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Bronwyn Wallace shares how her cancer was initially misdiagnosed as menopause

When Bronwyn Wallace first began feeling unwell in her early fifties, she was constantly tired, flushed and short of breath. Every doctor she saw said the same thing, it was "just menopause."

Bronwyn Wallace

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When I first began feeling unwell in my early fifties, I was constantly tired, flushed and short of breath.

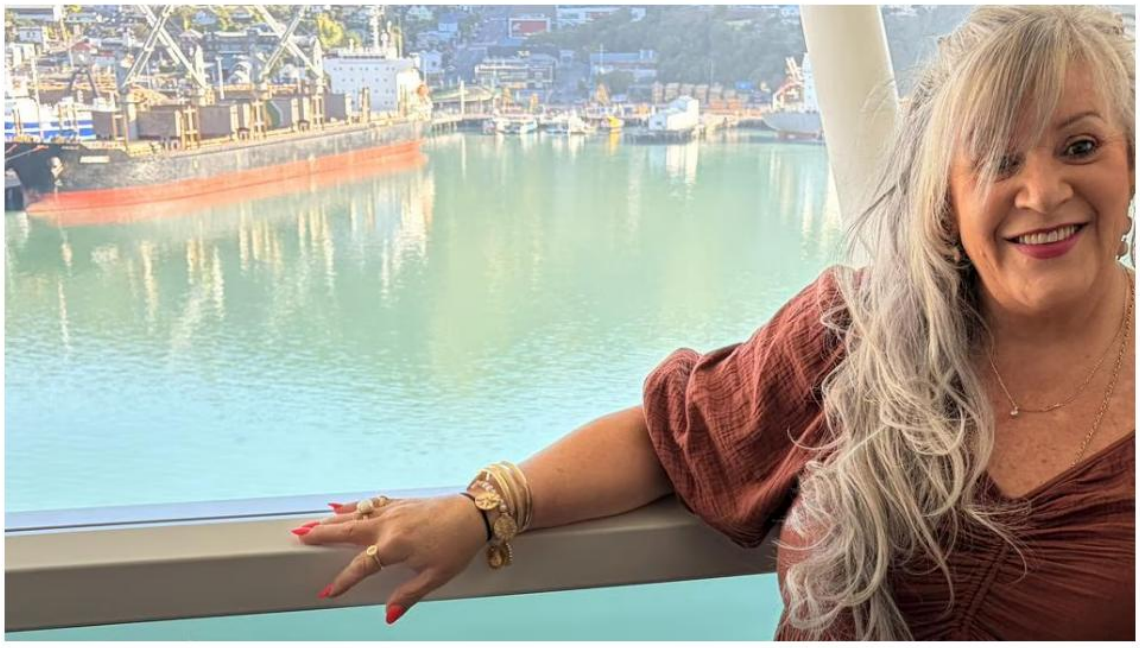
I would sit down to dinner after work and barely make it through the first bite before my elbows were on the table, eyes closing, trying not to fall asleep.

My husband Paul would ask, "Have you slept badly?" but I hadn't, I just couldn't stay awake.

Then came the heat.

If I had a glass of wine, it looked like I had a chemical burn.

I would be sweating while everyone else was cool.



Bronwyn first began feeling unwell in her early fifties.

Every doctor I saw said the same thing, that it was “just menopause.”

I tried to believe them, but deep down I knew something was wrong.

For more than a year I went from appointment to appointment.

Living in the Manning Valley meant waiting weeks for appointments and travelling long distances for referrals.

My GP was wonderful and tried everything to work out what was going on.

He even sent me to a gynaecologist and an endocrinologist, but no one could explain why I was so flushed, tired and unsteady.

In October 2018, Paul and I were travelling back from a trip across Western Australia when I became so unwell that I half-joked, “If I die on the way home, tell everyone I knew it was coming.”

Soon after, I went to Taree Hospital, about 15km from home, where doctors thought I had a systemic infection.

During a kidney scan they found a large mass on the right side of my body.

One of the doctors, who had seen a neuroendocrine tumour years earlier, recognised what it might be.

