Her Edit

HER ISSUE | HER VOICE

Issue Thirty-two
Winter 2020

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Front cover images
Clockwise from top left: Sim Scavazza,
Jessica Borge, Sha Zhou and Jenny Glanfield

Welcome to Her Edit

There is little I can add to the existing extensive commentary on what has been an extraordinary year. Amongst the Her Edit team we have faced many of the challenges common to us all during the pandemic; loss of work and income, caring for our parents and vulnerable loved ones, experiencing the isolation of lockdown and missing the love and company of those we hold most dear.

As we look forward to brighter days ahead, I am delighted to share these articles which each touch on the one lesson we might all take away from 2020 - the importance of finding our common humanity.

Jessica Borge's research for her fascinating book about the original maker of Durex condoms led her to finding new friends. I defy you not to titter at her hilarious YouTube video which shows how robust these things genuinely are.

Sim Scavazza's personal response to the Black Lives Matter campaign is a salient reminder that inaction is compliance and a call to action for us all; we need to do better.

I hugely enjoyed talking to Sha Zhou about her research on the experience of Chinese women who have migrated to Britain, challenging the stereotypes which we can all acquiesce to.

Jenny Glanfield's account of her liver transplant illustrates how an act which demands nothing of us can transform someone's life.

This year we have born witness to incredible bravery, resilience and kindness often by people in our communities who are acknowledged and appreciated the least. We salute those who have selflessly given care, support and service to others, from NHS workers to the postie and hope we may all be inspired to continue in that spirit in 2021. Happy New Year!

Her Issue Thirty-two

IMAGES
Left: courtesy www.blacklivesmatter.com
Right: courtesy of Jessica Borge

Dr Jessica Borge is an interdisciplinary researcher in the field of Contemporary British History with a specialism in the intersection of business, society and media.

Jessica's latest book, Protective Practices: A History of the London Rubber Company and the Condom Business, tells the fascinating story of the biggest and most successful condom manufacturer in Britain, its business practices and shines a light on the changing sexual culture.

Jessica was raised in Clerkenwell near to where London Rubber had their first shop and offices.

JESSICA BORGE

Hand in rubber glove

When you set out to write the history of The London Rubber Company, which was once Britain's biggest condom manufacturer, you do so with the expectation that anything can happen. One of the things that has surprised me most about the experience of researching this most niche of topics is the willingness of strangers - and men in particular - to discuss condoms with me, even if I don't ask them to (which I mostly don't!).

I will never forget being the willing captive audience of a bunch of middle-aged lawyers - all of them perfectly pleasant and well-behaved – in a downtown Washington DC bar in the summer of 2015. Once my special area of interest had been revealed, the floodgates opened and they gushed forth, wide-eyed, about their lives with condoms.

You would be amazed at how easily that conversation flowed, and how willing these gentlemen were to discuss the subject in front of each other, let alone me. After all, most end-users of this particular product aren't even wearing the correct size and go on suffering in silence: you can't just go and get fitted by an expert like you can with a bra in John Lewis! I honestly think they were pleased to get these experiences and their questions off of their chests, and it was all done – as Kenny Everett would say - in the best possible taste.

But the best takeaway from writing this book (as well as having a very beautiful object to show for it) is the investment made in the project by people who just wanted to help.

The book grew out of PhD research, which I had nearly finished when I chanced upon Gary Heales, then assistant curator (since retired) at Vestry House Museum, London Borough of Waltham Forest in the autumn of 2016. There isn't much of an archive for the London Rubber Company, but Vestry House holds the firm's historic photo albums and for someone like me, these are gold dust.

Gary was just doing his job by letting me come in and pick out photographs to illustrate my thesis, but it was his own personal kindness and thoughtfulness that led me to meet Angela Wagstaff, a local lady and ex-London Rubber employee.

IMAGES
Angela Wagstaff photographed left, as Miss Marigold, and right wearing her Miss Marigold sash and Mary Quant fabric dress, 1960s.

Angela was also doing some research on the company, and within hours of our first emails we were on the phone, chatting about London Rubber. I think we were on the line for close to two hours, sharing information. “This is what it’s all about”, I thought to myself, feeling butterflies.

Angela kindly allowed me to interview her, and what I found especially interesting about her testimony was the sense of ordinariness she had about working for a firm that just happened to make contraceptives.

