

BARBARA Minta is no stranger to drama. A past president of GADOC and its present front of house manager, she is still at the forefront of it all.

But when in 2002 she was diagnosed with breast cancer. Barbara took the news calmly and made a decision that this would not become a personal drama that would take over her life.

"I had found a lump before I went on holiday to New Zealand. When I got back they called me in for a routine mammography and one of the things they ask you to do is mention if you have noticed any changes. So I told them about the lump."



But the mammography did not show this up and Barbara was called back for further tests. She was due to find out the results after the long holiday weekend of the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

"I remember feeling a bit edgy though I didn't think about it too much," says Barbara.

The news that she had cancer was a real shock but she says, at the time other people seemed to react more than she did.

"I had taken a friend along with me for my results as my husband was working away. I remember sitting in the waiting room for my 11.30am appointment and watching all these women go in ahead of me, even though I had got there much earlier."

"At the time my friend commented that I should say something as it didn't seem right. But the minute we walked in and they told me it was bad news it struck me that was the reason

"I only had a bit of a dip but that was my fault. I had friends arriving from Australia who I had not seen since college. It was only four days after my operation and I went all out to do everything and go everywhere with them, and overdid it."

Her cancer, she says, was a grade two. "It's about in the middle range, but I was lucky and still feel very lucky to be alive."

Barbara went over to Southampton for her radiotherapy in September 2002 and, she says, she sailed through it. "I was at the Abbey Unit, which has now been replaced by Manor House, but the unit is so central, you can walk to it. The Manor is lovely, but it is a bit further out.

"Friends had advised me to take my car with me to Southampton and I'm glad I did. It is best to be mobile. My radiotherapy happened every day for six weeks but it only lasts a few minutes. I would head off afterwards and do my shopping!"

She is proud to say that she arrived home in November with her Christmas

they had cleared the other people first."

Barbara's initial reaction was typical of the sheer strength of character she has shown throughout her professional life. As head teacher at Vale Infants School, and more recently after her retirement six years ago, as a tireless worker in a wide range of charitable committees and voluntary organisations, Barbara is known for her sheer force of energy.

"I didn't cry then, it has never made me cry," she says simply. Barbara has a reputation for being a force to be reckoned with and silently she directed that force at the illness.

'If I had to have a motto it would be Carpe Diem, seize the day, and I live my life that way now'

The resolve to fight her breast cancer was another challenge to hit head on. "I was in church during that long weekend waiting for the results and decided that if it was bad news, I would hope that 'Him up here' would give me the strength to fight it." The decision was typically Barbara and a wise one. Three years on and cancer free, she has never felt fitter or looked better. "At the time I was diagnosed they told me that I should come in the following week for an operation. I told them it was

shopping done. "Obviously my illness and treatment had to take a precedent but I didn't let it take over my life," says Barbara.

Her friends know her as a strong, feisty woman who lets nothing get her down, and dealing with her cancer was no exception.

"Obviously it has changed the way I feel about my life. You really do realise that life is for living, you have to grab every moment. If I had to have a motto it would be Carpe Diem, seize the day, and I live my life that way now."

A little while ago Nick Falla, head of Vale Junior School, asked Barbara to talk at the annual speech day. and she talked all about Carpe Diem.

"I was delighted when a while later one of the parents stopped me and said what an impact it had on her young son who took

After her radiotherapy Barbara arrived home to find a letter telling her that she was to be nominated for an MBE in the New Year Honours List. "I was so proud and found it a real boost," says Barbara. Three years down the line she is busier than ever - fitting in a huge amount of charity and committee work, visiting friends and family and travelling with husband Chris when their busy schedules allow.

"I'm lucky that my husband still works and spoils me," she says laughing. Chris is a senior lecturer at Bolton University and the couple enjoy a modern commuter marriage that suits them both beautifully.

"He comes over a weekend a month - and there are very long holidays! He comes home for seven weeks in the summer - just enough time to sort out the garden," she jokes.

"I am going over to him this month because he is very busy at the moment -

impossible - I had too much on." She did agree to work through all her commitments and go into hospital the following week.

"It was all done so very quickly. I can't talk highly enough of the surgeon, Roger Allsopp, and also Karen Leach and the team at the unit who get you through it."

After her hospital stay Barbara says she wrote to Health Minister, Peter Roffey, telling him how impressed she was.

"Everyone was so supportive," she says.

Barbara's friends and family were also behind her in those months, but in many ways found it harder to cope than she did.

"I know my husband was very shocked to hear I had cancer, I don't think he could quite believe it." A short time later, admits Barbara, it struck home with her too, but she never felt negative or down. "In the past when you hear someone has cancer, you think, well, that's their lot. But that's not the case at all.

Look, I'm still here!"

Barbara is swift to play down the treatment, waving it away as almost a formality.

"They did a lumpectomy and took away some lymph nodes which were not affected. I did have radiotherapy but they told me I didn't have to start it until the end of the summer which was lovely. I was very happy to be able to enjoy the sunshine here at home."

and he has suggested it's time for a bit of retail therapy."

The couple plan to go to Abu Dhabi in November as the latest in their catalogue of travels. "We have been to Dubai for the past two years and decided to go somewhere else in the Middle East this winter."

They enjoyed a break on the Red Sea at Easter, hopped over to Spain in the summer, met up with Barbara's 95-year-old father in France, and early next year are heading off for some winter sun - "but we don't know where yet."

Barbara has always lived life at a pace and nothing - cancer included - has changed that.

She sits on various committees. "I am chairman of Drug Concern, the Eisteddfod's secretary, house manager for GADOC and president of the Retired Head Teachers Association. I also sit on the Standing Advisory Committee for Religious Education, am a committee member of the Friends of the School's Music Service, a duty manager at St James and a committee member of the support group of Le Cotils."

On top of those commitments she also works as a volunteer at the hospital in the shop and when needed invigilates for the Training Agency.

Barbara is just glad to be alive - and feels that way every day. She tells the story of how, a few weeks ago, she was walking up Smith Street huffing and puffing a bit and bumped into a friend. "I mentioned that it was no fun growing old and she said to me, Barbara, there's no fun in dying young either. It really pulled me up and made me think. I am feeling better and fitter than ever. I feel well. Life is for the living and I want to do as much of it as I can. we all should."

This article reproduced courtesy of 24SE7EN magazine (Issue 122 7-13 October 2005)