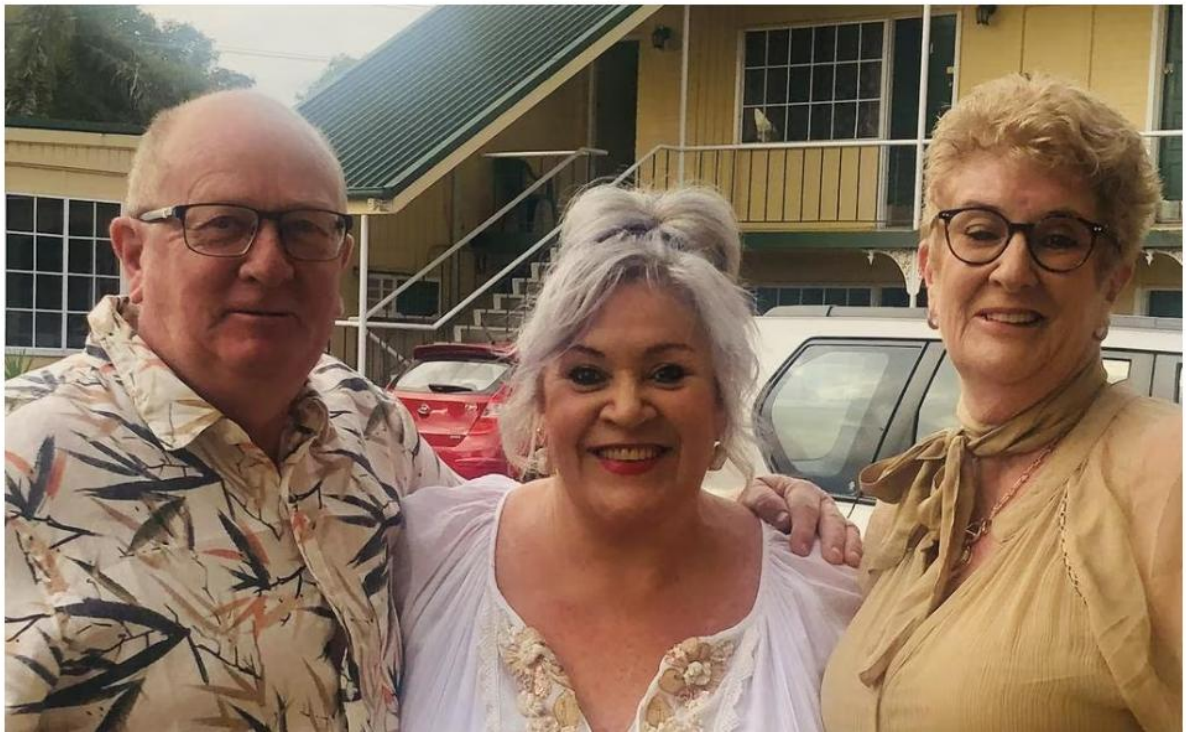
Within ten days I was having surgery at Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, where the mass and 13 lymph nodes were removed.

For a while I thought it was all behind me, but within months my symptoms returned.

New scans showed the cancer had spread to my heart and pancreas.

Living regionally made it difficult to access the care I needed, but my sister Frances and Paul were by my side for every appointment.

In 2019, we decided to get married.



Paul proposed on a trip to Goodooga, a tiny outback town where my parents once worked.

He bought me an opal and asked me to be his wife.

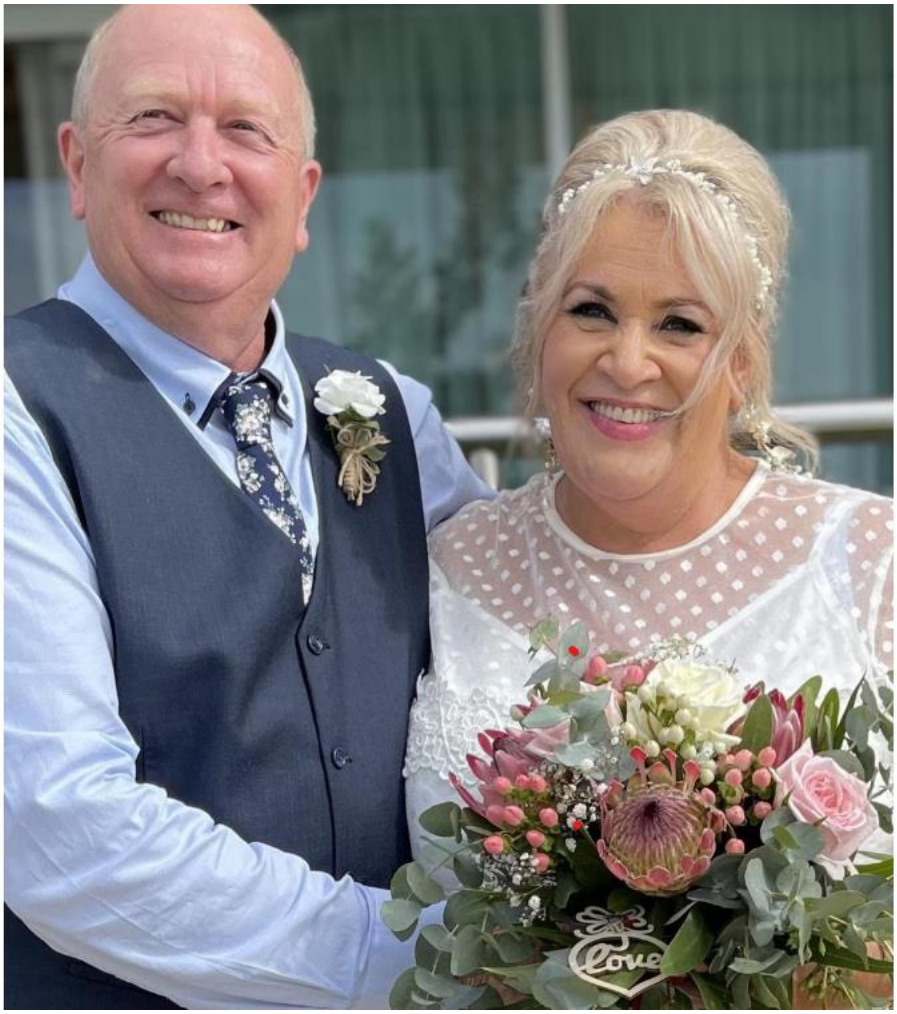
After delays due to Covid and a hip replacement, we finally married on 20 February 2021. The Sunday Telegraph even featured us in their wedding section. Surrounded by just 25 close friends and family, it was the most beautiful day.

