

Life on Thursday

YP Table

The real life drama behind the scenes for soap's cancer survivor

As a script supervisor on Emmerdale, Angie Lavelle is used to dramas, but for the last four years she's had plenty of her own.

Catherine Scott
meets her.

BEFORE SHE suffered cancer Angie Lavelle would never have thought of throwing herself out of a plane or doing a high velocity zip wire. Now she can't get enough of these adrenalin fuelled challenges.

"I think having cancer made me realise that I could do things," says Angie, 54. "When I told my friends about the challenges I am doing they can't believe it. But I just say I have battled cancer, so I can do anything."

It is this positive attitude and the support of family and friends from *Emmerdale*, where she is a script supervisor, which has helped Angie through her four-year battle with breast cancer.

Now she wants to raise awareness of the condition as she is concerned that with the improvement in success rates people might become complacent.

"When I told people I had breast cancer some said: 'That's one of the good ones.' There are no good ones when it comes to cancer and women have got to make sure they check themselves and go to their doctor if they are worried. I'd had a clear mammogram just months before I found a lump in my breast," says Angie who worked on *Hearbeat* for 17 years before moving to *Emmerdale*.

Angie, who is divorced and lives in Guiseley near Leeds, was diagnosed with breast cancer in March 2011. She first noticed a lump in her breast one morning in the shower.

"It was not painful but felt slightly sensitive. I didn't go straight to see my GP as I was in the middle of filming a block of episodes for *Emmerdale*. I work long hours and am responsible for continuity in the programme, so it's difficult to slot appointments in," said Angie.

"When I eventually saw my GP she thought it may be a cyst as I'd had a clear mammogram a few months previously. However, just to be certain, she made an appointment for me to get it checked the following week."

Angie had a further mammogram, ultrasound and several biopsies and was told it was almost certainly cancer.

"I was totally numb, I'd gone alone to the appointment. I sat in my car and burst into tears. When I got the official diagnosis,



DRAMATIC STORYLINE: Emmerdale script supervisor and cancer victim Angie Lavelle at work and inset, Skydiving for a cancer fund-raiser in 2014.

a mastectomy and full armpit lymph node removal.

The following month she underwent a course of chemotherapy. She opted for the cold cap in the hope of preventing total hair loss.

"However, by the third chemo it was obvious I was losing my hair anyway and I made the difficult decision to have it shaved off," she said.

"Losing your hair is one of the hardest things for a woman with cancer. But I was determined not to let cancer take over my life. I picked out some fantastic wigs, and never went out without my make-up. I decided if I looked good it would help my self-esteem."

"I'm not saying there weren't some dark days, but friends and family and the staff at the Spire really helped me through."

During her chemo treatment Angie didn't feel well enough to work full time and ITV Leeds allowed her to work from home when she felt up to it.

"This was an enormous help as it gave me a purpose and helped

me feel that the cancer hadn't taken over my life."

Following chemo she pushed herself physically by walking every day, no matter how tired or ill she felt. She built up her stamina and after three weeks started going to the gym.

By April 2012, Angie felt ready for reconstruction. Mr Horgan carried out an LD flap (see panel) and inserted a breast implant.

Last year she decided to have nipple reconstruction surgery. "Everyone is different but for me reconstruction as really important."

Angie decided to set herself a range of personal goals. Three months after reconstruction surgery she climbed Mount Snowdon with 40 other breast cancer patients in a charity

fundraising venture. Her team was called Lifeclimb.

"I have met an amazing group of women through an online support group. We have all been through a similar thing and some of us have become firm friends."

Angie and a friend organised a charity ball, again in the name of Lifeclimb, raising more than £50,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support from the two events.

This year she is to tackle the Velocity Zip Wire in Snowdonia.

"My energy levels are not as great as they were pre-cancer but I don't allow that to stand in my way. I push myself physically, which I feel has really helped me battle my disease."

"Cancer has changed me totally, I live for the moment and am not afraid to try new things. I have always been positive and optimistic, even when there's been a glitch and there's a worry at the back of your mind. But negative emotions fuel the cancer I believe, so I never dwell and try not to worry. The cancer was not going to control me or my life."

"The cancer was not going to control me or my life."

Emmerdale script supervisor and cancer survivor Angie Lavelle

Reconstruction through surgery

Some women have their breast(s) reconstructed using muscle, fat and skin from their back. This is called a latissimus dorsi flap (LD flap).

It has a high success rate and problems are rare.

Sometimes an LD flap is used with a breast implant to give a more natural feel than an implant alone. It may be used after breast-

conserving surgery if a large amount of breast tissue has been removed.

Angie Lavelle is taking part in a number of fund-raising challenges for Macmillan Cancer Relief and Cancer Research UK.

Anyone who would like to sponsor her in her latest High Velocity Zip Wire challenge can visit Angie visit www.justgiving.com/Angie-Lavelle3

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