Back in the 1950s, London Rubber was the largest employer in Chingford but, the way Angela tells it, the specific discussion of condoms seemed as uncommon as it was unnecessary apart, perhaps, from the occasional and wholly understandable wisecrack.

Angela was aged 18 and working in Westcott’s laundry when, in 1955, she “decided it was time for a change”. London Rubber recruited her as an office junior in the wages department, but it wasn’t clear what the company made. At the end of her first week, Angela was sent onto the factory floor to distribute wage packets and realised for herself…sort of.

‘I don’t think I did know what they were for’, she told me. Later, Angela was made ‘Miss Marigold’ and promoted the rubber glove side of the business in a bright red sash she made with her husband, Harry, a medical instrument maker.

When Angela and I met, she was in the midst of tracking down other ex-employees and introduced me to John Harvey, who had been a sales manager at the firm in its golden age during the 1950s and 1960s. Unbeknownst to me, John had been going through a particularly rough patch with his health, but he really seemed to want to talk. His wife, Pat, dropped him off at Angela’s house (with a home-made cake) and the three of us began what would become a series of recorded interviews that proved instrumental in my understanding of this company, the products it made, the culture it cultivated, and the importance it had in supporting the lives of ordinary Chingfordians.

This was wonderful for my research, of course, but the main thing seemed to be that we were enjoying ourselves. Through a chain of small kindnesses, not only had I gathered some cracking material, but had also gained new friends. Gary retired from Vestry House and I was very proud to visit him on his last day: had it not been for him I would never have met Angela. And of course, without Angela, I would not have gotten to know John, and Pat too. We are still friends, and all of us are thrilled that the book has finally come out: who knew it would bring us together?

Protective Practices. A History of the London Rubber Company and the Condom Business is published by McGill-Queen’s University Press and can be ordered from all good bookshops, priced at £22.50. Visit the London Rubber Company website for more information on the book, the author, and the company,

IMAGES
Top right: Gary Heales and Jessica Borge;
Centre, from left to right, John Harvey holding a 1960s Durex Gossamer, Angela Wagstaff and Jessica Borge;
Bottom right: Jessica Borge.

All images courtesy of Jessica Borge

Sim Scavazza is a retail and fashion specialist with 30 years' experience working for the UK's leading retailers. In 2003 she become brand director of Miss Selfridge and two years later was voted one of the UK's most infllluential people in fashion retail by the trade magazine Drapers.

Sim is deputy chair of the University of the Arts London, a non-executive Director at Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust. She is an advocate of ethical fashion and mum to twin girls in their first year of university.

Here Sim shares her personal response to the Black Lives Matter campaign.

Image of Sim Scavazza courtesy of University of the Arts London

SIM SCAVAZZA

I've never felt more Black - the complexity of race

Something changed for me following the horrendous death of George Floyd in May 2020 in the United States. I became more aware of my Blackness. Let me explain.

My mother is Italian and my father was Jamaican, but I was born and bred in the whitest of whites south west of England in January 1966. My family is white European and I had no contact with my father or his family in Jamaica throughout my childhood.

I was just me until about the age of seven when a girl at school pointed out my colour and commented on the fact that my mother was white so how could I be her daughter. I remember being gobsmacked — shocked — rocked to my very core.

Of course, my family threw their arms around me and assured me I was loved regardless of my colour, but I suddenly felt angry and resentful at my mum for putting me in this position. I was struggling to understand the enormity of the news and struggling with the way it made feel. I couldn't speak to anyone about it, it just burned away inside me.

These confusing emotions made me become more competitive - I felt I had to show the world that I was good, worthy, better even, than others at a lot of things. I ran faster, worked harder, amassed medals, cups and accolades at school. If my efforts weren't recognised on Prize Giving Day, I felt like a failure. My best friend was white, all my friends were white, my family was white, my brother was white. How was I supposed to relate to anything else? I didn't know any black children.

The only other clue as to my 'otherness' at home was my hair. My mother was engaged in a constant battle to manage it. I was forever in rollers with acres of olive oil slathered on for good measure. I remember being spat at in the street in Taunton and being called Blackie. Most of the locals weren't used to seeing black faces you see.

I remember it carrying on like that until 1979, when I started at my new senior school. It was an independent boarding school with day pupils, of which I was one.

