

Why this really is the season of joy

At this time of year, it's easy to get caught up in the whirl of present-buying and parties. But the stories of these four women show what really matters at Christmas

'Our home will be filled with love and warmth'

Most women going through gruelling cancer treatment would not have the time or energy to launch a new business. But single mum Stella James did just that. And now she's rebuilding her life – with a new relationship, too

When I separated from my husband in 2011 it was very hard, but I'm a positive person and I knew I could work through it. With two young sons, a telemarketing business and regular triathlon training, there was no time to mope. But in March 2014, a lump in my right breast seemed to appear overnight. Two weeks later I was told I had stage two breast cancer. It was a horrendous shock. I was so fit and healthy, and there was no family history of the disease.

My emotions were all over the place, especially when I thought of my sons Zachary, now 14, and Luke, nine. I had a lumpectomy, followed by chemotherapy and radiotherapy, and there were complications with cellulitis. The whole ordeal left me feeling depressed, and I knew I had to find something to distract me.

The answer turned out to be Gooseberry Planet, an app I invented that teaches children about online safety. It was a subject close to my heart, as the boys were wanting to spend more time online. Once I'd had the idea, finding a developer to create the app gave me a focus, helping me through some of the darkest days. For support, I rang Cancer Research UK's helpline when I felt sick.

My treatment finished in October last year, and in January this year the app was launched. It's been such an exciting time, and the app has been shortlisted for awards.

I'm taking Tamoxifen and still feel drained some days, but my latest scan was completely clear of cancer and I feel so positive about the future. I'm

also in a new relationship. We're taking things slowly, but Mark is amazing and I'm thrilled we're going to spend Christmas Day together.

Last Christmas the boys were with their dad and although my sister was brilliantly supportive, I still felt low. This year everything will be different. We'll go to the village church in the morning, have a late lunch, a country walk with our dog Bongo and then home for family games, with a few bubbles to toast the occasion! There will be a lot of warmth and love in the house, and I really can't wait.



A festive toast: this year, Stella will be celebrating