to remove the tumour but to remove a part of it for testing. Therefore, Matt feels he is likely to be feeling ok next week, all being well he should be out of hospital tomorrow evening.

We won't know the histology of the lump for a week to 10 days but the surgeon felt that it was probably Lymphoma, assuming this is the case then they will not remove the tumour but will shrink it.

So Matt thinks he will be in and out of the office next week if a little distracted.

If you have any questions at all please come back to me

Laura

From Matt

Subject: A little update (17th May 2009)

I am putting together a list of people who are potentially interested in having updates on where we are at the moment. It's so much easier to give information out like this that over the phone. I am basically cutting and pasting from stuff that's going out to the network at work. Please let me know if you want more/less/nothing at all!

That said, I'm really pleased that I have managed to speak to most of you personally during the week. Most people that I have actually spoken to seem to be reassured by the fact that I do seem to be completely normal and upbeat about the whole thing. I really am.

Strength and inner resources by the way (which were mentioned in most of your very powerful responses last week) come not just from within; they come from outside too, from networks like the one we have together. I took and will continue to take great strength from the messages that you all sent back and in the simple message that even the most painful times and emotions pass and there remains joy and beauty to be found. I am finding joy and beauty everywhere: in the greenness and in May's overall beauty, in things the boys say and do, in many very normal things that I wouldn't normally have noticed. My life, or at least my perspective on life has I think been changed forever by my experiences over the last week or so.

The facts

I feel absolutely fine, completely healthy. I do have a sore throat but that's to be expected because on Friday they took a big chunk of the tumour out for analysis. The surgeon who did the job (and in whose care I am now) inspires immense confidence; very understated and very straight talking. He has confirmed that, having 'prodded it', he thinks that his initial instinct was correct and that we appear to be dealing with a lymphoma. From our initial consultation, we were clear that this was the lesser of two evils – particularly insofar as the treatment would not necessarily involve invasive surgery – rather they would shrink it with a combination of radio and chemotherapy. A phrase that one of my cricket mothers (who also happens to be the Dean of the Brighton Hospital Trust) used was that 'early, aggressive interventions are fantastically successful.' The phrase is uplifting but nonetheless somewhat daunting. Our current thinking is that either later this week or perhaps early next week we will get the histology (the analysis) of the tumour. If it is a lymphoma they will then have to find out with a scan whether it has spread to other parts of the lymphatic system and then the fun bit (the 'early, aggressive intervention') can start. I'm thinking that that might smart!

Stay in touch and be strong! With love

Neil to Matt

[17th May 2009]

We resisted the urge to ring you today. You probably should have time to think about the world outside of one small nasty thing that punches above its weight.

By now you may be more expert on the possibilities than anyone and we can only support. Weirdly last month Rupert (co-godparent) had a malignant melanoma taken from his ear in 2 stages. He is now in that feeling of “life changing forever” and that comes from the fact that you are forever waiting for the latest result or review or difficult choice. Very rarely will the team tell you either that the news is completely good or completely bad. On that note I have had patients with lymphomas where even the histologists can't agree on it. Much of the care, however, is thankfully dictated by evidence-based protocols from NICE and others. You actually don't want a maverick surgeon telling you he'd like to do radical laser guided electromagnetic chemo.

Of course you can call any time. That would be nice. Happy to look into Histology ideas. We are still quite able to come visit most of the time as well.

Love to you, to Boo and the Boys.

Neil

John to Matt

[19th May 2009]

Thanks for the reassuring message. It's pretty extraordinary that you can treat the whole business with the same calm you display at the crease--and I don't think that's only down to the strength you draw from your friends. The news didn't have any perceptible effect on your crigged at all. You are the Lance Armstrong of the South Indies. With two gonads instead of one, that is.

Re working and achieving. Wife and kids have kind of done the same for me. They are just the best thing. Although I do still think you should have applied yourself at university.

Lots of love to Boo and the nippers

Tamsin to Matt

[21st May 2009]

Laura told me that you have heard that it is not a lymphoma: not the news we were all hoping for.

I am sure that the next few weeks - and months - will feel like a real struggle.

We are all thinking about you and willing you and Vicky on. So many people at ELA yesterday spoke warmly of you.

I am on holiday for a week but will keep in touch.

love

Tamsin

PS ELA Conference was a great success. I thought you might like to have at least some good news today.

Subject: 2 weeks on

[From Matt 24th May 2009]

(I've added a couple more names to the list. If you don't want to hear this stuff, just let me know (but some of you are asking for it!!))

The first thing to say is that I simply can't believe that it was only two weeks ago that we first heard. It honestly feels like months ago; probably because of the intensity of emotion and the manner in which I have been experiencing normal things. If you notice the intense beauty of a leaf or a smell, if you're very aware of the patterns on the pavement, your brain has a lot more to file!

How am I feeling? Physically I've got a sore throat that I notice when I swallow. Other than, there is nothing at all. I feel great. Emotionally I've woken up this morning feeling great. Ned is playing cricket this morning against the big local rivals, I'm really looking forward to the game and to chillaxing (thanks Clem!) this afternoon while Boo beavers away planting the forest of plants she's had delivered by post. Life as normal in 76a! We're flying to Toulouse on Monday morning and staying near Liz for half term. Waiting in a new location, with lots of good food and wine; watching the boys in the pool is hopefully not going to feel like waiting!

The fact that this is all happening in the sunshine is I think very important. My mood has always been greatly affected by the weather. Last Sunday night was the only time in the

whole experience so far that I have started to feel down and perhaps not by coincidence it was cold and wet. By the way, you should all know that what got me out of that mood was the four emails I received from you after last weekend's status report. As I've said before this thing that people are calling my inner strength is little more than a reflection of the support that I'm getting from everyone. That doesn't mean that everyone has to think of something to say every time I write something!

In broad terms the week falls into two parts. Part 1 - Waiting for news, going to work and sitting at my desk trying to focus on something for the first three days. I've used words like 'distracted' to describe how it feels. I've realised that the voice inside me that I am calling my 'drive' or my focus and which is used to having its own way, suddenly has an organised opposition. Actually that's not true; when the voice suggests something, there isn't an organised response more a wave of white noise that drowns it out saying 'it doesn't matter'. Occasionally the voice comes back with some financial or other 'imperative'. But the wave is too strong and I end up lying on the grass with the dogs, having a lovely lunch with Boo and satisfying Ned's seemingly insatiable desire to catch cricket balls. This is very much a life I could get used to – which is probably going to worry the byrne-dean readership!

Then on Thursday we started to get news. It came first in the form of a call from the surgeon who did the biopsy on Friday. The pathologist didn't know what it was yet but pathology had ruled out a lymphoma. Other headlines from the conversation; the team with responsibility for my care will meet next Wednesday to decide the treatment but within a week or so of that I would be having some serious surgery to remove the lump(s), I would be in the high dependency unit following a tracheostomy(?). He mentioned 'reconstructive surgery of the tongue' and other warm and reassuring things. His frank 'no bullshit' style suited us last week. We had the right man doing the surgery. This week Boo has started to call him the Dementor. If you're not Harry Potter literate, you should know that dementors guard the prison on Askabhan and suck the life out of people. Boo's got an eye for a name. Dementor is also from Wales.

There was a lot of walking round fields and deep breaths on Thursday. We felt duty bound to tell my parents and Boo's mum and sisters. Boo spent most of Thursday night managing their very negative reactions. It was later explained to us by someone who has been through a long cancer battle that we'd fallen into 'the trap'; we'd started to see lymphoma as preferable to the alternative. Why? Basically because the surgeon had said it was. But that's just his view; he's a surgeon. In terms of outcome, there is no reason to see lymphoma as the preferred diagnosis.

Then, of course, the support system that is the real sign of our privileged position kicked in. On Thursday I had texted two mates (both consultants in Brighton) saying I may need some support – thinking that I'd like to talk to them because they could explain this stuff. They spoke at length to Boo. They also spoke to the people who are on the

team. At 5.45pm last night I'm driving back from our new favourite beachside pizzeria and ice cream joint in Hove with my recently broken up boys when Boo calls me to say that Mr S wants to see me at 6.30. He's the head and neck oncologist. If the surgeon is a dementor, this guy is Harry Potter's saintly Mum. We sat and chatted. He took me through the scan; if you've never seen a series of cross sectional pictures of your head and neck projected onto a screen, then you should give it a go. He explained that to him it looks like I have two tumours, the one on the base of my tongue and also the neck node. He explained why he thought the neck node was a second tumour and I heard 'because I look at a lot of scans like this and I've felt it and I think it is'. He said a lot more than that including 'it's outgrown its blood supply so the centre has died' which sounded good and bad at the same time. If you are an expert (or if you know one) he said that in terms of staging he thinks it's T²N^{2a} which is all about the size of the different tumours. He also said that neck cancers don't spread readily and that we will be looking to get local control. I liked that phrase.

Above all he said, as he drew a big line across the page 'this is readily curable.' I think it's important for doctors to start with a line like that and perhaps that's something we could feed back to Dementor boy. He flattered me saying I was clearly fit and strong. So I could take whatever he wanted to throw at me in terms of chemotherapy. He made that sound great; this guy is clearly a pro! He took me through a possible treatment schedule: inductive chemotherapy to shrink it down, targeted radiotherapy to kill it (potentially with more chemo), then after a three month recovery surgery to take out whatever's left there.

In terms of timescale he said that I would probably have three sets of chemo which would be a week in hospital and then three weeks recovery. So that's June, July, August! Then the radiotherapy which you do as an outpatient in literally ten minute bursts. I will probably have to have the radiotherapy at the Royal Marsden where they have a particular type of IMRT scanner. He is concerned to try and protect my saliva glands. He is pretty sure that I will lose the ones on my left side as a result of this treatment. Then there would be a three month recovery and then possibly surgery. He explained that the committee would want to see me; so the Wednesday after we get back from France (June 3rd) it's me, Boo and seven opinions in a room thrashing out the schedule. On the two previous days he is going to try and sort an MRI scan and a meeting with some guys at the Royal Marsden. It's all happening.

So we've got two of the seven opinions who will be at the meeting next Wednesday. I have asked Mr S to phone us after the meeting to tell us what they are proposing. I'm going to go to France feeling really quite positive.

Igor to Matt

[28th May 2009]

I have just read you last email via Isabelle and James. My first instinct is to offer you reassurance and ask you not to worry – but having had a recent experience of cancer professionalitis myself there is much more at stake than simplistic good wishes. I thought it funny and had a chuckle at your over zealous welsh surgeon – some welsh people do like you Matt – well one does – me!

I am glad knowing that you and Boo are good interrogators – that skill will stand you well in dealing with the brutal haphazard medical system. Do take your doctors to task over all the decisions they are making and question the effectiveness and downsides of any treatments. Ideally no treatment should be worse than what you have.

But most of all Matt if you or Boo want to call any time and talk shit or have a whinge or even bang on about the weather like a true Englishman you can call me on my mobile 0401 *** 021. My belief and confidence is that you and Boo will make the right moves where this illness is concerned and kick its arse (or neck) and I will see you and the kids down here for a long summer soon.

If you need anything please let me know. My thoughts and good wishes are with you.
Best Wishes and much Love

Igor

David to Matt: 'Lost for Words'

[27th May 2009]

No doubt you're still basking in Basque Separatist sunshine as I write this. It's Wednesday and pissing it down here at Foxcotte, so there's a certain amount of envy involved in this note.

I've got a big problem. I'm lost for words - not something I usually suffer from. What can I say to you, having just read the second enthralling episode of "Doctors"? It's surprisingly difficult to think of anything that doesn't sound cliched (aka fake). All that stuff about battling and bravery can surely be taken as read.

Oh yes, something's just come through and it deserves a line all to itself

WHAT A FUCKING TOSSER!

That sums it up perfectly. It's a total tosser. It's difficult (impossible?) for anybody who hasn't been diagnosed with tumours to totally comprehend what it means psychologically (let alone physically). I was most taken by

your description of the heightened response you have felt towards the world around you - and especially the family. A few years ago I was (mis)diagnosed with Crohns disease and for a while went through a very similar experience. It's like being a child again in many ways, concentrating on, and getting huge pleasure from, the micro rather than the macro. Even my hearing and sense of smell seemed to magically sharpen (though they've got seriously blunted since!)

I think your newsletter is a brilliant idea. I've always found the process of organising my thoughts in order to get them down on paper extraordinarily therapeutic. It's like writing a powerpoint presentation and being forced to sum up pages of total bollocks into eight or ten succinct points. It concentrates the mind wonderfully, and makes you sort out what's important and what's not. It doesn't solve the problem, but at least you've ring-fenced it. Plus, of course, we're all kept up to date.