What a revelation and a relief. I was cast into a mini cosmopolitan world with pupils from all over the world who boarded and travelled back and forth. Local farmers' kids, Nigerian princes, scholars from Hong Kong and China, students whose families were based abroad as part of the armed Forces. This was a slice of the world and I suddenly found my place. I wasn't the only black face or for that matter the only different face. We blended and rolled with it - this mix of cultures was totally natural. I attribute much of my happiness and confidence to attending that school. It was the making of me and prepared me for the next phase of my life at university. London was in my sights, a place that mirrored the diversity I had experienced at my senior school. It was obvious that I would end up here...

Throughout my career in fashion I have worked hard and I don't recall ever really being held back by the colour of my skin. I now realise that this was partly due to being in London, partly due to working in the fashion industry where making money was more important than the colour of your skin, partly due to being well educated and partly due to presenting as the 'acceptable' side of Black; by that I mean, not too dark, softened features, neutral English accent, tall and with straightened hair.

Most of my mates are white, because that is who I've been surrounded by in my life. I didn't see it as a problem, but the racial tensions in the US made me realise that I'd been leading a privileged, somewhat sheltered existence. I live in west London in a lovely house with a bit of a garden. My twin girls attended lovely private schools, my Irish ex-husband and I worked hard to ensure they had everything they needed. We were liberal, global, open minded and multi-cultural, but spent a lot of our energy looking after ourselves.

I was Chair of a UK registered charity for nine years but realised that I hadn't been advocating enough for Black people. Yes, I'd taken on Black staff and supported all sorts of people from various backgrounds during my career, but I suddenly felt as if I wasn't doing enough. I'd buried my Blackness and cast aside all the horrible comments and micro aggressions I had suffered as a child because they no longer seemed relevant.

I had become one of those people who think the world thinks like them and everyone is equal. But of course, like most professional people in London, I had somehow let the rest of the country down. I felt guilty at not being Black enough, guilt at having enough money not to have to worry.

What a burden, Black, privileged and unaware. I am supposedly BAME, that awful term which lumps people from five different ethnic groups and 18 sub-categories all together in one horrible homogenous mass. We are all meant to feel and behave in the same predictable way so that the marketers and social scientists can manage such a large set of people. The problem is, we are all totally different. I have nothing in common with a West African woman culturally, except for not being white. I have absolutely no idea what it is like to have been brought up on an estate in south London as a second generation afro-Caribbean woman or having been born in the Philippines or in a country like Jamaica. So what does that make me?

Mixed heritage, White and Black Caribbean apparently, but my mother is Italian, born in Sicily, having arrived in England at the age of five years old after the second world war. I happen to have been born in England. I am me, I am a woman who happens to have dark skin. I feel European, I love the UK (it's my home), I love people, wherever they come from, whatever nationality they are, as long as they're good, solid people who share my values.

The point is, I am ME, not someone else's definition of me. I don't feel guilty anymore. I've decided to use the fact that I'm on the 'palatable' side of Black for most white people. Now I see my role as a bridge to help 'good' White people, the 'Gatekeepers' as June Sarpong refers to influential business leaders, to understand allyship and unlearn some of what we have all been taught from time immemorial.

It's not easy, nor is it comfortable for liberal people to realise that they have been complicit through inaction and silence. It is no longer acceptable for White people to stand by and wait for improvements to be made by the Black community; we all need to take some responsibility and call out what we see in front of our very eyes. It has been an 'Aha' moment; a moment of revelation, a moment of reflection. I understand I cannot carry the weight of changing the world on my shoulders, but I do know I have to try and contribute and do something.

What can I do, I hear you ask? Well, read; read like there's no tomorrow. Educate yourself, immerse yourself in fiction and non-fiction authored by Black people, there is so much available now. Listen to all sorts of people who are not White as they talk about their life experience, watch the proliferation of TV content on offer. Question everything, rethink your recruitment processes, give someone a leg up. There's so much to be done and such pleasure to be gained from even small acts of kindness and acknowledgement.

I came across this piece of research on the subject of allyship. As the spotlight is intensified on organisations and institutions, you might reflect on exactly where you sit on such a continuum and, more importantly, what this might look like in practice.

According to the Rochester Racial Justice Toolkit, allyship is 'a proactive, ongoing, and incredibly difficult practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege works in solidarity and partnership with a marginalised group of people to help take down the systems that challenge that group's basic rights, equal access, and ability to thrive in our society.' Reid's (2019) work describes a continuum where allyship ranges from "apathetic" to "advocate" with promising qualities of "awareness" and "active" in between.

