

10 HEALTH MISTAKES WE ALL MAKE

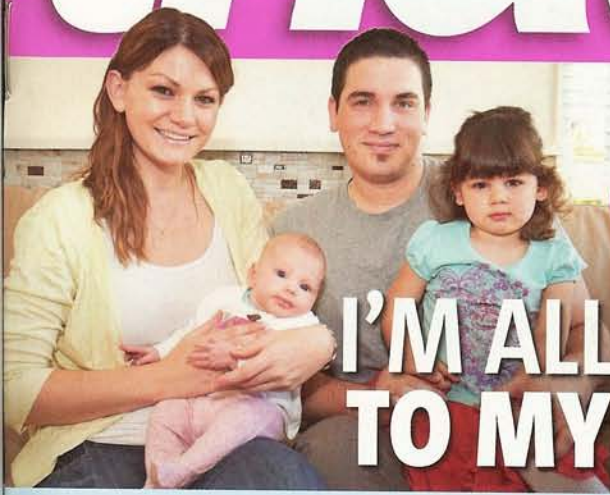


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MEDICAL MYSTERY

I'M ALLERGIC TO MY MAN



I MARRIED MY PRINCE WILLIAM!



The cat that saved my life



BLINDED BY A BOMB



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The cats **THA**

Purring like a chainsaw, the kitten rested his head on the pillow.

I'd been as tense as a coiled spring but as Jonah's fluffy body nestled next to mine, my heart began to melt.

Worries had been crowding my mind ever since doctors found a tumour in my breast after a routine mammogram just six weeks earlier.

'It's malignant,' they told me before explaining I'd need to have a mastectomy. Shock

was followed by terrible fear. How would I get through this?

Happily married to my second husband Philip, I'd been focusing on my career as a writer. But my carefree world came crumbling down.

It didn't help that my daughter Lydia, 26, had just flown off on a potentially dangerous trip to war-torn Sri Lanka, leaving me desperately worried.

Fortunately my family rallied round. My youngest, Katharine, 19, and eldest Rob, 35, were on hand to support me. Then Lydia flew back to help me through the op and my sister Mary travelled over from New Zealand to look after me too.

But deep down I knew I had to get well and let them get back to their own lives.

Then, three days into her visit, Mary came back from the shops with a twinkle in her eye.

'I found a perfect companion for you,' she grinned. 'A Siamese kitten in the pet shop. I want you to come and see him.'

I shook my head, sighing. I knew all about the amazing power of animals from previous experience, but no cute little cat could ever replace the saviour that helped heal me once before.

When our family had been shattered by the death of my nine-year-old son, Sam, three decades earlier, it was a tiny cat called Cleo who

came to our rescue. Sam had been hit by a car as he crossed the road and tragically Rob, then six, witnessed it all.

Rob was traumatised, but for a long time I was so paralysed with grief and anger towards the female driver, I didn't have the strength to

give him the support he needed. Then a friend of the family appeared on the doorstep with a small black bundle of fur – a kitten Sam picked out just a few weeks

before as his birthday gift. The painful reminder of our loss was almost too much for me to bear – until Rob scooped her up and took her inside. For the first time since his brother's death, I saw Rob smile. From that moment on, I knew Cleo the kitten was going to stay.

Through her cuddles and companionship, she helped Rob embark on a new life. Although our hearts never healed completely, over the years Cleo helped us piece ourselves back together. She saw me through the birth of my girls and when I separated from my first husband, she helped me through the divorce too.

Our little black cat continued to support us until around the time Rob fell in love with the girl of his dreams – Chantelle. It was then that Cleo finally passed away, aged 23.

Devastated, I vowed I'd never get another cat.

'Yes, you will,' my neighbour smiled.

'Cleo will choose your next cat for you.'

