

Celebrity

TELL ME THE TRUTH ABOUT...

Choreographer Arlene Phillips, 67, lives in north London with partner Angus Ion. She has two daughters Alana, 31 and Abi, 20



Picture: FEX

FAMILY

It's absolutely vital to me to be around family, almost to the extent it may be stifling for my daughters. I worry it's selfish and doesn't give them independence but it's great they seem to enjoy my company. Growing up I was very close to my sister and still am. Her three boys like my two girls are close to me too and that's lovely.

LOVE

You have to treasure the one you love. When you have a busy life it's easy to forget why you're with each other. Everything else takes over if you're not careful especially if you have children. You know when you're in love and to me that means you never stop enjoying one another's company. I worked this out later in life. My first marriage charged along at full speed without appreciating what being married involved and not realising how wonderful it could be.

FRIENDS

Mostly my friends are those I made from childhood to my early 20s. With friends who go back a long way you relax with one another so quickly, that's deep friendship. Having other couples as friends is important. It means one of you isn't dragging the other along as you're both involved.

HEALTH

The key to good health is to stay active. My energy comes from being energetic. I could easily live a slotful life so I fight against it. I don't allow myself to slow down because I want my mind to be as active as it can be for as long as it can.

LOOKS

My clothing philosophy is to enhance the parts you want to show off and hide the bits you're not so keen on. I want to look good as long as I can but the truth is we can't fight ageing and should accept it's part of living. I'm not trying to defy age, it's just a number which doesn't mean much. I was 50 when my daughter was three. The right attitude counts.

SUCCESS

Success takes a lot of hard work. I know a lot of successful people who don't feel that way at all. It's how you feel inside that is important and being successful in every area of your life because if one part of your life fails it affects the other parts.

● *Alana Dancing Star: Samba Spectacular and Alana Dancing Star: LA Moves by Arlene Phillips are available now (Faber, £4.99).*

DEANY JUDD

expressyourself Real life

We found the art of dealing with cancer

INSPIRED: Exhibition organiser Anna Antell



When ANNA ANTELL discovered she had a tumour, she found support through a network of creative women whose work led to an innovative new exhibition

GAZING into the camera I slipped my robe off for the photographer revealing my bare chest. At 43 I never expected to be posing topless but then I hadn't expected to have suffered cancer and a mastectomy either. Now here I was with only my left breast and a dramatic tattoo where previously had been a womanly curve.

I wasn't posing for this photograph just for my own satisfaction. It was for part of a larger exhibition I had curated with women artists who had been touched by cancer. It was these women, who I'd met through a range of social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, who had inspired me with their honesty about their condition and also with their creativity.

Each one chose to express herself through her art and now, in order to raise money for Cancer Research UK and other local charities across England, I wanted to exhibit their creativity in the face of such adversity.

After all I knew better than anyone what a shock cancer can be. Just one year ago I was waiting to start a new job as a

support worker for domestic violence victims. A few months earlier I'd found a lump in my breast while in the shower. It wasn't a free-floating lump I had imagined breast cancer to be but more like lumpy, fatty tissue. I thought it was odd so went to my GP.

"I don't think it's anything sinister," she said but referred me anyway. The breast clinic at John

'I said, I can't be ill, I'm starting a new job in two weeks'

Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford did a scan and I had a fine-needle biopsy. Staff told me it was probably a fatty mass. I was so relieved. I didn't feel ill and I had three daughters Megan, who is 21, Alyse, 15, and India, 13, to care for as well as my new job. However when the results came back they weren't so favourable. "I'm afraid it's cancer," the doctor told me. "You'll need a mastectomy."

"I can't have cancer, I'm starting a new job in two weeks," I said, going into immediate denial. This wasn't one of those things that was going to happen to me. I'd breast-fed my three daughters and didn't drink heavily. I'd smoked for about five years but gave it up when I was 25. There was no history of cancer in my family.

The doctor told me I had grade one cancer which was the best I could have hoped for. She then ran through my options but told me if I didn't have surgery and chemotherapy, while I would probably still be alive by the age of 50, I'd have full-blown cancer. If I

agreed to the treatment it would improve my chances by about 80 per cent. Five weeks after my diagnosis in August I had a full mastectomy of my right breast and I started chemotherapy in October. It petrified me. I remember walking into the treatment suite, seeing all the sick people and

thinking, "I'm not one of them, I shouldn't be here." But I needed to be there to save my life and have a future with my girls.

Within three weeks of starting chemo my long hair was coming out in clumps. I couldn't bear to see it happen so I shaved it all off. During my treatment I was online

Picture: DANIEL LYNCH
Styling: MARIE McCAVER
Hair and make-up: SONIA DAMNEY

all the time as I was stuck at home. It was a lifeline to the outside world. I went on different cancer forums and started following other sufferers on Twitter. Each time I met someone they'd say, "Do you know so-and-so?" and I'd look them up. We swapped tips for dealing with the side effects of chemotherapy. It's also really easy to be brutally honest online.

I'd read online that many women were doing arts and crafts, blogging and writing poetry to express their feelings while sick. I also draw and paint and thought it would be really good to get an exhibition together to raise money and awareness. In May, when I put this question to the women on Twitter and Facebook, the answering came back as an overwhelming yes. I approached local charities as well as friends and family explaining exactly what I was doing and why. Everyone was really wonderful and many people wanted to help. Finally after five months of planning and organisation the Dear Cancer exhibition launched at The Malmesion Hotel in Oxford earlier this week. The whole thing is an international collaboration. Philippa Ramsden, an Englishwoman living in Yangon,

'I'm really lucky to have met so many wonderful people'

Burma, has written a poem and a "letter to cancer". Her one-year "canceriversary" from when she had her breast removed was just three weeks ago.

Rita Dolan, who is 55 and lives in Hartlepool, County Durham, had mastectomy in June 2009. She designed a special sculpture while Kate Harbridge, from Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire, donated her time to help with framing. There are also auto diaries and I've worked on some painting and an installation.

We're later planning for the exhibition to be staged in Brighton, Sheffield, Cornwall, Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and London and any other town or city that will host us in the next few years.

Maybe we'll take it worldwide but it's just little steps at the moment. I've finished my treatment now and am taking tamoxifen, a hormone therapy that stops oestrogen from causing my cells to become cancerous. I will be on it for the next five years.

My life is good. I'm alive. I'm fighting and I'm lucky to have me so many wonderful strong people.

There have been some very stressful moments but I'm happy to have done this. I have a good feeling about Dear Cancer. We have made an impact on some lives and that's what I wanted to do, make a lasting impression.

● For more information go to passionatepink.co.uk

Interview by **AMY FALLON**