I am hopeful for the future. It will take a generation, but things will change. It makes me smile when I think of my daughters with their mixed heritage and the ease with which they carry their otherness.

IMAGE

Sim with her mother and grandfather in Somerset in 1969

Sha Zhou holds a MRes in Historial Research from the Institute of Historial Research, University of London, for which she wrote about British women's emigration in the 19th century. In 2016 she joined the Institute of Contemporary British History at King's College London; her doctorate research attempts to fill the void in historical accounts of Chinese women's migration experience via archival documents and oral history testimonies.

Sha spoke to Jayne Phenton about her research and how the shared experience of Chinese women moving to Britain resonated with her.

SHA ZHOU
China Girl

Of all the migrant communities in the UK, few must have the ubiquitous visible social presence of Chinatowns in cities like London, Manchester and Birmingham.

The British government's drive to meet post-war labour shortages via migration from Commonwealth countries, such as the West Indies, also extended to colonies such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia, many of whom were born in China or Chinese descendants.

While the latter part of the twentieth century has seen the feminisation of migration across all nationalities, the increase in the Chinese female population in Britain in the past 70 years has been dramatic; from less than one-fifth in the 1950s to over half in 2001.

The economic boom in the 1950s fuelled the British appetite for the exotic exemplified by a chop sticks eating competition at a Butlins holiday camp, but western fascination with 'the Orient' is epitomised in the depiction of women in cinema and literature. The American-born Chinese actress Anna May Wong embodied exotic, oriental beauty variously playing a slave girl, prostitute, temptress or doomed lover in over 60 films up to 1960. Stereotypes such as the exotic China Doll, erotic Suzy Wong or the diabolical Dragon Lady continue to be pervasive and now extend to the bookish, passive and fanatically studious Chinese student.

Unpicking the complex reality of the experience of Chinese women in Britain has occupied researcher Sha Zhou for almost four years. Her PhD thesis, The Migration of Ethnic Chinese Women to Britain since 1945, examines the establishment of the Chinese community in the UK through the lens of gender.

Originally from Wuhan, Sha studied English literature and language in Shanghai before moving to London to learn more about British history. Her imagination was captured by letters she found in the Women's Library archives, written by Victorian women who had emigrated to various parts of the British empire.

'I read the letters and felt very moved by how they wrote about being so far away from home. One wrote, 'I'm 15,000 miles away from the old England. I miss you a lot and I'm not coming back.' It was the first time I had lived away from home myself - and so far from my family and

friends - so these women's experiences really spoke to me.'

The result of her research is a fascinating documentation of Chinese women's experience of settling in the UK.

'What resonated with me while I was interviewing these women, was that the main similarity between us is that we're all foreign. Migration status gives you a lot of shared experience, such as developing language skills, and it can be a challenge managing the compromise between British culture and Chinese culture, adapting, adjusting and making sense of it for yourself.'

The catalysts for moving to the UK range from the economic to the political to the adoption of baby girls abandoned in colonial Hong Kong in the 1960s under China's one child a couple policy. Many Chinese from the southern coast escaped famine and political turmoil before the Cultural revolution in the late sixties and seventies by travelling via Hong Kong and elsewhere; the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration in which Britain handed sovereignty of Hong Kong back to China resulted in the migration of educated, bilingual, middle-class, urban professionals from Hong Kong to Britain. Following the military action after the Tiananmen Square protests in June 1989, the British government reluctantly granted British citizenship to 50,000 people and their direct descendents although they were subject to scrupulous selection criteria including age, experience and command of English.

A lot of the women Sha interviewed worked in family catering firms and expressed guilt at the long hours they were obliged put in at the expense of spending time with their children. While middle-class housewives displayed a greater sense of confidence, Sha says the racialisation they experienced and the labelling of them as 'Chinese women' were common to both, but the dangers of assuming a heterogenous bond between people who share a land of origin, was highlighted by Sha's own experience.

'As an international student, I was more or less an outsider to the Chinese community in Britain. I visited, volunteered and worked at Chinese charities and organisations and participated in cultural and political events to expand my network and enable me to approach gatekeepers and potential interviewees.'

Sha took Cantonese classes and volunteered twice a week at one London Chinatown-based community centre. All the women she spoke with were first generation migrants and often struggled with language skills; most interviews were conducted in Mandarin or Cantonese, but she found many didn't have the words to articulate racial incidents they'd experienced.

