

Joan's Story

The last cardiologist said, "I can't help you, but I think I know a man who can..."



I was born during the second world war, an East London baby and my family moved to the quiet of 'rural' Harrow just as I started school. I was lucky enough to enjoy an upbringing full of fun, family and sport – and at 16 moved into the mad world of business in the London of 1950s and swinging '60s. By the time I was 40, I was married, running a couple of family businesses, had two children and decided that this was the time to go back to school... So I entered the wonderful worlds of university, science and medicine.

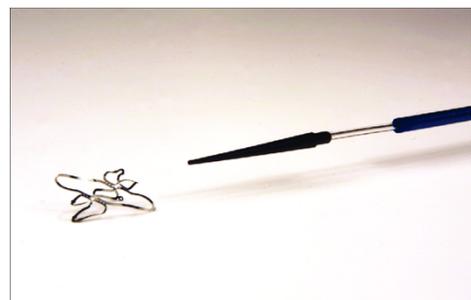
I spent the next 30 years or so as a Registered Nutritionist, working for and with a great boss, a Professor of Medicine, who not only let me grace his clinics, but sent me on some mad adventures partaking in medical research around the world.

Life took a sudden change when my husband was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 2006, though our life situation was enhanced and graced by the Clinical Research team at Queens Square in London. My husband was a willing and grateful participant in a trial with a group of specialist neurologists who he called 'his girls'. Unfortunately, in 2010 he was found to have an aggressive form of prostate cancer and he passed away early in 2012, very gently and surrounded by his family.

At this point my GP — who had taken great personal care of my husband — approached me and said they were worried that the years as a 24/7 carer had taken their toll on me. My blood pressure was higher than was good for me. "It will probably be perfectly controllable with medication", I was assured. I thought I was fit and healthy, never needed any meds other than an occasional headache pill, so I agreed. Oh dear!!! A year and a half later, 14 medications later, 3 GPs, 3 cardiologists... It was finally agreed that I can't handle medicines, and I was left with what was now dangerously high BP and first in line for a stroke.

Fortunately for me, the last cardiologist had said "I can't help you, but I think I know a man who can. He spent some time with me during his training and now works at Bart's hospital, in the research department". A letter was duly sent, and I met Dr (now Professor) Mel Lobo who admitted me into the fold at the William Harvey Research unit.

I was originally to be entered into a trial where some nerves in or around the kidney are switched off, but my physiology wasn't quite right. Next offer was for a trial with an implant called a **ROX Coupler**. This is a small device, placed in the right groin (under local anaesthetic I can assure you) which interrupts the local circulation and consequently reduces the blood pressure. It doesn't work for everyone, but in my case was spectacularly successful and we have just celebrated our 5th birthday together.



I had little reservation or hesitation in entering the trial. My previous experience with my husband had been very positive and this team at the William Harvey Clinical Research Centre – where my doctors are David Collier and Manish Saxena – is kind, extremely knowledgeable, friendly and their doors are ever open. No money could buy the medical care and support I get from them.

How do you say, 'Thank you'? Again, I was fortunate enough to be asked if I would like to join the patients who give their time to **TrialsConnect**. Another win/win for me. We have had great fun travelling to different centres — telling our stories, helping with concerts and performances that highlight and explain the world of Clinical Trials. We help train young students and undergraduates and on a personal level I have been invited to sit on several research panels. They are the friendliest group of people I have had the pleasure of working and sharing my time with.



My family and I have received so much from the NHS and London's health services. We can never repay them for our lives – from my mother being treated 'experimentally' in the then London Hospital in 1920 to me, here 100 years later. We owe not only our lives, but the quality of our lives to medicine, science and the dedicated people who give their all to research. I feel this is one way we can help invest our 'now' for our children's future. It is a privilege to be included as part of the team.