During my speech I joked, “Paul’s marrying me for my health,” and everyone laughed.

But beneath the laughter, it was a deeply emotional day.

I had been told I might only have three to five years, and as I looked around the room at the most important people in my life, I felt such joy mixed with sadness.

It was a moment of love and gratitude, but also uncertainty, not knowing how long I’d be there to share more days like it.



Six years on, I'm still here and I'm currently on a cruise through New Zealand.

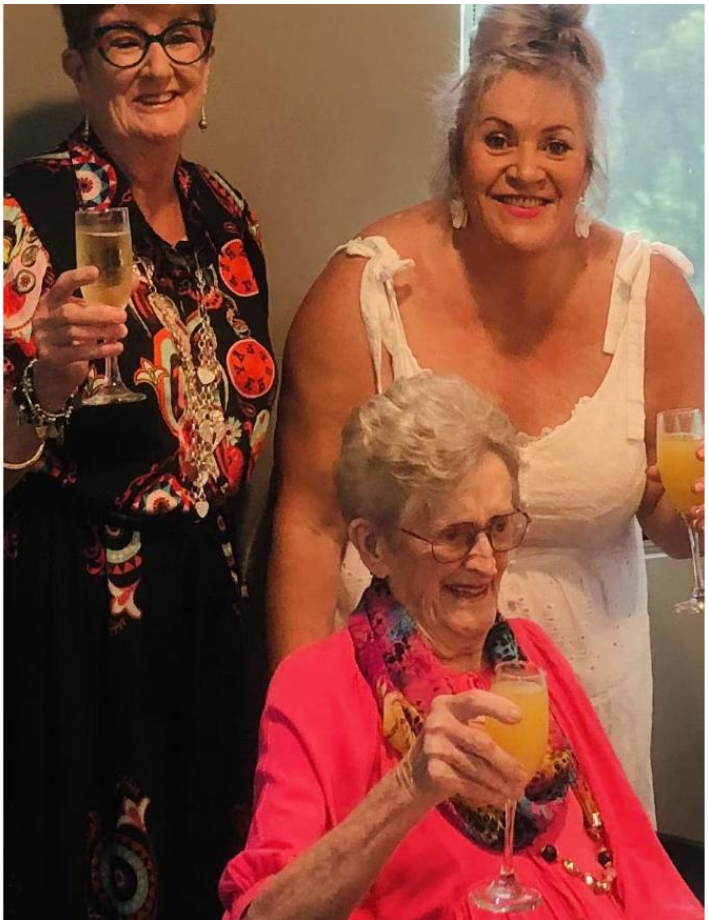
I'm what they call "watch and wait," with metastases in my heart and pancreas, but I liv
life as fully as I can.

Earlier this year my mum passed away in May.

Around the same time our community in Wingham was hit by devastating floods.

More than 800 homes were lost across the Manning Valley.

We took in evacuees, cooked for people without electricity and helped friends whose
houses were inundated.



Through all of it I kept thinking there is always someone worse off than yourself, and that to live a good life you have to care deeply about others and stay kind.

I want others to know that neuroendocrine cancer isn't always terminal.

You can live with it, and you can still find joy.

I still see the best in everyone, and I believe the key is to trust your instincts.

If something doesn't feel right, don't stop asking questions.

You know your own body best.

Bronwyn has been supported by NeuroEndocrine Cancer Australia.

NECA provides access to a dedicated NET nurse helpline, patient support groups, educational resources and advocacy to ensure all Australians receive timely diagnosis and equitable care.