While family take-away businesses are typically characterised by men working in the kitchen and women occupying customer-facing roles, with home above the premises, the opportunity for Chinese women to occupy their own social and public space has often been limited.

The lack of support for childcare, language or professional training, tackling discrimination or domestic violence and other issues that some housewives, female caterers, single or working mothers experienced at home or in society were evident. Several feminist professionals founded women's organisations in the mid-1980s and 1990s and projects such as a London-wide out-of-office hours emergency helpline for Chinese female victims of domestic abuse.

Sha hopes to publish her thesis later in the year and, given the working restrictions of her student visa, is likely to return to China to look for a job. While she has chronicled the experiences of a very diverse group of women, she has one takeaway from the experience.

'Personally, I think the one thing they all have in common is that they were all very brave, even though they didn't say that. Even though they might have British passports and be resident here, I think they all still feel Chinese.'

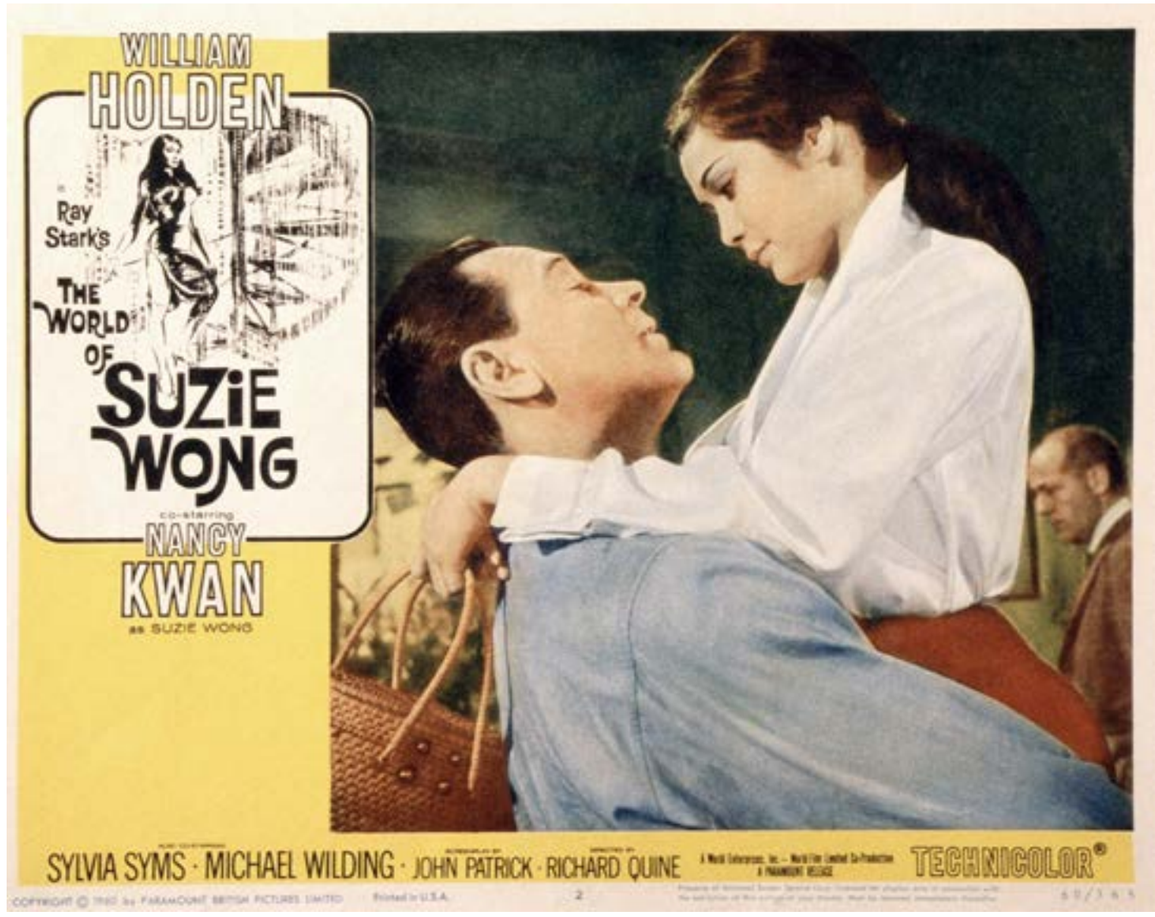

IMAGE
Poster for the film, The World of Suzie Wong.
From left: William Holden, Nancy Kwan, 1960

Jenny Glanfield has worked for several charities in the environmental sector and recently took on a new role as a Heritage Engagement Officer. She also runs her own business, [Independent Flamingo Paperie Partners] selling greetings cards and stationery and enjoys spending time on her allotment and walking in nature

In 2011, Jenny was diagnosed with an incurable condition and went on to undergo a liver transplant. Here, she shares her journey and highlights the importance or organ donation.