Chris to Matt

[29th May 2009]

Not much to say other than good luck and be yourself...I am sure there's enough within you and around you to cushion the difficult days, and to celebrate the good days, minutes and moments with those who love you. You sound not at all totally and utterly absorbed by this thing, and that you see the value on giving attention to all other things around you as usual; its good.

Have a great holiday and I will call again; you don't need to give the whole story each time, am sure it gets boring to do so. Just make sure Boo's responses to all this don't induce mass frippery-related activity....the house won't stand it.

Much love mate, to you, to the missus and to the boys

Michelle to Matt

[30th May 2009]

I am looking out of my kitchen door at a view Ru loved - and I mean loved!

It's 3 sky scrapers (the kind that nearly made me nearly not move in to his place), and when I didn't get it he said 'look harder - can't you see? It's the space in between the buildings that makes them beautiful'.

Since then I have been taken by the space between things, and I was looking at the space this evening and seeing you.

Love

M

Xxx

Subject: The End of Week Three

[31st May 2009]

Going to France this week was absolutely the right call. We have had a perfect week; sunshine, friends, fields of barley swaying in the wind, cool, fast flowing rivers, baguettes. The back drop has allowed me to recognise what 'living in the moment' actually means. This balcony, the warm breeze, the taste of the coffee, the sun on my face, the words I'm writing; that is what matters. Turning everything else off; dealing with it when it matters. It's a revolutionary approach for me. Communication is unrecognisable from its previous form; you actually listen to the words someone is using and work out what they mean.

We were interrupted on Wednesday by two calls from reality. Dementor boy was first. He uses a checklist when he talks. At the end of a conversation he actually says 'so this is what I have told you'. That's great. It means you get the information. Finally I got the confirmation that I have a cancer: a squamous cell carcinoma. Fortunately, his opinions had not held sway in the clinical discussion earlier that day. The overall view was that surgery at this stage would be too 'mutilating'. I wonder if he could have used a slightly softer word to convey a similar impression? Just a thought. He also said that more than one lymph node has been affected which was new information. The treatment would be radiotherapy and chemotherapy first. At Boo's suggestion I asked him what the mood of the meeting had been. He thought and said 'Well, you've got a big tumour.' This was the first time that I had grasped that size matters in this game.

Later, during the football, Mr S phoned. He was at home, I could hear his kids. What a decent bloke; and also clearly not a member of United's Sussex Fan Club. Basically he said that what he and I had discussed last Friday is pretty much what we will be doing. Inductive chemotherapy will start straight away; it is quite generic treatment. The way that the lump(s) react to the first doses of chemo is a very important indicator of overall progress; if they show signs of shrinking that is good! He is writing a letter of referral to the Royal Marsden for the radiotherapy. I got a slight sense that he was positioning a full handover to the Marsden. This is something that he had mentioned on Friday night and sounded fine then. Somehow on Wednesday night I wondered whether they were sending me there because of the severity of the situation? He didn't say as much and I didn't ask.

I am very consciously not asking any questions that may have as their answer a percentage. I don't see it like that. I am in my own scrap and the circumstances of that scrap are unique. Also, if it is extremely rare for someone of my age to get this, what help are statistics? The small sample size will make any prediction unreliable.

I hadn't understood why if the malignancy was in the lymph nodes, this wasn't a lymphoma and joining up with the rest of the lymphatic system. I understood his explanation: infections in the throat 'drain into' the lymph nodes; that's why your glands

go up when you have a sore throat.’ It’s basically the same with cancer. A tumour on the base of the tongue will drain into the lymph nodes. But only a malignancy that starts off in the lymph nodes will travel freely to the rest of the lymphatic system.

I also asked Mr S about the mood of the meeting and told him what Dementor boy had said about that. He didn’t disagree; the size of the tumour(s) had been an important factor in the discussion. There will almost certainly be surgery to clear the lymph nodes after chemo and radiotherapy. Again he said that the condition was curable. He then said words that caused me to doubt myself I think for the first time. He said that the tumour was of such a size that that result ‘was not a given.’

I didn’t sleep much on Wednesday night. I watched the skylight turn from black through various purples and greys to a light and then a beautiful blue. When Boo and I talked about it in the morning we were in agreement: the words he had used actually took us no further forward. We had known that nothing was a given. What I had learnt though on Wednesday night was that I really can’t look at the whole process. I have to break it down and live in the moment. So now I am into the phase of ‘preparing for chemo and setting up radiotherapy in London’. We also have to see all of the doctors next Wednesday which, given the effect of conversations with one of them, is likely to be quite impactful. But I am back on it with my fundamental belief in tact.

We had an insight into how rough the ride might be with the boys on Friday night with Clem. He took me aside and asked me about the treatment. He then asked whether this thing could kill me. We have bigged up the idea of honesty all week, so I had few hiding places! He was upset. But in the morning he seemed fine. He’s got quite upset a couple of times since but overall I think he knows that we’re going to fight this thing together and he’s up for it too!

Expecting a busy week starting with an MRI scan tomorrow.

Jacky to Matt

[31st May 2009]

Thank you so much for this update; it is good that your treatment is starting straight away. Starting the treatment will give you some locus of control (it certainly did me) and is the start of the fight back.

I'm thinking about you and wishing you courage and focus as you go through this journey. I also think you are right to honest and straightforward with the boys - they will be upset, but why wouldn't they be? I have always thought it was, in a way, respectful as a parent to include children in information-giving, anyhow in as much as they can comprehend.

Victoria to Matt

[31st May 2009]

Your emails are incredibly powerful.

In three weeks time we are going to our friend's Andrew's 40th birthday party – this time last year his wife Emma, was diagnosed with cancer of the oesophagus (sp?). She's 36. They talked then a lot about “unknowns” as she was so young and at their baby's christening a few weeks later, Andrew and Emma had difficulty working out how to deal with the magnitude of the thing they faced.

But faced it they did – slow steps, day by day – as you and Victoria will do. Emma is in full remission now – not a strange cell in sight. And we are ready to party in a few weeks time for these dear friends of ours. I really have no doubt at all that you and Victoria, with all the people that love you, will attack this thing and that you will win. I think that you are wise to take bit by bit - your strength will see you through.

I understand it get quite noisy in the MRI scan so ask for some loud music.

One day at a time Matt.

With love

Victoria

Lindsey to Matt

[1st June 2009]

Your emails are truly remarkable. They are lucid, honest and uplifting. You are truly remarkable. Paring life down to its essence, to its essential core, to enable you to keep focused and ready to fight this.

You are absolutely right to take the course of honesty with the boys, incredibly hard though it is. So many times, children are shut out in some kind of attempt to protect them. It doesn't. They just fill in the blanks with dark imaginings which, as we know, can be worse than the reality. It is a great credit to you and Victoria that you are able to include them honestly in this journey.

My love and thoughts with all of you.
Lindsey

Tamsin to Matt and Barry

[1st June 2009]

From nowhere, William C*****y has popped into my mind as the Dementor. He is an old friend of Matt, but Barry here he is - mind, if they set Bonfire of the Vanities 'up norf' he would be the Michael Douglas character.

http://www.*****.com/lawyers/profile.asp?hubbardid=C297527493

Having said that, if I was going to do some fighting (even if only metaphorically speaking), I would definitely pick him for my team...

Surgeons, eh. 2 doctors I know happened to be working together and they relayed this illuminating discussion. By the way, "A" is an orthopaedic surgeon - 6 foot 4, big, big grin, nice bloke, not very academic, likes motorbikes; "S" is a plastics surgeon, same height as me, delicate fingers, double first from Oxford. They related their discussion over a man with maimed hand:

A: come on. let's just take it off

S: No, we can mend it

A: It'll be rubbish. It'll never work. Let's just take it off

S: It will work. Give it a try.

A: Don't be a softie. We'll just have to take it off later on. Take it off now.

S: I'm going to mend it

A: I'll get my saw.

Luckily, everyone in hospitals know what surgeons are like and that's why they are usually kept in a box. Funnily enough, A's wife is a consultant radiologist at the Royal Marsden..

Matt, thank you for your eloquent and wonderful email. Con and I have been thinking of you all. Carpe diem indeed. I can't hope to find the right words. But, in my own carpe diem moment, I found myself watching Susan Boyle's audition for Britain's Got Talent on YouTube over the weekend (I was reading about fundamental rights - it was boring).

Gentlemen, I cried..So, now I have shared my moment of weakness with you, I hope you will feel able to keep sharing yours with me...

Matt to a wider client group

[2nd June 2009]

Three and a half weeks ago I was told that it looked like I have cancer. That has now been confirmed. I have a large tumour on the base of my tongue and further tumours in the lymph nodes on the left side of my neck. My treatment will start later this week and is likely to last on and off for the rest of the year at least (although obviously no-one can be certain). The current thinking is chemotherapy followed by radiotherapy and possibly a surgical intervention. To date I have not felt in the slightest bit ill, but I think that may change!

I feel very calm and extremely positive. I can't see the sense in being otherwise. For me 'cancer' is just a word. The next few months are about me, the people who love me and my medical team taking on some errant cells in my body. It's going to be a fight but I am confident that there will be a good outcome. I also think that good things will happen because of this. From the start I have felt privileged and energised to be surrounded by the people around me offering support and by the resources apparently at my disposal. I have started to see things very differently!

The byrne-dean team have been absolutely fantastic; it really is business as usual! Jane Kissack is taking over temporary responsibility for all client facing projects and Liz Stanley will be picking up some of the managerial burden. Of course, Victoria and I are not going away and want to be involved in things; our focus though is likely to be elsewhere to a greater or lesser extent in the coming months. My experienced and very practical oncologist said that he would advise not taking on any new clients for the moment, to focus on the ones I've got and perhaps warn them that they may not get quite the level of personal attention they have come to expect from me.

Be positive!

Debbie to Matt

[2nd June 2009]

Dear Matt,

Thank you so much for letting me know about your health news. I am so impressed by your calm and pragmatic approach. I have been living with cancer for the past 5 years and can assure you that I look at it exactly the same way - just get on with it. You are now a member of a rather exclusive club which will bring you in contact with some amazingly generous people, give you positive insights about yourself and will probably

change your outlook on life for the better! If I can help in any way , if only to share some tips on experiences don't hesitate to email or call at any time - mob probably best.

Thinking of you. Debbie

Sarah to Matt

[2nd June 2009]

Oh hell. You are right, it is just a word. But the process of dealing with it is tedious and disruptive. For other friends who have gone through it, one of the oddest things is feeling perfectly well, as you say, and agreeing to start treatment which is likely to make you feel distinctly not so. I wish you a lovely and loving summer, with plenty of time to rest and recuperate beside sunny cricket fields, and look forward to seeing you bouncing back into our working world later in the year.

Much love to you, and to Victoria and the boys - Sarah

Laura to the membership of Ditchling Juniors

[2nd June 2009]

I am very sorry to be the bearer of this news but, Matt has asked me to forward on the below statement to you all, this has also been published on his page of the website:

Three weeks ago I was told that it looked like I have cancer. That has now been confirmed. I have a large tumour on the base of my tongue and further tumours in the lymph nodes on the left side of my neck. My treatment will start shortly and is likely to last some considerable time. To date I have not felt ill; I think that may change!

I am not frightened. For me 'cancer' is just a word. The next few months are about me, the people who love me and my medical team taking on some cells in my body that are misbehaving. It's going to be a fight. I am confident that there will be a good outcome and also that many good things will happen because of this.

In the last few weeks the performances and application of Ditchling's junior cricketers have been a major focus of mine and have helped me to deal with the adjustments that I have had to make. I feel privileged to be surrounded by the people around me and to have the resources to draw on that I do. You are all a part of that. Please support me by seeing that we play cricket in the way that you know we should and by enjoying it to the full.

I will be around as much as I can be. I'm happy to talk about this. I haven't changed; some cells in my body are acting up!

Gareth (cricket Dad) to Matt

[2nd June 2009]

I am writing in response to your note about your cancer. Your response is the only one that you can have. It will drive you forward and sustain you in the experience.

Last August we discovered my wife's breast cancer. There followed a series of further and stressful tests about spread and prognosis and actions. In the end she had a full left breast mastectomy, some lymph nodes removed and had chemo for 6 months. One treatment every 3 weeks.

This ended in Feb. 2 weeks ago she had a full reconstruction and our first check-up is in July.

