

Paul's reliving a familiar battle

TRUE LIFE STORY

I'M SCARED IT'S LIKE LAST TIME



The story so far

Unable to conceive naturally, Amanda and her husband Paul decide on IVF. But then Paul is diagnosed with cancer. Suddenly the couple are fighting a far bigger battle — just to keep him alive. After Paul's given a tentative all-clear, the couple have their postponed IVF treatment. But sadly, it's unsuccessful. Their IVF journey is at an end — but another terrifying journey begins when they're told it looks as if Paul's cancer is back... (To read last week's story in full, go to our website at www.thatslife.co.uk.)

As Paul goes into hospital, Amanda has a terrible fear

We're so relieved when Paul's CT scan is finally done to check for a tumour on his tongue. But soon the awful wait for results takes over. I actually have no more worry left in me.

Paul agrees. 'My nerves are worn to blunted stumps,' he says. We're resigned to a long wait, but after just three days the phone rings. I pick it up. It's Paul's designated cancer nurse, Susie. We haven't heard from her since Paul's last cancer battle.

I start shaking. 'Stop it!' I inwardly yell. 'I'm not doing this again! I can't, I won't. But I've no choice.'

'How are you, Amanda?' Susie says in her lilting Scouse accent.

'Cut the chat!' I want to scream. Instead, through gritted teeth, I say I'm OK. Susie explains Paul's surgeon asked her to call. Yes...

'We've got the scan results...' 'Yes!?' 'Nothing distinct's showing up.' I feel sheer elation.

'So,' I stutter. 'They didn't find a tumour?' Paul's standing with me, watching me intently.

I want Susie to say this is a brilliant result. Fantastic!

But she's not indulging me. Instead... 'No, they didn't,' she explains extra-calmly. 'But we'll only know if there's a serious

disease there (she doesn't like using the word cancer) after another biopsy.'

The op's already been scheduled for next week.

My elation dampens and I tell Susie how one surgeon told us he was '95 per cent certain it's cancer' and that Paul will die in six months without treatment.

She gasps sharply. 'They haven't even got a definite diagnosis for Paul yet!' she says. 'Nothing's certain.'

When I hang up and tell Paul the good news — I think it's that — so many emotions cross his face. 'It looks like you'll keep most of your tongue!' I say.

But we're too wise now to get carried away. So over the following week, we focus on 'life as normal' — sunny motorbike rides, quiet drinks at a riverside pub.

On the morning of the op, we're both dreading it. Last time, loads of tissue was taken from all over Paul's mouth, tongue and throat. Even the skin connecting his tongue to the base of his mouth was cut out.

I'll never forget his mouth afterwards. Like the Black Hole of Calcutta. Dried blood and blackened stitches everywhere. 'It's like I'm swallowing razor blades,' Paul had winced.

So unsurprisingly, we're both

quiet now, entering the day surgery ward. And I'm instantly transported back in time. This is where Paul had his first-ever op, 16 months ago, when doctors thought the lump on his neck was just a cyst.

But then he woke with a huge Frankenstein-like scar, and was asked to stay in overnight.

Yet we weren't even scared... Paul had been given a private room and we'd had a real laugh eating an impromptu picnic of sandwiches, while watching the sun set outside the window.

Little did we know the surgeon had just removed a secondary cancerous tumour, not a cyst...

And now, here we are again. Paul's doctor arrives to chat about the operation. 'The tongue is a complex organ,' she says. 'It's hard to tell if there is a tumour there with a CT scan.'

My heart plummets. So, that explains Susie's lack of enthusiasm. But I push such gloomy thoughts away.

Paul's op is eighth on the list, but thankfully three people haven't read their instructions properly. One's drunk water, another coffee. Another's chewed gum — all big no-nos before a general anaesthetic. So Paul goes down earlier than expected.

'I love you,' I tell him. 'I'll be thinking of you.'

'I love you too,' he whispers back before he's wheeled away. To keep myself busy, I phone family and friends.

Finally, Paul returns. Still unconscious, lips speckled with blood. 'Oh, God!' I think. 'It's just like last time.'

I kiss him gently, smelling the now-familiar odour of general anaesthetic. Then

I sit there, holding Paul's hand.

I have a minor panic when he wakes and coughs up a big blood clot. 'Don't worry,' Paul mumbles. 'I had this last time.'

When the nurse looks inside his mouth, our heads nearly clash as I also loom in for a peek!

'It looks OK,' she says. Within an hour, Paul's sitting up, talking OK, just a little raspy.

'It doesn't feel as bad as last time,' he says. And after he's managed something to eat and drink, he's discharged. It's lovely to snuggle on our sofa watching *Coronation Street* together.

But now we face another long wait. Next week, we'll discover whether the biopsy found any cancerous tissue.

It'll either spell the beginning of a very difficult road — or the end of weeks of mental anguish.

AMANDA REVELL WALTON, 41, HIGHWORTH, WILTSHIRE

'We're too wise to get carried away'

We face an agonising wait

NEXT WEEK: Paul and Amanda brace themselves for the results.