

**Julie McClelland, 44, Islandmagee**

Mum, I'm bleeding,' yelled my daughter Michelle from the bathroom. She'd just turned 11 and was growing up fast. 'Don't worry, darling,' I soothed, digging out some pads. 'You're just starting your period.' We'd already had the talk. Michelle was about to go on holiday with her dad Mark, so I called him to tip him off. We'd split when Michelle was little but had stayed friends. He doted on his daughter. Michelle had a great time on holiday in Turkey but when she came back, she was still spotting. And she was still bleeding a month on. I took her to the GP, who prescribed a contraceptive Pill to regulate her cycle, but that didn't help. 'Mum, look,' she shouted one day. Her pants were stained with bloody clots.

The C-word

We were referred for an ultrasound at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast. Doctors spotted a shadow near Michelle's womb. *She's too young for it to be serious,* I reasoned. Then doctors told us she had something called clear cell carcinoma of the cervix. My girl had cervical cancer. The baffled specialists had never seen a patient so young. 'Don't tell Michelle,' I told them sternly. 'I don't want anyone saying the C-word in front of her.' But, in the end, it was impossible to keep from her. The next 18 months were a blur of three gruelling rounds of chemotherapy. Michelle's beautiful

**SO YOUNG****CERVICAL CANCER****AGE 11****Pick Me Up!**
BIG STORY

- **Mystery symptoms, shocking diagnosis**
- **A beautiful young girl's fight for life**
- **Loved and remembered forever**

brown hair fell out, so we bought a blonde wig and pink headscarves. Michelle was such a girly girl, her make-up box was fuller than mine! The cancer was aggressive, so we were flown to London for a treatment called brachytherapy. Michelle was put to sleep as specialists inserted radiotherapy rods into her vagina. Surgeons stitched her internal organs into a kind of mesh to protect them, and she needed a stoma bag to take

away waste from her bowels because she couldn't go to the toilet. My brave princess slicked on her lip gloss and soldiered on. She celebrated the end of her treatment with a 70s party. We kept her illness a secret – only close family knew how sick she was. Michelle wanted to be a normal girl and she adored days out shopping and sleepovers. But back home she'd snuggle on our sofa, whimpering in pain. One day, she couldn't keep smiling any longer. 'Mummy, please help me,' she sobbed on

the loo. She was passing a vile-looking liquid and her back pain was terrible. Doctors said it was the after-effects of radiotherapy, but it got worse. She spent her nights lying in hot baths and Mark moved back in to help care for her. More scans, and devastating news – the cancer had spread to Michelle's left lung and pelvis. She needed part of her lung removing and more chemo. But Michelle wasn't going to let cancer hold her back...

Live, laugh, love

When she was 15, I nearly had a heart attack when I caught her snogging a boy at the end of our road! It was a welcome relief from all the hospital appointments. Specialists decided the only way to save her was radical surgery in London to remove her womb and ovaries, bladder, and part of her vagina. She was just 15. Michelle sobbed her heart out. For the rest of her life, she'd need external stoma bags

strapped to her body. We took her back to Turkey before the surgery. Predictably, she fell hopelessly in love with a young waiter and he took her for walks along the beach. I even let her get a tattoo reading *Live laugh love* across her foot. In June 2011, she was in surgery for 14 hours and Intensive Care for two weeks. We were warned it'd take months to recover, but soon Michelle was bouncing around, preparing for her 16th birthday. Our chubby-cheeked girl was now a beautiful young woman. She wore a glittering pink dress and held a party, raising £4,000 for local charities. But underneath, her body was shutting down. Just hours after posing for birthday snaps, she was crying in pain on the sofa. Back at hospital, we found out why. The cancer was back – in her right lung, liver and pelvis. 'I don't want to talk about it,' I shouted, bolting out of the room as doctors gently told us there was nothing more they could do. Michelle's ambition was to work with children, so she sat her GCSE exam in Childcare in our living room, with her headteacher watching over her. We bought her a little pug puppy called Lola – and, for her last Christmas, the living room

was piled high with presents. On Michelle's 17th birthday, she couldn't get up, so we filled her room with balloons and her daddy handed over his credit card. 'Buy whatever you want, princess,' he told her. She never got the chance. Three days later, Michelle was rushed into hospital and doctors warned us we'd reached the end. Our girl died on 27 February 2013. I told folk to wear pink for her funeral, played *Diamonds* by Rihanna. I sobbed as her GCSE results came through three months later – of course my girl had got an A.

She's gone but she'll never be forgotten. Mark and I hold an annual Princess Ball to raise money for charity. This year, like every year, I took pink balloons to her grave on her birthday. Michelle would've been 21. How I wish she was here to celebrate.

Doctors warned us that we'd reached the end...**See Your GP...**

Cervical cancer in younger people is incredibly rare, with only two out of every 100 women diagnosed under the age of 25. Whatever your age, you should see your GP if you are bleeding outside your period, or during or after sex. Women aged 25-49 will be invited for cervical screening tests every three years, regardless of whether they are experiencing symptoms.

MICHELLE WILL ALWAYS BE OUR PINK PRINCESS

Michelle wrote a diary about her cancer journey which has now been published, called *Time To Take My Life Back*. It costs £7.99 and all proceeds go to the charities that supported her. For more info, go to www.michelle-peacockfoundation.com

With Mark and Michelle, aged 15**After her first round of chemo**