She is a rock - little shakes her. So are you. You are clear in decision making, tough in outlook and have the heart of a lion, use that strength. Cancer is one word that summarises hundreds of different diseases. You are absolutely right to be strong and positive.

Matt, two things I would also like to say, understanding I was watching (not playing!):

1. Don't feel the need to be brave all the time. Have someone you can share your fears or make statements or show your real feelings to.
2. I am sure you are surrounded by close friends and family, but if Andrea and I can help or chat about our experience then nothing would give me greater pleasure if you would like it. You give so much to these boys, it would be my pleasure to give something back.

If I can help with training also do let me know who to speak with - I will do whatever I can to assist.

God Bless You Matt,

Rob to Matt

[2nd June 2009]

I received the email below this morning and then received a similar one from Pattie Walsh. I read both emails on my Blackberry during a break in an all day meeting. The emails certainly put things in perspective! They made me swallow hard, firstly because of the terrible news but also (and perhaps more so) because of the great dignity and bravery with which you described your situation.

I wish you the very best in the weeks and months ahead as you fight off the cancer. I'm sure it won't be pleasant but rest assured there will be a lot of people like me willing you on and hoping to help in any way we can.

Keep fighting,

Karen to Matt

[2nd June 2009]

Hello Matt

Just wanted to say 'hello' and 'how are you?' tonight.

I saw Rachel on Saturday at the U10s who told me about your histology confidentially and out of earshot of anyone else (hope you don't mind) and Adrian forwarded the message that has been sent out to all the cricketers today...

I thought it was terrific that you saw that performance on Sunday – it is quite unbelievable what you and the other Ditchling coaches have created in those small boys in such a short time and I am so glad that you were there to see it.

Personally, I believe that if you can get ordinary enthusiastic village kids to play cricket like that, then beating this diagnosis is easy in comparison...

I always think that knowing the name of something makes it easier to put into its box and then defeat it. It actually does not really matter that it is lymphoma versus squamous cell carcinoma versus anything else.. they can all be written down in one sentence, have appropriate (albeit unpleasant-sounding) treatment and than are cured so that you can move on..

It is however always much, much better if the original cells are still clearly identifiable as e.g. squamous cells than if they are so abnormal that it is not possible to work out what they were originally..

I remember that the original plan was that you would meet the whole team tomorrow but I don't know if that is still required as it sounds as if you have a very clear treatment plan/pathway already..

If you do have to meet them all, good luck – although a fairly intimidating set of titles/degrees, they are all delightful and very, very good at what they do and I know that you are just the sort of patient who does the very best from their team input..

Equally, if you have been spared the 'trial by numerous consultants', I wanted to wish you the very best for the intensive treatment about to start later this week..

There is no way to dress this up Matt, the treatment is no fun at all. However, the treatment is all a means to an end.. cure and freedom from this hanging over you. I KNOW that you have the family and friends right behind you to give you the strength to get through it in the short-term with such positive long-term gains. You could not be a fitter fighter to 'bring it on' and you will get through it...

If there is ANYTHING we can do for you, Vicky or the boys, don't hesitate..

In the meantime, all our best positive vibes are with you..

Love and best wishes

Karen

Michelle to Matt

[3rd June 2009]

How you doing my love? Holding up? When do you start?

Matt to Michelle

[3rd June 2009]

Have actually just had some apparently very good news - the histology says it's P16. So related to the HPV virus not smoking. We're both feeling bouyed up by that as this typically means it reacts better. Starting soon with the drugs!

On Sunday 7th June (Day 4 of Matt's first chemo session) his two cricket sides: the South Indies and Ditchling played their annual match. Boo had managed to get hold of a Cup and got it engraved. It was an emotional day by all accounts, not least when Matt's eldest son bowled his first overs for the Indies – the team of old college mates that Matt has bullied into staying together for over 20 years now.

Mark (Captain of Ditchling) to Matt

Subject: Sunday and other things *[5th June 2009]*

Wanted to drop you a note, tried to call but no one home will try again later. I just wanted to say I think this cup is brilliant and I have to say that I feel the utmost admiration and respect for the way you have handled all of this.

Thinking of you and your family and Godbless.

Mark

Sham to Matt, Doug etc

Subject: The Glorious Sindies *[8th June 2009]*

Hopefully you'll have heard about the boys' terrific efforts in securing victory and the inaugural Macmillan cup yesterday. We chased down 243 – yes, you read that right – to win by 6 wickets.

Doug's marathon 42 off about 150 balls saw us most of the way there, though he got a bit of help from Dee (holding the trophy), who scored 128 not out. Harry turned in a tidy little 3-over spell for us too.

Here are some pictures marking the occasion. Hope you enjoy them.

See you soon

Sham (on behalf of all the Sindies)

Doug to Sham and Matt

[8th June 2009]

48 not 42 !! Makes all the difference to me. Good to see you y'day. *[Doug had visited me on the cancer ward ahead of the game.]*

Matt to Sham and Doug

[8th June 2009]

I've just seen these photos. I find it difficult to sum up their importance and value. We have created something very, very special, but we know that. Looking at those pictures of Harry, I am sure of one thing: he now understands the thing that we understand!

Doug saw that I wasn't at my best on Sunday. It's inspiring to me to know that just down the road such a positive thing was happening.

Doug to Matt

[11th June 2009]

Sorry to catch you at a bad moment on Sunday, the only one on a very good day. You would of course have loved it. Ditchling's skip Mark fought ferociously but in the end was gracious in defeat. Fantastic innings from Dee, real, unusual class and of course Harry's three overs which put serious moral pressure on them. Anyway I assume you're much better than you were. Take care.

Clare to Matt

Subject: Matthew Dean, Matthew Dean, his avoirdupois was once obscene [8th June 2009]

I had a chat with Sula this morning, who told me your news. Bummer.

I just wanted to say, as one (former) chemo patient to another, that it's kind of not as bad as you expect, apart from the hair loss, which is worse. But it grows back.

All in all, I would say that the most serious damage is to the psyche, so do watch out for that. I was into the Larry Sanders and the Thick of It DVDs; found Father Ted a little too bleak. I never tried the group therapy approach, partly because I was trying to remain in denial and partly because I didn't have time, but now I think I probably should have done more of That Kind of Thing. Talking to people who know what you're going through, and can even prepare you for the next phase, is more valuable than I thought. But just talking to people, particularly ones who make you laugh, is the best treatment of all.

I hope that's not too presumptuous of me; just wanted to share the hard-won knowledge a little. Sending you lots of love - and to Boo and the kids too.

Clare xxxxxxx

Hope you appreciate the title, which was from one of Hugh's more memorable poems.

Karen to Matt

[10th June 2009]

Just wanted to say 'hello' again..

Tony was giving me regular 'coffee' updates last week.. i.e. how many times he had managed to sneak into Howard 1 with coffee for you when he was not officially allowed to!! A staff badge seems invaluable...

I am guessing that you may be feeling pretty rotten at present? I saw Rachel picking up Harry and Clem on Monday and it sounded as though you were just home with the chemo just starting to hit...

It IS toxic stuff, which is why it works, but it can make even healthy people feel dreadful so just keep those teeth gritted and take all the chemicals they offer – it is for a very good purpose...

If you want to moan, laugh, shout, cry or whatever... just here anytime...

Love and best wishes

Karen

x

Matt to Clare

[11th June 2009]

The poem comes from another lifetime! Thommo doesn't apparently change and perhaps he still does use (create?) words like avoirdupois. We had a pint together in the sunshine a couple of weeks ago.

You shouldn't apologise for any presumption on your part. I am open to any advice and help, especially from people who know what it's like. It's obvious to me that everyone's experience of and approach to cancer is highly individual. I note that you 'tried to be in denial.'

From the start I saw this as something to be public about; I wanted to be a positive cancer role model for the children I coach cricket to and for the hundreds of people I have some connection with or influence over who may in their lives be affected themselves by cancer. I have come to realise that this is not altogether altruistic; I am someone whose energy and strength comes from others, not from inside. The support and love I have received from sometimes totally unexpected sources has enabled my approach.

I'm just coming out of the first of three chemo sessions. I think maybe that as a bloke (who literally has never been ill) I am struggling a bit with reasserting the positive mental attitude I had when I was physically fine now that I just want to go back to bed all the time!

I am going to contact a healer who has been recommended to me who works with your energy fields. I don't think I am attracted to the group thing either, but maybe that's because I haven't explored the available counselling routes at all. We think we are doing all right with the boys, but each one seems to be reacting differently. Boo is being absolutely fantastic and handling all the wider relationships incredibly well.

Thanks for being there. I have sent out a few emails updating people of how it's going - but am very conscious that you may not want to be reminded of chemo wards and nausea!

Matt

Subject: Another Sunny Weekend

[15th June 2009]

As I write this (on the morning of Sunday 14 June or Day C37) I feel absolutely physically normal. I have slept well, I am drinking coffee. I had a normal day yesterday, watching cricket. There is a slightly strange taste in my mouth – but that's about mouthwash. On a truly normal day, I would probably now be contemplating a walk up the Downs with the dogs. If I contemplate something like that, I have a sense of not having the energy to do it. I'm not often ill but I recognise the phase or sense of slight weakness that accompanies recuperation.

I came off the toxic chemotherapy drugs six days ago. It has taken a long time for me to sit down and write this update. I know why that is. The chemotherapy ward had a very significant and complex impact on me that I don't think I have yet processed fully. I'm far from clear that I can do it justice, but I want to try.

My last email was sent two weeks ago. On the Monday I had an MRI scan (which I found strangely relaxing) and I took control of my own hair loss; I had a number 1 all over – the old fashioned 'skinhead' cut. On the Tuesday Boo and I crossed the threshold of the Sussex Cancer Centre. Should they call it something different? I can't decide. Somehow though, the honesty is probably reassuring. There was a real significance to entering that building and I recognised the moment.

There we met a saintly red haired woman with one of the most reassuring names on the planet; Cath. She was one of the ward staff and she took Boo and I through what was going to happen. Reflecting back, I must ask her when I next see her whether everyone in those initial discussions uses phrases like 'if I was a normal person with cancer'.

The next day we returned to the Centre with a bag full of books and DVDs and a sense that we were finally starting to engage with this thing. We started with something that felt very daunting called the 'Joint Clinic'. It turned out to be a big sunny room with upwards of 15 people standing in various states of engagement with me (the patient). They were curiously banked in order of seniority and the most senior ones were introduced to me. It went well. I obviously told a couple of jokes to break the ice; I am a facilitator after all. I couldn't avoid it. The bloke who was going to put the camera tube up through my nose asked me which was my best nostril [for inserting a tube with a camera attached to it through]? It was a gift. As Boo keeps saying, these are the boys who weren't very good at English at school. I don't remember Dementor boy being there.

Things that were great about the Joint Clinic: first was the comment, 'it looks much smaller in real life than on the scan'. Second the description of the thing, 'hanging off' the back of my tongue [as opposed to being 'embedded' or 'concealed']. Suddenly Ned's suggestion of getting rid of this thing with a really big burp seemed less

ridiculous. The third was an analysis of the histology which showed that this thing was 'P16 positive'. At its simplest this means that the tumour is related in some way to a virus rather than being caused by my lifestyle choices such as smoking and drinking. Richard [that's what I want to call my oncologist] had made it quite clear when we first met that this was preferable and he now expressed himself to be 'excited' by this revelation. Interestingly, he would have closed our meeting without looking in detail at the histology had I not asked him specifically what the histology had shown. I'm learning that even with the good ones, if you want to learn, you need to ask!

Boo and I both felt a moment of exhilaration in that discovery. Yes we've already learnt that to see one thing as good and another as bad is a trap; that we need to treat Kipling's twin imposters just the same. But it's probably OK to allow something to feed your positive mental attitude. In the same meeting Richard had talked about this being a long haul, had highlighted that I would feel at my lowest at the end of my radiotherapy (October?) and talked about having to use feeding tubes. But we had heard that it was P16 and Boo had looked at the tumour on the screen during the joint clinic and thought it looked 'worried'. We entered the chemo ward [Howard 1] on something of a high.

Howard 1 is small. It has nine beds and low ceilings. It's in one of the hospital's Victorian wings. It's on the ground floor and all windows are on to the car park. There are two small rooms at the end with sofas and chairs. Those are the physical surroundings. The ward though is really the team. Dedicated, warm, practical professionals single-mindedly focused on making my experience bearable, on treating me as a person.