JENNY GLANFIELD

Organ donation - saving lives

My story is not about my career, it is about my journey with liver disease and organ donation. I was the young person who didn't tick the organ donation box on my driving licence form; I didn't want to think about death and certainly didn't want parts of my body being taken out and given away. Organ donation was not relevant to me.

Fast forward to 2011, following a year and a half of gruelling tests and investigations, and I had been diagnosed with an autoimmune form of liver disease called Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis or PSC for short. In essence my body was attacking itself and my liver was being slowly destroyed. There is no cure and I was likely to need a liver transplant in a few years, which would only prolong my life.

I was heartbroken. In an instant my future career and plans for a family were crushed by a disease I'd never heard of. I knew little about the liver and its importance for survival. I did not want to think about a transplant. It wasn't going to happen to me.

I had several years with few symptoms but then started to get more fatigued and experienced abdominal pains and worsening symptoms. I struggled with a young daughter and trying to work. In 2016 I spent several weeks in hospital with a severe cholangitis infection (which affects the bile ducts in the liver), followed by pancreatitis. Aged just 34 I was told I had final stage cirrhosis. I had exhausted all the treatment options and now a liver transplant was my only option.

Organ transplantation is not a given, there is a process for eligibility. I underwent the tough transplant assessment process over several days. Your fitness levels, disease progression and other things are scrutinised. At the end of several days of tests, scans, samples and talking with various professionals your future lays in the hands of the transplant team who meet to review your case. Only about 50% of people being assessed will be accepted. Some will be too Ill, old or even not Ill enough to meet the transplant criteria. I was lucky to be listed and given a second chance.

IMAGES
Jenny pictured before and after her liver transplant.
Courtesy of Jenny Glanfield.

‘Mentally the wait and persistent symptoms were tough and my life was in limbo.’

My blood group was O; as O is a universal blood group it meant that if an O liver came along and there was another urgent case, they would receive the liver not me. Consequently, I was told the waiting list can be two to two-and-a-half years. I doubted I could wait that long. My life had become about survival and putting on a brave face. I couldn’t be the mother I’d dreamt of being; it was heart-breaking. I relied on family and friends, my social life became virtually non-existent, my work minimal.

Physically my body was not able to function properly anymore and I spent a lot of time sleeping and in pain. I had repeat cholangitis infections, my skin itched, I had oesophageal varices which could potentially give me a life-threatening bleed at any moment, plus I looked months pregnant with my enlarged spleen and ascites. My life was a ticking time bomb. I was now willing to suffer the excruciating pain, surgical risks and endure the long recovery of a liver transplant rather than carry on living like that.

Mentally the wait and persistent symptoms were tough and my life was in limbo. At the start of August 2017, I received my first call, but it wasn’t to be. Then in less than 24 hours I received my second call, this alongside a further three phone calls, were not viable for different reasons.

Each time I had an unsuccessful call it was hard, but ultimately I knew although I was close and still alive, whilst a family somewhere was mourning the loss of a loved one. On my 6th call in October 2017 I finally got my gift of a new liver. The difference within just a few days of the operation was amazing!

Three years on I am fit and healthy and have been able to live my life to the full again. Without organ donation I wouldn’t be here today. Through death there can be life. My donor lives on through me now. My daughter has her mummy back, my husband his wife and I consider myself so blessed to be able to continue living, making happy memories with my family and friends.

There are few barriers to organ donation; all the major religions in the UK are in support of it. Age is not a barrier to donation if you have healthy organs; my donor was in her eighties! Even with health problems you may still be able to donate organs or tissue. Ask yourself if you or someone you loved needed a life-saving transplant to survive, would you want to help save them? Please share your wishes and remember that organ donation can save or transform the lives of up to nine people – what a great legacy that would be.

Follow Jenny’s post-transplant life journey on her blog. For more information about Primary Sclerosing Cholangitis visit PSC Support UK and read more about organ donation here

IMAGES
Jenny with her daughter and husband.
Courtesy of Jenny Glanfield.

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