

Breast Cancer Awareness Month: Celebrating Kee-moh Snacks



“Sometimes life guides us to where we will be the most impactful or where we will be the most fulfilled. Sometimes, that is the same place.”

Alexandra Stewart had forged a professional career as an orthoptist and was studying forensic science at university when she was diagnosed with breast cancer - just nine weeks before her wedding. She endured a double mastectomy, surgery, chemotherapy and early menopause. The side effects of her treatment were horrendous. She clearly remembers the nausea and metallic taste in her

mouth, as well as the mouth ulcers and malnutrition.

She also remembers the “jelly and custard” hospital food she was served because she could not keep anything else down and the weight loss she suffered because she was so depleted.

It was only when her treatment was all over and she’d come out the other side of breast cancer that she found her new purpose - an online food business for cancer patients called “Kee-moh Snacks”, featuring recipes she designed and trialled herself with the help of nutritionists.

This business also spawned her first book, ‘Festive Fare’, which is a collection of Christmas-inspired recipes tailored to people undergoing cancer treatment. Now a second publication, ‘Jelly is Not Food’ has just been launched.

From here, Alyx dreams of Kee-moh Snacks becoming a global enterprise, informing hospitals around the world that cancer patients need foods that are nourishing, palatable and delicious.

This is her story.

“In my early thirties, I found a tiny speck of a lump in my right breast and I mentioned it to a doctor who told me it was probably just hormonal. But 18 months later, it felt like the lump had suddenly grown exponentially overnight and it had become painful. I went to my regular GP and the rest, as they say, is history. It was such a whirlwind. The following week I was into surgery. This was exactly a week after diagnosis. I had a single mastectomy initially and then I had the other breast off a year later because there were signs of pre-cancer in my other breast. Because of my age, the surgeons said to get it done.

Chemotherapy and Other Treatment

The side-effects of chemotherapy were brutal and took an inordinate toll on my

body. The biggest issue was nutrition and actually being able to get food in (and stay in). Side-effects had made it so difficult to eat that I had developed disease-related malnutrition. It's very common in the cancer world but not widely dealt with. My entire diet for months (when I could eat) consisted of lamb, garlic, the freshest white bread with the crusts removed and strawberry jam. I was so malnourished that I lost about 10 kilograms. For the duration of chemotherapy, I was also on other hormone-suppressing medication which put me into early menopause. I had hideous hot flushes. At the peak, I was having a hot flush every minute and a half. That was the most distressing thing. I had to sleep on towels on the bed because I was soaked through.

Fertility

Egg freezing was provided as an option to me early on, but we opted against it because we wanted to do everything in the shortest possible time that we could. My cancer was so hormone-positive that a pregnancy would have tipped me over the edge. I would have been putting more hormones into my body to feed that cancer.

I had not found anybody I wanted to have kids with until I met James, so it was a whole new area for me anyway. I thought he was good breeding stock! It's more these days that I think about not having children. Sometimes I wonder which one of my nieces and my nephews I will be able to rely on and if I will be lonely when I am older. I find that not having the opportunity to have children plays more on my mind now.

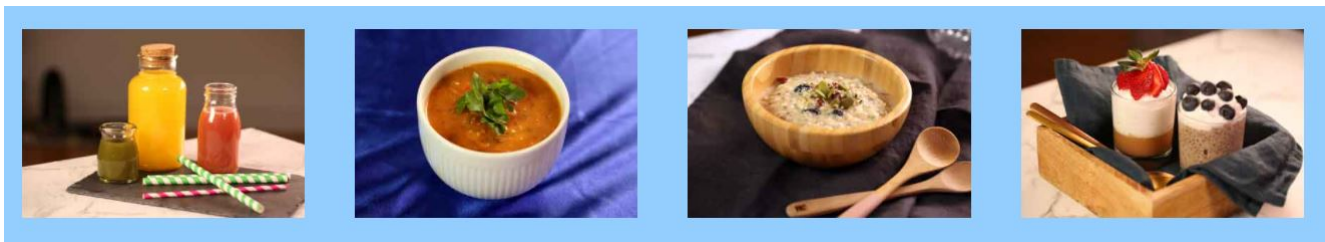
Work and Friends

I went back to work too soon after my chemotherapy, way too soon. It was only couple of weeks after finishing chemotherapy. It was a ridiculous move in hindsight, but I just wanted to be out of the house. Cancer can really be a lonely and isolating experience. I lost a lot of friends because I think they don't know what to say; it scares them. Nobody wants to hear the truth; they want everything to be rosy for them and for you.



Kee-moh Snacks

A few years ago, I realised I had to find my new purpose. Cancer had changed me. I had learnt so much from my cancer experience and I realised there was something else I needed to be doing. I started listening to people with different ears. I had always enjoyed cooking, but I have found I am really good at improvising and making up recipes! I realised I wanted to give people the tools they needed to prepare nutritious and comforting food while going through cancer. That was really how Kee-moh Snacks began and the cookbooks are an extension of that.



Fear of Recurrence and the Future

It's 13 years now since my experience and I am doing well. I am fit and healthy but the fear of cancer returning is always there. I call it the 'black shadow' and it comes in waves. I don't know how I get out of it; I just need to let it run its course. I think it is becoming more prevalent now because I realise I have so much more to do. For me, it is about leaving a legacy and what if I don't get the time to do that?

If I was diagnosed with secondaries tomorrow, I think I would be in a heap. I want the time to do what I need to do.

For now, I am exactly where I am meant to be. I have never had a real feeling of purpose until now. I will never be grateful for having had cancer, but I am grateful for what it has given me."

*Alyx shared her story in August 2019.

For more on Kee-moh Snacks or to order a cookbook, please go to <https://kee-mohsnacks.com.au/>