Incarceration is a word that kept coming to me. I was there for five nights. I've got an insight into that now. I love flying long haul. But even for me, when you're flying to somewhere like Sydney, there comes a moment, probably an hour or two out of Singapore when the mask cracks slightly, when you can't motivate yourself to do another hour on the figures or to watch another film. You just wish you were there. My first experience of Howard 1 was a 120 hour flight. It's just how it felt. I had a flat bed, I had a choice of endless films or games, I had sixty personal emails to reply to. The staff were fantastic, I could walk around and go to the loo or get a drink.

The mask started to crack I think on the Friday night. Also I started to get a bit sick then. Nothing dreadful, just a bit queasy. I was sick a couple of times over the weekend. But it was the tiredness, the feeling of constraint, the wanting to unplug myself from the little black bag on a stand dripping the stuff in that really ate into me.

In Howard 1 there is real life and no pretence. There were other patients. I had four or five separate neighbours during my five night stay. The rest of the ward was full too. There was no sharing. Not of names, stories or even mints. We are fighting in the same war but the battles that we are engaged in are completely individual. Some of the

simple things I heard those neighbours say, so matter-of-factly, so bravely, have opened my eyes to other peoples' worlds in a way that endless liberal minded imagining never could. I can't share those comments. They were private. But I know that they have changed me. The coming weeks and months will show exactly how.

Walking free was not anti-climactic. No drip stand and the promise of a bath. Sending Boo away probably wasn't a good idea. I collapsed (fainted) on getting out [of the bath] and bashed my head. Boo wasn't very happy! I slept in our beautiful bed, I watched the leaves dancing and the wire that slants across the sky. I recognised the beauty of my position. By Thursday I was feeling normal in parts and less invaded by the chemicals. The next week is about getting myself stronger and fitter than I was before.

Barry to Matt and Boo

Subject: Just a few words *[15th June 2009]*

I just wanted to drop you a line to say that you and the boys are all very much in my thoughts - and Kathryn's too. As I mentioned to Matt the other day, the six-year old son of my oldest friend was recently operated upon to remove a brain tumour which analysis showed to be malignant. He started chemo this week at the Royal Marsden.

I know so many people talk of 'holding' others 'in their prayers' and, a few years ago, so would I. The truth is that I believe very little of all that now. I'm not much of a prayer person any more, and I'm not near enough to do any holding. But the alternative can be just as powerful, so let me be more precise: I reckon I think about you at least once every 15 minutes or so, sometimes fleetingly, sometimes for much longer. I think about fragility, arbitrariness, love and affection. Matt's positivity and optimism has, until now, facilitated my denial. In change curve terms, I'm just about moving past that now - probably entering the resistance phase.

The biggest issue for me comes from thinking about how I would feel watching Kathryn, Elena, Dan or Manon going through the same thing. And then I know that almost nothing I can say will make any difference. But the answer is not to say nothing, but just to say something. And something that conveys a little of what I want it to convey - which is that I am so very sorry this is happening but so desperate for you to have the strength to see it through to what I hope, more than anything, is a successful outcome.

I saw something in the shops at the weekend that I thought might be a distraction for you both. It will be in tomorrow's post.

Take care
Barry x

Michelle to Matt

[15th June 2009]

Hi honey – when I read this I thought of Ranulph Fiennes’ motto – “plod forever” – you don’t get a break, but you also don’t have to run, you just have to plod indefinitely.

Thinking of you, and it sounds to me like you are doing amazingly well.

Igor to Matt

Subject: Another chilly Melbourne morn *[15th June 2009]*

I like the fighting talk, the metaphor of a battle/war is often useful. What does the fight involve Matt? If you need to borrow a pair of my steel toe capped boots and set of knuckle dusters I will send them. If you need some spit to fling in the eye of your enemy I will send it.

On a more practical note, a good friend of mine has recently gone thru the chemo and radiotherapy session for a similar tumor in his neck and throat – I spoke to him in length about what he did and how he fought and won.

Some interesting points for you – My friend Graeme saw a Chinese herbalist/naturopath and he gave him some homeopathic cream that minimised the tissue burning on his neck (from Radiotherapy) and gave him a plum and pear tea to drink to help with the saliva glands and throat dryness and burning. I strongly recommend getting some alternative medical help. It’s not part of the recognised system of our western science and involves you leaving the skeptical slippers at the door.

We can’t measure, test, define and verify everything – ask your medical specialist where the machine is that measures the amount of support, care and love people have for you? Science is limited and narrow – look wider and find more allies - you will need them.

On a more serious note I noticed the Argies gave England a touch up as did the French to the all blacks. I’m keen to see the lions have a crack at the springboks – I don’t think it’s a great side however they do lift for the big occasions. The Boks have had a good super 14 run and really thumped the aussie and kiwi teams – both of which are running with an under 16 line up in an effort to replace aging players.

Cheers
Igor

Chris to Matt

[17th June 2009]

You sound cheerful and up-beat; good for you.

I bought a Four-Tops album from the bargain bucket in a supermarket here yesterday and old memories of Matt Northern-Soul Brother came back, Jolly Miller, wedge cuts etc; good days.

Take care and continue with the update diary; you can publish and become a millionaire....just come up with a witty title. I propose 'I am Cancer Boy'

Life is full of twists, some wonderous and beautiful, others not so; driving to work today, I take a short cut through a mud road and came across a dead pregnant woman lying at the roadside. There seemed to be no car stopped, so I assumed she had been mugged overnight; it was truly awful. The police were there, as were people taking photos on their mobile phones! Life surrounds us and we never see it; death just tries to mug us sometimes, so use our eyes and LIVE, use them to see the spectre approach and beat its ass! I need to heed this, as I have struggled really to use the opportunities I have been given and look inwardly, seeing darkness, rather than outward and seeing great things around me.

Love to the Dean-ites
degs

Tamsin to Matt

[18th June 2009]

Thank you Matt

I have read this several times. Like you, I feel immensely – and irrationally - cheered by the P16 thing. And I am cheered by the sense that the “fight-back” has begun. I like Ned’s image. When Kitty was little, she got a shell stuck high up in her nose – off to A&E; just about to hold her down whilst doctor extracted it, you can imagine the anxious moments....when atishoo! She sneezed and the thing flew out across the room. What a relief. Imagine if you just coughed and, there it was, in your hand – an ugly tumour with a little stalk hanging off.

I like the Joint Clinic. Have you ever read / seen the film “Doctor in the House”. You must – it’s very funny. I will try to track down my book.

I have spent a fair amount of time in hospitals over the years. It can give you an insight into the human condition – and the real nature of equality like nothing else. And it always makes me look at my life – and other people – in a different way.

Liz and Jane have been absolutely fabulous. It feels like byrne-dean is in really safe hands and we are all just getting on with the job.

Take care

Tamsin

Karen to Matt

[18th June 2009]

Dear Matt

Late on Thursday night seems to be when I think 'I wonder how Matt is getting on?'.. You looked so well on Sunday and it was great for the boys (and us) to see you even though they were not performing at their best (especially Alex)...!

Hope you are not feeling too tired /sick / ill from the chemo?.. All are possible...?! Be especially wary of sun exposure.

Was it my imagination or did the swelling already look better..?

Keep going Matt and let me know if there is anything I can do/sort etc..

Love and best wishes to you Vicky and all the family.

Karen

Hugh to Matt

Subject: Being Hugh Thompson *[23th June 2009]*

Dear Matty,

The sun is back and Wimbledon is on the telly – which I'm finding a terrible distraction.

Good to hear that you got through your first dose of chemo so positively. Keep it up.

Nothing much happening in my world, working away but easily distracted – don't really see much of people, occasionally Jim and Caz. Highlight of the week has been the arrival of a new telly. So I've managed to waste a day setting it up (yes I know I could have done it in 1/2 an hour, but where's the fun in that). Still Ira's not quite happy with the sound... It's quite strange working on your own with not a lot of contact with other people. I do sometimes worry I'll lose any of the meagre social skills I had, as I find I'm less and less interested in other people. Don't get me wrong when I meet new people I do generally get a buzz from it. I just can be rarely bothered to initiate contact.

Another side effect of working on your own is that I witter on about rubbish in emails. Do you think the past tense of Twitter is Twat? (I don't, by the way).

Anyway I'm working from home for most of July so if you fancy more of this rubbish, or a shandy one evening, or someone to walk up a hill with or watch the cricket with or whatever do let us know. And if there's anything I can do to lessen the boredom at the hospital – are you not going to the Royal Marsden?

Love and best wished to you and all the family

Hugh

Look what I found - also have the Harpes Rd Book (copy). We used to argue over who owed who £1.20.

Seconds out: round 2

[24th June 2009]

So tomorrow I start my second session of chemo. I'm not sure if it's easier because I know what to expect or more daunting because I know what it's like! I have had a line fitted and so there is a prospect that I will be able to have most of the drugs at home and not attached to a big stand but to a little pouch attached stylishly to my belt(?) The other worry is that I have been having some discomfort in the arm that the line is in (it goes all the way to 'a place near my heart' – literally not metaphorically) and they may not want to use it. We shall see. Another five nights in hospital would be troublesome.

As I write the keyboard shows more of the tell tale silver centimetre strands that are my predicted hair loss kicking in after three weeks. I keep saying that it really doesn't bother me and I don't think it does. It's the sort of thing that I've always wanted to do but never dared. I think I'll have it cut seriously short tomorrow before I go in tomorrow.

I have been eating really well. The sun's been out. I've umpired cricket games, been out for lunches, had a couple of beers, enjoyed the 20:20 World Cup, even been in to work and thought about a couple of things there. I've just spent an hour or two looking for lovely hotels in Dorset to take Boo away for a weekend in July. Life is curiously good. I'm just a bit tired and find it difficult to concentrate still. Who cares?

My mental state is difficult to sum up. I am aware I have a disease that can kill. I am, however, sure that it is not going to kill me. For example tonight I wrote to an elderly neighbour whose husband has just died, 'You know that Victoria and I will be here for you so long as you stay in Ditchling.' I meant it and it's how I feel. At the same time, I have had to do what Boo refers to as facing my own mortality. There's no trite way to sum up what that's like. Or is there? Perhaps it's this easy: I am, without doubt, one of the luckiest blokes on the planet and having this disease has made that very clear to me. How can I moan?

We went to the Royal Marsden today. It was great and strangely uplifting. We needed a bit of an up because we'd stupidly gone down to Brighton A&E last night. I was very tender along the arm with the line in it and the helpline was very cautious - understandably. At 1.15am spending five minutes with a junior doctor who was pleased that I was seeing a district nurse and a consultant oncologist later in the day was not really worth the three/four hour wait in an infection ridden environment. The cancer ward had assured us that we'd be in and out. Anyway, we'll do our enquiring about things in normal working hours in future!

The Marsden sends out a glossy book with your appointment letter. It's Europe's largest comprehensive cancer centre. It treats more than 30,000 patients every year (that's nearly 600 a week or 85 a day). The bit we went to in Sutton is basically an enormous

hospital with lots of impressively architected new wings that deals solely with cancer. My new oncologist is called Kate and she exudes exactly what I want in an oncologist. Competence, confidence and approachability with a hint of style. A woman in her mid 30's (?) who is at the head of her chosen field but does a great line in normal. The study that I am taking part in has been initially written up in the 'American Journal of Something'. I loved that. Actually she's not my oncologist yet. Warm, human and clear in an unthreatening way Richard is in charge until I finish chemo. Then I'm Kate's. If Hugh Grant had a blond, scientific brother working in a caring role, he might be Richard. I think that Tilda Swinton would probably play Kate well.

Kate said we could have a week's holiday between the chemo and the radiotherapy starting (so at the end of July). So she's a hit with us already. Even though they are going to have to have taken out any troublesome teeth before that and fitted my mask. The mask is a plastic thing that is moulded to your face and clamps you in position during IMRT radiotherapy. Apparently it's not a good idea to move during radiotherapy! I wonder if I can keep the mask afterwards; not that I ever dress up (or go to) dressing up parties, but that'd be sort of sci-fi cool. They do the tattoos on it too – rather than actually on my face and neck!

She ran through the other side effects too: 'the worst sore throat you've ever had', skin blistering on your neck, feeding tubes, permanently dry mouth. But she did it in a way that made you feel, 'I'm with the right woman here'. It's tough, it's every weekday for six weeks and the effects build up cumulatively. 'Don't plan to do much in the four – six weeks after you finish'. So don't go inviting me on any hikes in October!