If Cleo sent me this feline tornado, I had to question why

Helen's experience with two special feline friends has changed her life

Helen Brown, 58, Melbourne, Vic

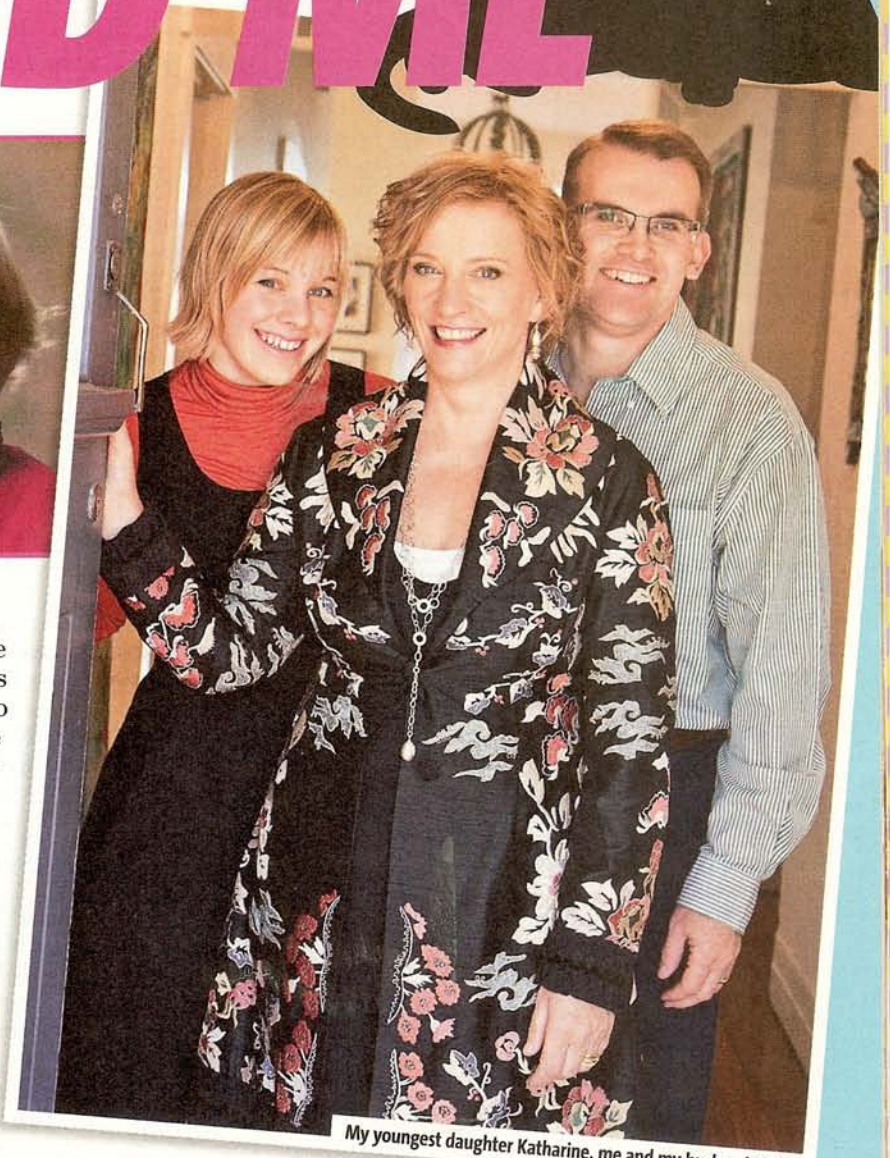
Me and Jonah – he can be a rascal, but he knows when he's needed



'CURED ME



My beautiful boy Sam



My youngest daughter Katharine, me and my husband Philip

Of course I hadn't been convinced. But as I gingerly walked into the pet shop with Mary that day, not long after my operation, something odd happened. I set eyes on a milky white kitten, whose face was tinged with shadowy brown, and I was instantly smitten.

I called him Jonah and the minute I got him home, I began to have regrets. He bounded down the hall, scaled the blinds and even dived into the toilet. If Cleo sent me this feline tornado then I had to question why.

In fact, as Jonah continued to wreak havoc, I was all set to send him back to the pet shop – that is until he crept into bed with me. Purring, he stepped over the covers and carefully avoided the areas surgeons had operated on. He knew where he was needed, nestling into my neck with his head on the pillow. Suddenly I knew Jonah was a healer, just like Cleo had been.

Weeks passed and Lydia told me she needed to return to Sri Lanka, but Jonah was proving to be a soothing presence.

If Lydia and I had a cross word, Jonah would put himself between us – making us lower our voices and run our hands through his fur. With Jonah's help, Lydia and I started to understand each other's fears. Now we're closer than ever.

Of course there were times when the little rascal was so naughty that I felt like posting him to Mary in New Zealand. If I dared to go away I couldn't put him in a cattery as he got too stressed. Instead I had to book him his own cat nanny to fuss over him at home.

He scaled trees and had to be retrieved by ladder and for a

long time, the sound of dogs barking was a battle cry. No matter how big the hound, he charged towards it, tail flying. We also had to build a cat run – complete with two hammocks – for him to sunbathe in.

But Jonah's antics always made me laugh. And they say laughter is the best medicine! As I slowly recovered from cancer, Jonah gave me a new lease of life.

Not that he liked me writing about his predecessor though! As I started putting together my book about how Cleo helped my family, Jonah got jealous. One morning the little devil trashed my study, tearing the letter keys off my keyboard! Despite his sabotage attempts, I finished the manuscript.

I was blown away when a publisher picked up the story. Less than a year later, my book, *Cleo*, began flying off the shelves all over the world. Suddenly I was being invited to America to do interviews and book signings.

My life had taken an exciting new turn and I had my feline friends Cleo and Jonah to

thank for that.

Now, *Cleo* has been translated into 16 languages and has sold around 500,000 copies. It's even going to be turned into a film – a true tribute to my furry friend.

I've been cancer-free for four years and Jonah is getting his moment in the spotlight too. I've written another book – about him!

It's funny because growing up I never really liked cats, but seeing what they've done for my family I've realised how

special they are.

Cats are always available, they don't answer back and they give you unconditional love. And we can all do with a bit of that in our lives. ●

As told to *Charlotte Ward*

After Cleo Came Jonah by Helen Brown is published by Allen & Unwin priced \$27.99.

