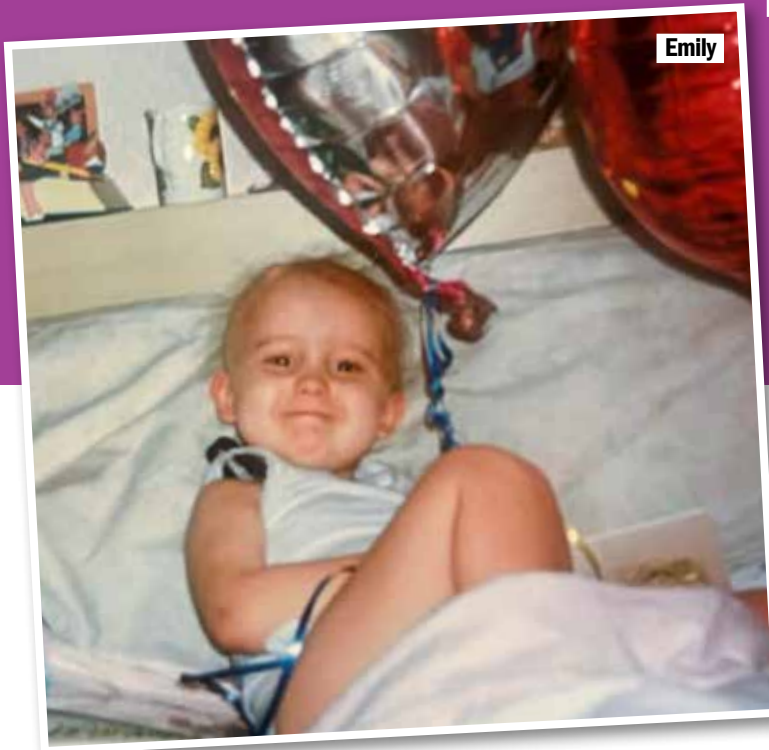


'I'll keep charging on!'



I'd never been one to sit still. So when I was offered an amazing opportunity, I refused to let a frightening diagnosis get in my way.

By Julie Kent MBE, 64

operation to relieve the pressure, then started chemotherapy, followed by stem cell treatment, celebrating her third birthday in hospital.

I kept my saxophone under her hospital bed, and in the evenings when Bernie finished work, he sat with her while I slipped out to play gigs. Playing music kept me going.

When we lost Emily just six months after her diagnosis, the only way I knew how to cope was

to just sort of charge on.

I'd always been someone who needed to be doing something – and going all in to do it.

'It's going to be bad news'

So, almost immediately after her death, we founded the Emily Kent Trust, initially to raise money for the Bristol Royal Infirmary, where Emily went for her scans, and then to support other families locally.

In time, Bernie and I went on to have Oliver and Georgia, and I juggled the charity with being a mum and working as a musician, a music teacher and running a boarding house.

Eventually, we folded the charity after donating £50,000 each to the new Bristol and Gloucestershire

With my MBE



children's hospitals and having a unit in the latter named after Emily.

But charity work wasn't over. Some years later, I joined the board of trustees for the Pied Piper Appeal, which raises money for the latest equipment for the Children's Centre at the Gloucestershire Royal.

Then one day, I got a surprise.

'I've been named one of the 50 greatest women in Gloucestershire!' I told Bernie.

We both started laughing,



especially when I realised it included Princess Anne, and famous writers like Pam Ayres and Jilly Cooper.

But two years later, an even bigger surprise landed in my email inbox.

'Bernie!' I shouted, running downstairs. 'Can you take a look at this?'

He stared at the official-looking message asking if I'd like to accept an MBE for my services to charity, and his mouth fell open.

'Oh my god,' Bernie gasped. 'This looks real!'

We had to keep it a secret until the Queen's Birthday Honours List was officially announced.

It was in the middle of COVID-19, so it was another two years before I found myself at Windsor Castle, curtsying in front of a smiling Prince William to

officially receive the honour.

I was in the process of retiring from the boarding house, but had recently become involved with a homelessness charity, so I joked to our future king, 'I have a feeling I won't be very good at retirement!'

The following year, to mark what would've been Emily's 30th birthday year, I challenged myself to raise £500,000 to fund a psychologist to support kids with cancer and their families at the Emily Kent Unit.

By then, I had yet another secret up my sleeve. I'd received a phone call inviting me to be the High Sheriff of Gloucestershire for a year.

But one morning, a few months before I was officially due to start the ceremonial role, I was drying my hair naked when I noticed a

weird crease in my left boob. I saw my doctor who sent me for tests, and within weeks, I'd been diagnosed with breast cancer.

Luckily, because I'd spotted the change, it had been caught early.

'Thank goodness for your naked blow-dry,' my consultant joked. After two lumpectomy operations to remove two small tumours and some of my lymph nodes, there was an anxious wait to find out if I'd need chemo or radiotherapy.

Depending on which one I needed, doctors had warned I might not be well enough to take on my new role.

'What happens if you have to have chemo?' Bernie fretted.

'I'll just charge on as usual,' I told him. 'Whatever happens, I'm going to make it work.'

Thankfully, I ended up having radiotherapy, which was tiring, but much less gruelling than chemo.

And two days after my last session, I headed to Gloucester Cathedral and got into my robes to be sworn in.

After making a declaration to the 500-strong crowd, a special badge was hung around my neck, and I stood proudly at the altar as the new High Sheriff of Gloucestershire.

Since then, I've travelled all over the county, attending three or four different engagements and meetings most days, including charity events, schools and colleges, speaking engagements and more.

I've enjoyed a ride-along in a police car and visited a prison.

Bernie loves being my consort. He's meant to walk

a couple of steps behind me, but he often forgets!

There have been so many memorable moments, but some tough times too, especially working with children affected by poverty and homelessness.

I couldn't sleep for three nights after learning more about the exploitation of children during a meeting with the Youth Justice Team.

I also believe very strongly in doing whatever you can – even if it's only small actions – to help other people.

Georgia and I were recently driving to an event in town when I spotted a woman running for the bus.

When it pulled away before she could get on it, I pulled over, rolled down my window and said, 'Would you like a lift?'

We ended up giving her a ride into town, and she was lovely.

Now, even though my year as High Sheriff is coming to an end, I won't be putting my feet up and taking things easy – it's not in my nature!

I've recently been named chairperson of the board of trustees at The Pied Piper Appeal, so I'll be throwing myself into that and I can't wait.

Just charging on has got me this far, so I'm going to stick with it!