The other things that Kate did that we loved was to confirm that P16 tumours do appear to respond better to treatment and that my (virtually non-existent) neck node has indeed reduced in size from 4cm to 2cm. I've got to say that I think she's being generous to Node with her valuation; sometimes I struggle to find it and it's in my neck! Any news that Node's mate, Tumour has undergone similar downsizing would be the ideal. We'll find out when we get in front of our 15 mates at the joint clinic tomorrow and they stick the thing through my nostril. It's not an ideal way to find out important news, gauging the facial reaction of an array of scientists. But that's what we've got. We've also got about twice as much silver on the keyboard as I finish this update.

If my hair's still falling out three weeks after they gave me that stuff, imagine what it's doing to Node's mate!

Jay to Matt

[24th June 2009]

I eagerly open your epistles and often end up smiling and laughing my way through them. That says a lot about you . . .

In my job there's a fair bit of helping people face their mortality. [*Jay's a priest*]

It's easier when it's theirs . . .

On Ash Wednesday at the start of Lent, ash is smeared on people's foreheads with these words:

"Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

Sometimes it feels like I'm slapping people in the face with those words. Yet there's no denying them.

It may fall into the trite category and I'm sure you could do without the judgment bit, but I'm reminded of a New England epitaph:

Keep death and judgment always in your eye.

None's fit to live but who is fit to die.

I guess Node and his mate haven't reckoned on Matt Dean. You've got a strong team battling them on the physical side. The treatment is brutal. I suppose it has to be, but that doesn't make the 'side' effects any easier to handle. Tumour and Node fight dirty on the emotional side too, but that's an arena over which you have some control, and it seems that you're somehow managing to stay on top of them. That's if my laughter is any sort of gauge. Hang in there, kid.

Or more succinctly, fuck them.

Love,

Jay

Re: Update (From Matt)

[24th June 2009]

It feels appropriate to send you all an immediate update from the hospital. At the joint clinic Hugh's blond brother used the words 'wow' and 'fantastic'. Node's mate Tumour seems to have lost alarming amounts of weight. Some swelling still visible in the area but I think we can say a better than expected result from Round 1 of chemo. Round 2 is currently being delayed by the need to sort out this line. Probably starting tomorrow. Bring it on!!

Anna to Matt

[25th June 2009]

That's just fab! It's so bloody nice to hear from you as I find myself thinking about all the blumin time (much more, of course, than before you became an oncological slebritee) and wondering how you are. And now I know. And it's good news! (Not that I'm suggesting I don't want to hear if/when it's less good news, but obviously I'm thrilled that so far, so good. Even if I cannot begin to imagine how sick chemo must make you feel.) Richard is obviously a good person to have around and Kate sounds promising. As a new blog-ee, I've missed hearing what the study is that you're participating in. What's the story with that?

Hope that the line works ok and you're sporting the pouch look come tomorrow. I'll be thinking of you (again!).

Please keep me in the blogisphere.

Big hug,
Anna

Igor to Matt

[25th June 2009]

Hi Matt,

I have been thinking about you too. As for me well... I'm not the best of late. I have seen a couple of Gastro specialists after an extended stay in hospital. I had to beat off an over zealous surgeon - he wasn't Welsh though! I have since been referred to a very lovely, Polish catholic gastro/nutritional specialist - He has spent quite a bit of time looking at my medical history, tests that have been done and something very strange - talking to me for over an hour!

Doctors here only spend 6 minutes on each consult - write a script for antibiotics and send you on your way. Not an ideal way to help people, not an ideal way to discuss or learn about what is the real problem. So I am quite happy with the Polish knight - yes he has been knighted - I know all that queen stuff is important to some people, however as long as he helps me get better, he can do whatever he likes with the queen. He has done several tests some of which I have results for - Monday this week I got the results from sending a large sample of my shit to the USA for analysis - they know their shit!

Actually they really do - there is a company over there who have been doing some ground breaking research into our cells and finding out why they behave or mutate into things that can kill us. It mostly has to do with the nasty things we absorb thru food, drink, cosmetics and environment - in 2005 the EU banned a lot of food additives and makeup based on their findings - so these guys know what's what.

Finding reliable information and being confronted with negative and cynical people has been an issue for me in the last 5 years. My test results show I have severe coeliac disease and my colon and gut are in bad shape and not absorbing any nutrients from my food. I am on a very restrictive diet (no wheat, bread, coffee, booze and fruit to name a few) to help my gut and colon get better, which it can.

The other downside to this is that I have been starving to death over the last couple of years - I dropped down to 70kg 3 months ago and was completely exhausted. And it was at this very moment I was confronted with a horrible hospital stay and an aggressive surgeon telling me I had a large tumor in my colon. So being confronted by death by cancer is something I can identify with. Also the distress it caused my family. Two of my welsh cousins (43 and 48 years old) died last year from bowel cancer. All of the other eldest children from my mother's brothers and sisters have colon/bowel cancer - my brothers and I are taking part in cancer genealogy tracking program from Wales. My brothers and I don't have any trace of it.

All of that is behind me now and I'm starting to feel better and put on some weight (back up to 80kg!) I thought if I could get down to 60kgs I could reignite my career as a male model for French vogue - they like their men anorexic.

On the more personal front, not much going on there – I haven't really developed the taste for love since divorcing. The women I have met are either desperate for a child (which I would like too) or so young and difficult it defies explanation. Finding a partner is very difficult.

So when you asked me I haven't heard from you – what's going on with that then? Got me thinking about what has been going on – I must say that I have disappeared into a bit of machine called work and have severely neglected all my friends and relationships - to my detriment. There is no excuse, nor is there any conscious strategy behind it. The last 5 years have slipped past me. Most of my friends have moved on and have families and busy lives. I can't think or even say what I have done???? I feel like have overslept? I will work it out and get moving – I think I missed the turn off to the beach!

I hope that fills in some of the gaps for you – I hope the next couple of months go well for you and your family – it sounds like you are in good hands – I'm troubled by how big that Marsden facility is – make sure you seek out some alternative help to counter those radiation treatments. Back to wheel for me more cheese to chase and if I get bored with that there is always the maze.

Take care
Igor

Michelle to Matt **(26th June 2009)**

Hey you - how has your week been? Hope not too poorly. Have been feeling fabulously pleased since your last email - good work is all I can think.

Hope am not being a pain tagging on to Christian's trip. Would love to see you (with caveat of course that you can refuse/tell us no on the day etc.).

Thinking of you, my love.

Xxx

PS I totally freaked out today at the Michael Jackson news. I think because so sudden and all the awful jokes around it going around. Had a major wobble. I say that not to be selfish (well, maybe it is selfish to talk about how I feel!) but more that I remember after R died people were lovely to me, but rarely honest about what was going on for them. They seemed to hide their lives/themselves from me, just when I wanted to hear about everyone else's life to feel connected. Such an amazing life isn't it? And, again, that

thing about everything always moving, changing, hopefully growing, even if sometimes undeniably less. Anyway, that's my thinking on the day today. See you soon!!! X

Chris to Matt

[29th June 2009]

I see Node and Tumour a bit like Al B***** and Mike McC*** *[two people we were at school with]*; big ugly threatening bastards until you turn and face them head on and squarely tell them to bring it on....and watch them shrink away.

Good luck mate, keep up the news, it is very illuminating, both medically and spiritually
Love to Queeny and the Deanlings.

Matt to Jay

[1st July 2009]

I've read this *[Jay's email of 24th June]* a number of times recently. It's really helped me. You're obviously quite good at this stuff! I think that the bit about judgment is quite important. I think we are being judged, but we are being judged by the standards we set ourselves and the people we give love to.

I think I may have just had a breakthrough too. For the last hour or so I've been thinking that what I'd really like to do is to go outside in the beautiful evening sunshine, to walk across the road and to watch the people playing whatever it is they are playing; to enjoy the beauty of it all. Then I started to get myself together, I sat up and thought about it. And then I realised that physically I couldn't do it but I also had the sense that that was OK. This is the control thing we've talked about and this is what it means in reality. A man who for as long as he can remember has done whatever he wants in whatever order he determined, simply can't. And the central idea is to accept that in a positive way. The easiest path would be to say 'this is only a temporary state of affairs'. But to take that route is to disrespect the foe (and I suppose also involves not facing my mortality).

Last night I saw a reflection of myself in the glass and I looked very small and vulnerable. I felt the power of what I was facing. I didn't feel scared, I felt respectful and accepting of whatever might happen. And I felt small.

And now I can say, on reflection, that that feeling is probably related to the standards that I've set for myself in recent months and the love that I've got from the people I love.

And the amazing thing is that I'm saying all this to a Vicar!!

Jay - on a practical note can we ask you a favour. Boo is worried that Christine doesn't know about the cancer. We don't talk to her that often but we think about her a great deal. Could you let her know please?

Thanks mate. Speak soon.

Jay to Matt

[3rd July 2009]

Hi Matt,

Thanks for your email and kind words, Matt. I'll speak to Chris over the weekend.

I fractured the knuckle on my left index finger yesterday. I occasionally play weekday matches for a Pakistani side from the neighbourhood. They were called the Yardies but mercifully changed the name to Queen's Park. We were playing in Thurleigh, a proper old Bedfordshire village. Their eyes widened to see a Gringo playing for Queen's Park. Then they heard the accent and were really confused. In the closing overs the batsmen started going down the pitch to our medium pacers so I stood up to the wicket . . .

The pain and swelling didn't let up, so I cycled to A&E at midnight (after The Wire of course). Cycling home at 4 am as the dawn was breaking I got that feeling of smallness but in a profoundly positive way. A few Muslim neighbours were already up and on their way to the Mosque.

But I've barely coped with the fatigue, pain and inconvenience of having a single joint out of action for a day, so hat off to you, mate!

Give our love to Boo and the boys. Stay strong when you can, but don't fear too much if and when you can't. Sometimes the wheels just bloody well come off. I guess you've got some pretty decent mechanics around you.

Christine to Matt

[5st July 2009]

So, Jay called me last night and I'm in the loop. I resisted the immediate urge to call or dive in the car and listened to Jay's advice to write first and here I am. Puffy eyed from large amounts of outraged blubbing that this was happening to you, a reaction you've probably had to put up with from lots of first timers hearing your news and which is completely and utterly useless to you.

Jay was kind enough to forward me your email correspondence dating back to first diagnosis (hope you don't mind, Matt) so I've been able to get a context and lots of info quickly. I'm just staggered by what you've been through in such a short time. I'm also staggered by the grace and courage of your beautiful 'blog'. Who knew our Matty was such a fabulous writer? When this is all over, you should make your fortune from 'Memoirs of a Wicket Keeper' or 'Big Law in a Small Village'. I could even read about cricket in such lovely prose...

I've spent today working back through and re-reading to understand better what you're facing. If I've got it right, you're into second chemo with radio following on later. Done in the autumn, then surgery? I think the only answer for the highly enquiring mind is to get every detail of the facts down and examine them in order to make up your mind how to respond to them. It seems to me that that's what you and Boo are doing. It was much like that with my dear and brilliant friend Rose. I walked round Kenwood with her between bouts two and three of aggressive chemo and she explained everything to me in detail. It seemed to help. She was, like you, totally unused to any kind of illness, strong as an ox always. Again like you, she seemed to take the measure of the thing and decide to let it utterly exhaust and punish her, knowing that she'd beat it in the marathon by giving it the sprint. We talk about that walk whenever we meet up still. It was one of her treatment milestones.

Beneath your voice in all of your messages is Boo's, of course. I can see you, Boo, tower of strength, dealing with everyone else's reactions, probably putting your own in second place. I really want to hug you. Being so dearly loved by so many people makes its own demands I imagine, as you're coping with the cancer and also with their responses to it. I think this must be where the children come in. Where, as adults, we complicate and confuse everything, children just normalise, don't they, with their down to earth quest for honesty and complete inability to do anything other than keep living life with gusto and at breakneck speed. Your boys will pull you forwards.

The Marsden is the very best, Matt. You sound to be well advised and to have friends as well as professionals on hand. Remember our own 'wee Davy' too. If there's anything more that would be useful to talk through with a medic as a friend rather than a patient, you know he'd be delighted to be of use. Oncology was his thing in London, not so much now, so he may be a bit rusty (Consultant Chest Physician now), but his wife Jane is a Consultant Oncologist. Between them they could probably clarify things if you felt you wanted to re-visit or check out things you'd been told. Just say the word and I'll send his number.

I'd be grateful to become part of your 'blog collective' if you're happy to widen it. I'll be desperate to know how you're doing. If you want anyone else my end put in the picture (Fi? Karen?), let me know. How many times have I said to Ella that we must get over to Sussex because I have wonderful friends there that she must meet (not least to

introduce her to Ned, unto whom she is long since betrothed...)? It's exasperating that we're back in touch over this damn disease. When this hellish journey you're on draws to a close, there will be a time, I hope, for old friends to appear. I'll be on my starter's blocks for then.

I know there's nothing practical I can offer, really, and that you've got people all round you. But I'm not far away and I'm available for almost the whole of August. Please, if there's anything... Meanwhile, all I can send is my love, Matt. Hold fast.

Chris

And the Ashes starts tomorrow!

[7th July 2009]

It's very early on a grey Monday morning. I've just been looking at the calendar and realised that on Wednesday it will be two months since I was told. Two months! A fancifully short period. Two months ago I was a different person, living in a different age. Someone should invent a natural law about the passage of time being related to the degree of change in your life. In fact I think they have, haven't they; I remember being told that was why the journey back from somewhere never seems to take as long as the journey there. The brain's receptors have less to take in and process.

We went to a family wedding at the weekend. Beautiful location, sunny, happy children running barefoot. We were inevitably a centre of attention; neither Boo nor I had seen the people there during the cancer epoch. Quite Important People: sisters, uncles, nieces and nephews. Actually we haven't seen many people at all really! On the appearance front, I was worried or vain enough to go into the office and ask Wendy and Laura how I appeared to them. They hadn't seen me for a couple of weeks. I had a strangely unsettling sense that I may appear smaller. To them I looked quite well, if a bit tired. Laura helpfully mentioned that I had lost my hair. The general consensus though seems to be that I am carrying off the hair loss thing. Boo's mum used the word handsome. Last time we met she told me how much she loved me. Strange times indeed.

I have since had the amusing notion that at the wedding I played the role of Girl Garner (my rather eccentric Grandmother for the uninitiated) very well. I sat while (typically young) people came and talked to me, I was very aware that people were giving significance to how I was saying things in an effort to assess how I was coping with life. I was genuinely pleased that the disco wasn't too loud and I generally sat and watched everyone else dancing and having a good time. Also, of course, I went upstairs during the day for a couple of lie downs. Only Harry realised that one of them surreptitiously coincided with the second half of the Lions game!

At the end of the evening I went so far as to dispense sage advice across the generational divide. At Boo's bidding I told one of our niece's blokes about how you feel in the room with the oncologist admitting that you have smoked most of your adult life. He took it well and told me he was through the invincible stage. You and me both mate! As an aside, and because it is interesting to me, I want to say that at no point in the last two months have I regretted my smoking; I am a smoker and it's part of my life experience. That's not to say that I am relieved that I gave up six years ago. One of the saddest sights was sitting outside Howard 1 watching my fellow patients bring their chemo drips outside for a fag.

Enough wedding stuff, more update required. Today I am entering what I have started seeing as the green period (of pretty much full recovery from the effects of the chemo).

Last Monday, the last day of my chemo cycle was probably the lowest point so far. It was an unfeasibly hot day and we had to drive to the Cancer Centre to get disconnected. I felt listless and weak and everything seemed to hurt during the drive. I wasn't sure if I was going to make the stairs up to the unit.

Happily I had been able to do the chemo at home. A beautiful, cheery Irish woman with red lipstick, soft banter and the merest whiff of the dissolute fitted a line in my right arm literally without me noticing. This was a significantly different experience to the first fitting. Which meant that after one night in Howard 1, I came home on Friday morning for a weekend of ambulatory chemo. Happily the ambulation is optional, I typically lie down for mine.

I am struggling to describe the little thing that makes ambulatory chemo work because as I picture it in my mind, my loathing for the poison it contains grows. As I build up my loathing for the poison, I am painfully aware, of course, that I have one more cycle. But then I have a trick: I remember the voice of the bloke in the next bed talking about his seven cycles and I'm lucky again.

I want to describe the mechanism because it's so clever, and it's also so enabling. Whichever way you look at it, chemo at home is better than chemo in hospital. The thing looks just like a baby's bottle with a thin transparent tube that joins to the line in my arm. Inside the bottle is a condom thing full of transparent liquid. Somehow pressure determines that that liquid enters my body from the condom at the rate of 2ml an hour for 96 hours. Pop the bottle in a little blue zip up picnic sack and you've got the object of my fascination/misery.

I don't really remember much about the weekend. We have a cornucopia of sickness drugs and remedies and we managed the sickness better this time. I wasn't actually sick and I think I may have eaten stuff. Geoff came round and we watched the rugby. It was very hot. I lay on the bed and watched the leaves dancing. How does it feel? Apart from the acid reflux type sickness, the main impact is that you don't have the energy to do anything at all. While I was recovering, I would visualise going into the garden to sit in the sun, but gave it up as impossible after a couple of hours mental prep! The lack of energy extends to mental exertion too. I've read absolutely nothing. I just stare out of the window and think.

Geoff's visit took on a greater significance during my first venture into the outside world after eight days' captivity. I walked across the road to watch some cricket in the evening sunshine. My legs felt a bit funny after the exertion. Then the first person I saw said "Have you heard, Geoff's got swine flu". The phrase 'legs turning to jelly' is now something I understand more fully. During chemo your white blood cells are zapped and you are warned that any infection at all can be very serious. I walked home, slowly. Actually Geoff had virulent pneumonia and if Meredith [his wife] hadn't phoned

999 at 10.30 that night, he would have died. By the time we heard anything about it he was out of ITU in isolation. Unsurprisingly I was thinking by then less about what he may have passed to me, more about the fickleness of the edifice of civilised permanence we spin. It's been a strange summer!

The beginning of the second stage of the chemo was the last joint clinic. I wrote a headline report straight after, so you know that the news was good. The bloke with the camera honestly did say 'Wow' when he got the camera into the place where Tumour used to stand and swagger. Someone else did also ask 'will you still do radiotherapy?' The answer to that question by the way is a definite yes, but we have asked it.

I didn't get a really good look at the screen, my eyes were streaming and I was gagging a bit. I'm still not that good at having a camera in through my nose. Boo was so excited though and that alone made me feel happy. As we left I was aware of her skipping. I was visualising the two imposters and very focused on treating this news evenly. But there was an excitement too, I couldn't help thinking that there was no downside to what has been written up in my notes as a 'dramatic reduction in size'. I smiled when I read that lying in my hospital bed. And I felt a little proud of my body.

Hugh to Matt

[7st July 2009]

Fuckin' A Matty. Top News.

Young (At Heart) Guns Go For It

Well Done!

Hx

Hugh to Matt

[8th July 2009] Sorry about that last email Matt, it only takes a couple of glasses of wine and I'm practically gibbering.

Sula to Matt

[8th July 2009]

Dearest Matt, SO great to hear from you. I've been away and sorry not to have been in touch but am thinking of you loads and wondering how you and Boo and the little ones are doing. Sending huge huge positive thoughts and much love to all of you; fingers crossed for the Ashes – good news about Brett eh? Xxxxxxx

Anna to Matt

[21st July 2009]

Just thinking about you and wondering how you're doing? OK I hope and with spirits bolstered by yesterday's victory. Will took his stepfather, who flew over from Ireland specially, as an 80th b'day present so he was very relieved that they not only got to see some play but that it ended with an England win!

Not much to report from these quarters - the redundancy/grievance/litigation treadmill continues...

Matt to Anna

[21st July 2009]

Today has been rubbish. Finished chemo yesterday, feel crap and the weather is so important to my mood. Also had to face that it's not a good idea to go on a plane full of swine flu to France so the holiday is off. But you and L-J (and others) have sent me messages saying that you are thinking of me and that really does make such a difference. It's about taking a deep breath and focusing on things like how Will felt yesterday.

Thanks for thinking of me. Speak soon.

Anna to Matt

[21st July 2009]

Oh god I didn't realise you were in for bout 3 of chemo so soon. On the plus side, think that means you've finished-finished (as opposed to just finished this lot). hope that TUMOUR is now very-very-tiny-tumour (I was going to change the font size but I imagine that's lost on your t-mobile...)

the weather is bollocks, isn't it. i was feeling v pissed off today and wasn't entirely sure why but ended up concluding that the oppressive weather had a lot to do with it. well, that and having to work for a living. it will be sunny in sussex tomorrow though, which is (I hope) good for you, and good for my kids, who are going on a day trip to brighton with the nanny. (xanthe was very excited about the prospect of the seaside though not v impressed when I warned her that there wouldn't be sand on the beach!)

sorry to hear about france. can you get away to somewhere driving distance away in the UK instead? sadly, despite my best endeavours in life, i know noone with a private jet.

take good care.

A

Halfway?

[29th July 2009]

The idea of spending this week back in France was really always just that: an idea, an aspiration. Booking the flights made it more real (and more expensive!) Then we actually started to think logistics. Think about sitting on a plane with hundreds of virus laden, swine flu toting baddies. About driving into rural France, miles from anywhere with our sunglasses and a deficient immune system.

So here I am in the Cotswolds! Sipping coffee, listening to Haydn as the early morning sun streams through the mullioned stone window. Privileged, me? Hopefully the sun will remain out for long enough for me to convey my current feelings. I don't want to publish the sort of rain sodden, dreary grey stuff that has sought to ensnare me over the last week of slightly slower recovery from the third round of chemo.

It's too easy to say that the grey stuff is all about the depressing weather and the length of the road to travel. I came here wanting to refocus, to reconnect with the positivity we set out with. And now, having thought about it all, I think I understand more of where the grey stuff comes from. I have got through the first stage of treatment but no-one is able to say what I want them to say: 'Well done! We have achieved objective one.' We saw Kate (wrap around dress, pointy stilettos) on Friday and she agreed to my suggestion that we could do another MRI scan to assess progress. But I can now see how that would just be for me, part of my desire mentally to build a firm base for the next stage of the Operation Matt's Tongue.

The truth is that Kate can feel my neck and smile enthusiastically and knowingly at Boo. But she can't say 'we're halfway there'. Because it's cancer. And you don't control cancer. She did say 'we know it hasn't progressed'. At the time that sounded negative to me; I imagine everyone with cancer is quite sensitive about the idea of progression. But, of course, Tumour (and Node) could have progressed. Eight weeks ago Tumour was 'partially obstructing [my] windpipe'. And growing happily. Now he appears to be a red area on the rather unpleasant looking base of my tongue. Kate's words invite consideration of an alternative world where Tumour's still getting bigger despite all this treatment!

So now we're back positive!

Except that it is, inevitably, raining in Gloucestershire. But there are positives here too. Edgbaston is not too far away. Weather like this will restrict play in the crucial rubber, Freddie will have fewer overs to bowl. If we can't win, we may as well not lose!

Inevitably the grey stuff probably also seeps out of how you're feeling. Last week (and the weekend too) saw me feeling quite weak. Eating was difficult. Not really sickness, more an unpleasant reaction in my mouth to most foods I could think of. I'm sort of

expecting more of this as they start nuking the cells in my throat over the next few weeks. I've even started to wonder on occasions whether this feeding tube idea might not be such a bad thing!!

So from here we go back on Friday. After Edgbaston we go to the Marsden on Tuesday for an overnighter which includes various tests and one dose of chemo before the daily ten minute bursts of radiotherapy start. These will take us through August into September.

In a recent moment of honesty Boo and I agreed that we both hated the Marsden but had been relentlessly upbeat about it to each other. It represents cancer, it's cancer central, it's full of people at various stages of cancer. What's not to dislike? Daily trips should be fun. But that's the way it is!

Anna to Matt

[29th July 2009]

Thanks for the update. It sounds from this reader's viewpoint as if you're doing fantastically on the physical front - as if, prognosis-wise, things are going as well as Kate and the rest of them could possibly hope. So don't let yourself get beaten up by the weather, or the slog ahead. You've got a very impressive slog behind you too. The upside to each Cancer Central visit has got to be (if nothing else) that it's one visit down - one fewer visit to go. We'll all be crossing them off our calendars with you.

Love
Anna

Igor to Matt

Subject: Cotswolds v France *[30th July 2009]*

I think the combination of pink tees and Haydn piano sonatas is too soft a stance for you and hence the some what down stroke of Matt Dean. So my remedy is...

1. Wear a navy blue singlet – ala blue collar style – exposing your prison tats!
2. Military issue camo pant – somewhat loose – your not trying to pick up.
3. Mirror sunnies and Some hand jewelry – you need instill fear – ala - Travis bickle
4. A pair black dunlop volleys – somewhat scuffed – makes you look well travelled.
5. Sibelius – Finlandia – on the ipod – victory never sounded so good.
6. A typical matt dean sneer – “whats saat bout enn?”
7. Check your look in the mirror and go forward.

Don't get sad get mad – take a spoonful of cement every morning and harden the fuck up!

Doug to Matt

Subject: Matt Back Home [26th August 2009]

Sorry I've not been in contact.

Understand you're home this evening which must be a welcome relief from recent days in and out of hospital, drips and flitting in and out of consciousness. Poor you. Well done for getting through it. How have you been in yourself? Anxious, exhausted and in need of time out from the nightmare I should think.

I don't expect a reply by the way!

I have lots of news all of which is trivial in comparison with what you've been going through though I know you believe life should go on in the face of cancer so ... I'm four days away from the end of my dissertation. 20,000 words by 1st September. I've been in the Sussex library every day since we got back from France. Inevitably I had done far less than required before going away. Students definitely work harder than we did. The place is packed and it's not even term time.

The other thing I've discovered is that libraries are great places to work! Very quiet and nothing else to do. A collective will develops in which you're all compelled to focus on what we're doing. I can't believe it's taken me this long to find out. Previously and throughout my student days I sat in my room endlessly distracted by everything, doing nothing.

I'm so over the essay and just want to move on to something else, anything else. Decorating is I think being planned for me!

I imagine that the Ashes pretty much passed you by. If not for two ridiculous run outs the chase looked on. Hussey and Ponting looked like they could have been batting since the dawn of time. Good performances from Trott, Prior and Swann and of course Strauss. Collingwood looked washed up, Bell still not convincing and Flintoff was but a shadow. Sad but it really is time for him to go.

I imagine you now need some very quiet time. No doubt Boo will let us know when you're up for a visit and I'll come over. I'd love to see you but in the meantime, I'm thinking of you.

Keep away from colds and bugs and wee horrors.

Lots of love Doug x

Ashes Win

[30th August 2009]

I am very conscious that there has been a gap in my communication. It's been a difficult few weeks; if we haven't actually been through the mill, we've certainly got the keys off the agent and had a good poke around the interior! I've not been feeling great and possibly because of this, I have increasingly turned inwards for motivation. Ned gave me a Mr Grumpy badge yesterday. He was quick to say that it was the only one he could find, but I fear that the cap fits!

The daily routine of the radiotherapy is entirely supportable. The treatment doesn't hurt; in fact it's bizarrely quite soothing. The hour there and back become part of the day. The therapy takes about 15 minutes all told. I go into a cubicle and put on a gown. I'm called through by one of the team and lie on a table having confirmed my full name, date of birth and the first line of my address. Rituals are important. The table has already been set up with my own prescription of red and yellow foam supports for my head, neck and upper body. My green mesh face mask then clamps me in place, eight clicks. The lights are dimmed and spooky green laser type lines are used to adjust my position. I sometimes catch a reflection of myself and always think of Spiderman. One radiographer each side, they communicate in code of 'soup and ant edges', they aim for a position of '93.6' as I'm wheeled around precisely. As soon as they have both said 'excellent', the lights go up, the electronic ceiling triptych of a cedar tree (for I am on Cedar unit) is illuminated and the big machine emits a sound similar to that of a reversing bus. I imagine that it's at this point that the radiographers retire to a safe distance. I'm stuck looking at the ceiling! I know, or at least I believe, that if I raise my hand they will reappear. I've never tried it. The big machine adopts six different positions to zap me, its orbit has a start point below my left ear. I've normally drifted into sleep or something approaching it by the time it reaches the sixth position and they come and free me. I say 'see you tomorrow' and shamle a bit dazed back to my changing cubicle. My chin, eyebrows and a bit of my nose temporarily resemble a pimply table tennis bat thanks to the mesh on the mask. Apart from the tiredness you wouldn't know anything had happened.

My problems started with the chemo. During the first week I had a single, overnight dose of just one of the three chemicals that I have been given over the summer. Apparently this increases the effectiveness of the radiotherapy. There was a delay because my kidney function was taking time to recover suitably from the earlier doses. Despite this I was confident that it would be a breeze. One single dose. Sadly I never really bounced back from it. Chemo is cumulative in its effects. Since the last dose my default position has basically been bed. And the side effects of the radio are unpleasant: ulcerated tongue, very sore throat, difficulty swallowing, complete inability to taste anything, appetite loss, bouts of vomiting. The not eating wouldn't normally be a problem, I could take the opportunity to drop a couple of dress sizes. Sadly though, if I fall in size the radiotherapy stops until I am my original size. It's about targeting the

rays; I can't rattle around in the mask! Above all else I want this to finish on 14 September, session 30. So this season I am eating mainly specially designed liquids through a natty yellow rubber tube that goes in through my nose and down into my stomach. Ultimately very dignified.

I am very pleased with myself, over the last hour I have eaten a single weetabix with full cream milk and sugar and a boiled egg; at least 200 calories. My quest is for 2000 a day. I suddenly completely understand eating disorders. My life is a battle with food.

At some point after the chemo I also picked up an infection. The thing Boo has been protecting me from all summer. On the Friday of the Oval test I had to admit that I was feeling too ill not to go into hospital. I wasn't even watching the match! It wasn't great. On two occasions I managed to get four/five health professionals in my room looking concerned. I also started to get anxious about food. On the Saturday morning Angela, an unreasonably vivacious and attractive Registrar, said she understood how it must be for me. She said so many patients set out with great enthusiasm, but by this stage, when they feel they are near the end but actually they are not, the motivation is hard to find. I was crying pretty much for the first time in all this.

But now I'm back home, hugging Dean boys, enjoying the support of a woman who has yet to put a foot wrong, being grumpy, it feels much better. We've done 19 already and Kate has agreed that I won't have any more chemo. The only thing that I don't want people to say is 'only 11 more' and 'take one at a time'. It honestly does feel like I've got as far to go as we've already come. But I know were going to get there.

Julian to Matt

[1st September 2009]

Thanks for the update. Been thinking about you. Just been to Wales. Started chucking it down as soon as we crossed the Severn Bridge and didn't stop much. But Wales was good and quiet. Was feeling rested and relaxed. Then India threw up throughout last night, so am feeling a bit peaky now. Pleasant routine of washing her hair, sick, wash hair, sick etc. Now bouncing into work.

Look forward to catching up when you come out of what is clearly an extremely shit stretch. If you were feeling too ill to watch the Oval test, that does give me some idea of quite how tough it's been. Hope you caught some of it. I'd like to say I stayed confident that the Aussies wouldn't get the runs. But I didn't.

Julian

Anna to Matt

[1st September 2009]

Oh Matt, you poor sod. I was thinking of you last night as I loaded the dishwasher (as you do) and was worrying that you were going through hell and also that after such an upbeat kick-off, you wouldn't want to admit on the round robin if you were feeling really low. But once again you've left me feeling nothing so much as 'hats off to yer'. If only the waves of support which I hope you feel flowing your way could counter some of the ill effects of the radio waves. Hang on in there. (Don't you sometimes wish you were American? I feel myself wanting to make US-style irony-free statements ("Way to GO, buddy!") but think they just sound a bit embarrassing and patronising - not very English, what ho? - so I have to just hope that you know that behind all our stiff upper lips, everyone is actually doing a cheerleader dance for you.)

A x

Tamsin to Matt

[4th September 2009]

Thanks for the email.

I was reminded of it when watching the West Wing last night (I know – I have succumbed). Season 3, Episode 6 (or was it 7, I lose track..). They “lose” a submarine near North Korea. But is it lost or has it just “gone quiet”? Nancy says “trust the captain – trust the crew – they’ve gone quiet. These are submariners. They are trained to do this. They’ll make contact. But don’t tell the President – he’ll panic”.

There is nearly a crisis. Jed Bartlett wants to panic: he imposes a 4 hour window before advancing on North Korea. Lo and behold the submariners make contact a few minutes before. They’ve been lying low to evade the enemy.

I am sure there are analogies to be drawn between submariners and the last rounds of cancer treatment. It’s gone quiet and you’re feeling a bit submerged – you’ve just got to trust the professionals - they will let you surface in the end.

Look forward to having you back.

Love to Vicky

After the Treatment Ends

[22nd September 2009]

Back in May Richard (oncologist) was absolutely clear. He said that the lowest point for us would be the two weeks after radiotherapy finished. I did my last radiotherapy a week ago. It hasn't been that great I have to admit; not many highs to report and a bit anti-climactic.

I was admitted to hospital for the last few days of my radiotherapy, my nausea was making it difficult to take any nutrition on board. Happily I had also twice vomited up my feeding tube, which is hardly the cheeriest thing to have reinserted. Once in hospital I again managed to convey the impression that I was very unwell as my blood pressure collapsed (as it had on my previous visit). The medical consensus was that I had contracted another infection. Suffice to say they kept me in longer than I felt was necessary. And that they probably got the clear impression that that was how I felt!

If you're interested in the gory medical details, at that stage my mouth and tongue were very badly ulcerated, my throat was raw and I was producing masses of horrible, gunky mucous; the body's defence to the attack my throat has undertaken. Not all that pleasant. Strangely I also became physically unable to swallow, probably because everything needed to pass through the tube. The cocktail of morphine and anti-sickness drugs caused immense drowsiness. To give you some idea of how drowsy, I lacked the energy to swish my mouthwash vigorously.

There was no fanfare to greet my thirtieth and final radiotherapy session. I was on my own and just got back on my wheelchair and was pushed back to the ward. Later sitting on my bed I did have a bit of an emotional moment. The idea that, going forward my energy is on recovering and that no-one is going to harm me is powerful.

The last week at home has been uneventful and listless. I'm trying to do little bits and pieces, but remain very tired. The gunk continues to appear in great quantities and I am spending twelve hours plus in twenty four hooked up to a little pump that pushes brown liquid feed into the tube. The emotional side is possibly the most difficult. There is definitely a sense that I should feel positive. But there is a far stronger sense that I mustn't feel like we've achieved anything yet. We don't know what they will find when the dust has settled and I couldn't imagine anything much more difficult than receiving a negative diagnosis if you've been expecting them to say 'that's all gone then.' Hence I am in effect actively damping down expectations.

On the upside I've learnt what being stared at in the street, particularly by little kids, is like. If you want to experience something similar, just get a thin yellow rubber tube and stick it to your cheek with micropore (with the end disappearing into your nose). Everyone is guaranteed to look twice. Children under ten are likely to walk past you a

few times, their eyes locked on your face. More seriously, of course, Boo and the boys continue to provide fantastic support and the occasional distraction.

Overall though it feels increasingly like we are just crossing off the days while the dust settles.

Igor to Matt

[23rd September 2009]

Glad to hear that you are back out on the street scaring the kiddies – you still have the ability to instill fear an admirable quality – your future in the British navy is secure and bright. It sounds like you are in the void of here and there – that void is the space between having the shit kicked out of you and catching breath and getting back up again – so breathe deep and rest easy you have had a very tough couple of months and it sounds like they are feeding you the cement thru the tube – so you will harden the fuck up.

Its all footy mania down here – it's the grand final – St Kilda and Geelong a local Victorian shit fight. I will probably pop down the beach for a surf – while 99% of the male population plugs into the TV and beer for 3 hours.

The wallaby performance was bad on the weekend it was boys versus men and all blacks real gave the new kids a sound thrashing.

I'm also taking part in a group exhibition at the local council – some of my drawings have been selected for an art prize by the Stonington Council. Spring is starting to appear down here and its almost time to break out the thongs (flip flops) and stubbie holders.

Rest easy Matt – recover.

Tamsin to Matt

[23rd September 2009]

I am just glad to hear that it is over. And if you are feeling this rough and demoralised, imagine how those cells are feeling. And I am also sure that those drugs probably alter your emotional state - so the depression does not just come from within. As you said earlier this year, quite soon there will be a sunny day when you feel moderately okay and you will be surprised to find your mood lifting.

Your description reminded me of a "Little Book of Monsters" that Kitty made when she was four. It featured quite a lot of bald-headed monsters shooting out slime...and one who memorably shot arrows from its nipples. I am thinking that with your radiotherapy mask, you could probably be the star turn at a Dr Who party....although I imagine that you are not really feeling like going out much right now.

Lots of love to everyone. Good luck for the next bit.

Matt to Tamsin

[24th September 2009]

You do know don't you that your responses are always the most interesting and distracting. Keep it up!

As you predict, today is sunny and I am sitting on the trampoline in my pyjamas feeling very positive.

Tamsin to Matt

[24th September 2009]

Oh Good. Black humour works for me but I am conscious it doesn't work for all!

Continuing the West Wing theme, I was going to email you the other day after I watched the one in Season 3 (you no doubt recall) when Jed Bartlett gets really excited and nearly announces a "cure for cancer in 10 years" in the State of Union.

I was thinking - wouldn't it be galling if in 20 years time you were sitting there - having gone through all this - and they announce they can cure cancer by, say, sufferers going to Iceland to bathe in a hot pool for 2 weeks whilst sipping hot chocolate with brandy in it. Then you will be the old bore saying "You young folk have it easy. In my day, times were hard, we had chemotherapy and then radiotherapy..and you could only eat brown stuff from a tube." Everyone will be like "Alright, Grandpa"...

Have a nice day

T

Anna to Matt

[13th October 2009]

As you'd imagine, I keep thinking of you and really hoping that if Richard had to be right about the first bit (how shit you would feel after radiotherapy finished), he was also right about the other bit (ie. that it would last two weeks) and that therefore, the utterly miserable period you described in your last email has now passed and you are a fortnight on the other side...the other side being what, exactly, I'm not sure - but hopefully more energy, fewer ulcers, less gunk and being permitted a sense of hope again? It really shouldn't be too much to ask, should it. I'm thinking of you.

love

Anna x

Yoghurt!

[16th October 2009]

Last night I ate a yoghurt. It took me 45 minutes and a lot of concentration, but I got to the end of it. And what's more, I could taste something distinctly yoghurtly. It's funny how your goals and sense of achievement can change!

Overall yesterday was a great day. The sun shone, I sat in the office most of the day. I finished clearing out my in-box, I sent a few emails, I tinkered with some cricket policies. I took the dogs out for a walk with Boo. I felt human and normal. The gunk weeks are over. They won't be missed, they weren't much fun.

It wasn't just the stuff in my mouth, it was the sameness of the housebound days. The listlessness was compounded by an unwillingness to do anything. I couldn't sleep at night (something Kate strangely put down to me coming off morphine) so I sat up till two or three in the morning flicking channels while my little pump pumped nutritious brown liquid into my tube. I also got a cough, which made the nights less fun. More damagingly, the cough was exactly the cough that I had had at the beginning, while the tumour was growing stealthily. In my weak and listless state, it didn't take long for me to become quite upset by the cough and what it represented. After all nobody had actually looked or scanned the site for some months!

We had weekly meetings with Kate over the gunk weeks. She has been great, but she isn't reassuring enough. That's not her fault. Of course, she can't tell me what I want to hear. She's been hampered by the fact that there's no point in looking down my throat while everything is mucous bound and any scan would just show swelling and trauma, impossible to categorise.

This Tuesday, as well as telling me that I looked great, she had a look at the site. Camera down nose drill (now water off a duck's back!) She said that looked great too, which has lifted the mood somewhat.

We've found out a guilty secret about Kate. Casually flicking through one of the numerous copies of the Boden catalogue that land on our mat every season (apparently about four weeks) we happened across one of her summer staples: the flowery wraparound! Further careful scanning uncovered other items of Kate apparel. Fortunately, not the shoes though. My faith in her would have been punctured had the pointy shoes been there too. Enough to think about? Me? Or is there something deep about the sort of relationship people have with their oncologist?

Someone has mentioned recently that a form of agoraphobia is common in people who have endured treatments like mine. I identified with that immediately. For three weeks I don't think I saw anyone apart from Boo and the boys. That's not true, we saw Kate and lots of people around the Marsden. But they don't count, they're affected. The

point is I didn't want to see anyone, in fact I hid from them. Your social confidence drains away when you have a tube going into your nose, your mouth constantly fills with unpleasant gunk that you can't swallow (because you can't swallow) and you think your voice sounds funny. The fact that your hair is growing back well at the sides and on the top, but not at the back doesn't help the confidence thing. To be clear, it's not tufty, which I wouldn't allow; there is a neatly demarcated area at the back, where the radio waves exited, that supports only the finest of downy growth. Kate assures me that it will grow back. That pleases me.

In fact a lot is pleasing me at the moment. The difficult thing mentally is not to start thinking as if it's all over. Until the area has settled down and we have a scan, we don't really know where we are. The scan is on the 12th November and we're seeing Kate on the 17th. My current sense is that Kate thinks surgery will probably be unnecessary; she can't feel the neck node any more. But what's the point of speculating? We really have just got to wait and see.

Jane to Matt

[19th October 2009]

I think Yoghurt would be a great title for a book – obviously not about yoghurt – but about life changing experiences. You're right that the small achievements really do mean a lot

Looking forward to catching up again this week some time.

BTW I think your voice did not sound quite like you when we spoke a couple of weeks ago – but each time we've spoken since it sounds more and more fully like you.

Chris to Matt

[19th October 2009]

Good to hear you are progressing well; the yoghurt is probably more significant that I, or anyone other than you and perhaps Boo, realise, so well done!

I could start this with 'Last night I ate a banana'....it would make sense, there was a banana in my room when I went to bed, and only half a banana this morning. Thing is, I dont remember eating even half a banana.....I am in Congo this week, and the room isnt what you might call 'nice' in any sense of the word; the sheets stink and that's when they are 'fresh' on, there is little water (probably the reason why the sheets stink) and power, when it is available, is too low to properly light a bulb enough to read at night, so I go to sleep at 7.30 and listen to my podcasts of From Our Own Correspondent over and over again. I hate to confirm all sorts of stereotypes of Congo but it is a hard place

to work and to stay; I'd not imagine living here.....and the boss has been suspended for financial mismanagement of the local office here in Bukavu.

Am working far too much, I know that, but don't really know why I don't want to change that enough....I will get to the end of November when things should slow a bit and then think of holidays, again with little inspiration or imagination. I know I am too late as usual to think properly of Xmas bookings so will probably hang around home and just do nothing; I crave for days at home, books piled up by the side of me and a bit of good food in the fridge. Am reading The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins; if you have time and inclination, read it, its one of the best books I have read in a long long while.

Hope all the boys are doing ok and the missus is keeping busy,

Take care mate

Degs

Good News!

[17th November 2009]

Tonight Kate did something she's not done before; she leant over, smiled and said 'the news from your scan is good.' Later she said that the scan results were about as good as we could have hoped for. I'm reading from the written report that Kate received. The first paragraph concludes: 'The previously demonstrated left level 2 lymph nodes have resolved. There currently is no measurable disease activity within the oropharynx or nodal territories within the neck.'

Apparently any cancer I have is below measurable levels. Logically this is actually what I expected, but it's far from what I allowed myself to contemplate or expect. How do I feel? Emotional and tired probably sums it up. Strangely there is a sense of anti-climax. I have no idea why and I haven't had the chance to mull it over. Perhaps because I know that it's not all over yet, the surgeons may want to investigate the 'mild asymmetry at the tongue base' under anaesthetic, the scan showed a 4mm nodule in my lung that Kate isn't bothered by but which needs to be watched. I get the feeling that you never actually think 'that's it then!' But you'd have to be pretty hard-nosed not to feel relieved by today's news. Thank you to all of you for your thoughts, your prayers, your support. I hope I can somehow show that I am worthy of what has been invested in me these last few months! I certainly owe all of you.

I don't know if you'd be interested in reading my musings from earlier this morning. I include them just in case!

It's just gone midnight, so today is the day of the scan. The scan nine weeks after the radiotherapy finished. The scan that I have started to see as crucial and determining. Which is, of course, not how I should be viewing it. Have I not yet learnt that you can't control this thing? Am I not yet clear that there are very few right and wrong turns in cancer treatment; that very little appears black or white?

Last Sunday, Remembrance Sunday, was six months since C-Day the 8th May; the day I was told 'it looks like cancer to me'. What with that milestone and the upcoming scan, I have done quite a bit of reflecting. When I'm working, one of the things I do to promote clarity of thinking is to insist people choose one word, only one, to describe something. The word that I first chose to describe the six months since C-Day was 'calm'. Remember that for much of those six months my default position has been staring out of the window. Very capable people stepped in to run my business (extraordinarily well). I have spent more time with my wife than ever before. It has been calm.

The problem with 'calm' though is that it conveys no sense of my being unwell. Mathematically I can justify that. I have spent 18 nights in hospital this summer and there are about 183 nights in six months. One in ten. But perhaps my downplaying the illness aspect of the last six months is more than a coping mechanism. What if it's

actually an infuriating and possibly negative thing that I do? For example, I have learnt since my hospital visits that twice Boo was actually mentally preparing for the worst, on the strength of what she had seen. I can pretend that the medics were all making a fuss, that I really wasn't that ill. But who am I trying to kid? They called what they did to me an 'aggressive early intervention' and if I'm honest I know I was ill. So the second word that I came up with was 'weak'. For me that encapsulates the sense of being unwell. I feel weak now. There have been intense periods of illness, but there has been a pervading sense of weakness.

Perhaps 'calm' is the glass half full and 'weak' is half empty? Perhaps they work together?

Back on Day C+1 I surprised myself by my own clarity and calmness. I told Boo exactly how I felt. This is how I recorded how I felt:

"Privileged to be in this place, surrounded by the people I'm surrounded by, connected to the things I'm connected to.

A bit stupid that I let this thing go on for so long without getting it diagnosed.

Like a massive weight has been lifted off my shoulders, relieved that I don't have to worry about the little things any more.

A bit frightened. It's important to treat things like cancer with respect, not to take them for granted or think you've got them under control."

The sense of being privileged has stayed with me throughout. On that first morning I thought 'imagine waking up with cancer and someone you didn't love'. Over and over again this summer I have had cause to wonder at the strength of the love Boo has shown me. On a wider note in the last few days I've received numerous wishes, whether in the form of a phone call, email, text, card or visit. People care about me and my cancer. People in Australia and Kenya, people I haven't heard of or from in fifteen years, people I love and respect and people I have worked with. And the thing is, as I've said before that really matters to me. I gain great strength from it. On a more prosaic level, my cancer hasn't been accompanied by the debilitating financial hardship that strikes many sufferers. There's privilege on so many levels.

Quite early on I think that I came to terms with the delay in diagnosing my cancer. I don't think that you can do the facing your own mortality while still fretting about details like that. You've got what you've got and you need to deal with it! To be clear though I'm still actively seeking to ensure through communication with the doctors concerned that some good comes out of my experiences.

Do I still feel as if a massive weight has been lifted from my shoulders? Perhaps one of the things that is frustrating me most is that as I try and move on from staring out of the window, I start to worry about little things again. I wanted to have learnt wisdom and patience, but I still shout at the boys far too often. Maybe the point is simple; nothing comes easily and you have to apply your learning carefully. Let's hope.

Am I still frightened by it? No. You get used to the idea of something like this. You respect it, of course, you'd be a fool not to.

Christine to Matt

[17th November 2009]

This is great news, Matt. I've been thinking about you all day – what a great report. You must feel like you've been hit by a truck, though, and the emotional impact will take time to sink in and then begin to ebb. Goodness knows how you start to trust your body again and maybe you don't really, but I imagine it's telling you to keep it slow for a while and get loads more rest. You'll need all your strength to enjoy recovering. What a December you're all going to have!

All my love, Chris

Igor to Matt

[17th November 2009]

Excellent news – you are wise not to drop your guard now – get strong get your focus back and give your self some time with out any expectations that you need to figure it out or come up with some profound insight.

I'm very happy for you Matt and know you are going to have a great Christmas with your family. I'm going to have a small glass of pinot tonight and celebrate for you. Well done to you and your body and please pass my love on to your woman – you are a very lucky man to have her at your side. Now all I need is for Wales to give Australia a trashing this week – what a week!!!

Cheers

Igor

Caz to Matt

[17th November 2009]

F*ck me, I just read your e-mail on the tube and started crying . . . Need I say more?

Come up and see us all as soon as you feel well enough.

Lots of love

Caz

Jane to Matt

[17th November 2009]

I'm crying – you're fantastic. I can't even write something sensible – I'm now going to try and do a proposal – sensible eh?

We don't share our love enough I think – if things drift back to a more mundane footing in the aftermath of your news, that's because we all spend too much time worried about the little things. The thing is – you've got all the love and support from the last 6 months to tell you the truth about the much more important and bigger things.

Much love Jane

Neil to Matt

[19th November 2009]

Thank you for this great news and for the scan copy which reads as well as we could hope. I have to say I am very proud of you and of Boo for the emotional practical and physical coping ability over 6 months and it brings a tear to my eye to reflect on it. I meet lots of people in "crisis" but rarely do they endure the relentless and repeated punches that cancer care involves. Those that do well share your assets of inner strength, combative nature, intelligence and spousal saintliness. Your investment in friendship and sporting endeavour has paid out it seems to me.