

Glennis Squires – a poster girl for positive thinking.

Glennis and John Squires are partners in life and in business. Their relationship has a quiet strength; they've been married for five decades - for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

Perhaps this is why Glennis has done so well with her battle with cancer. This fight has been a two-person job, and hard work is something neither she nor John have ever shied away from.

For many, many years, Glennis and John Squires worked 14-15 hour days in their two successful North Coast businesses.

The pair were renowned in the Coffs Harbour region for their experience and hands-on knowledge in the plumbing supplies industry, and in bathroom and kitchen renovations.

"John tried retirement once – it lasted about a week," Glennis says, with a laugh.

After shadowing her at the supermarket and following behind as she vacuumed (pointing out what she'd missed) the couple agreed they needed a Plan B.

More challenges and hard work followed, and more long hours.

In 2009 Glennis was diagnosed with Sjogren's syndrome, polymyositis, and Lupus, which created immense fatigue and neuropathy.

"It affected my feet and upset my balance."

"I was exhausted all the time."



John and Glennis Squires - partners for five decades - for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

Then in February 2014 Glennis found a lump in her breast; and within a matter of days was told she had metastatic breast cancer, along with cancer through her bones, and potentially just a few months to live.

Three years later, Glennis is still receiving treatment, and is enjoying every day.

"She hasn't got time to die," John says, cheekily.

Glennis is confident her treatment is going well, and has only positive praise for her doctors and the staff at the Mid North Coast Cancer Institute (MNCCI) in Port Macquarie.

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Glennis has been part of a clinical trial¹ run by the Port Macquarie Oncology Clinical Trial Unit.

Glennis had no qualms about her involvement in the trial.

"I've never felt negative about it [the cancer] from the start, particularly once I managed to get into the trial."

"The really good news is that the drugs I've been taking during the trial have been added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme."

When going through chemotherapy treatment, it's normal for people to have bad days or to feel exhausted or 'down'.

After her first two treatments, Glennis felt very unwell, but after discussing her symptoms, some adjustments were made to her treatment regime which resulted in an immediate improvement.

"I've had a positive attitude throughout my treatment; I'm sure it's the best way to get through it all."

"I think I also feel positive because my doctor and the other people here [at the MNCCI] look at my treatment from a positive angle as well."

John is equally positive and grateful for the personalized support Glennis has received.

"I've had a positive attitude throughout my treatment; I'm sure it's the best way to get through it all."

"Working with good people like Cheryl Rine [from the Oncology Clinical Trial Unit] is one of the things that's made the whole experience worthwhile," he says.

Part of Glennis's positive approach to treatment includes a belief that wonderful experiences are still in front of her, and making wonderful things happen is something Glennis has become rather good at.

In 2015 seventeen members of the wider Squires family came together for a fourteen day cruise to the Pacific Islands.

"It was an amazing experience, which really brought the whole family closer together," Glennis says.

"We had a whole lot of fun and it was so enjoyable being with grandkids as well."

In April 2017, Glennis ticked another destination off her bucket list when she and John cruised to Hawaii with daughter Narelle and her partner, for Narelle's 50th birthday.

"I've always loved travel, and now the kids have got the bug from me."

"I think we all enjoy being together."

Since being diagnosed with cancer, Glennis says her relationships with family have changed for the better in many ways.

"There's no sadness when we all get together."

Glennis also attends local healing services, which she's found to be helpful.

"There's no sadness when we all get together."

Her faith is an integral part of her positive approach to life and to her treatment.

Looking to the future, Glennis and John plan to keep spending quality time with family and friends. The idea of slowing down or taking things easy is not part of their grand plan.

"When I tell people what I've been doing or what I want to do next, they often say 'oh Glennis, you can't do that', but I get so much satisfaction and I feel such a sense of achievement when I do the things I like to do; I look back and think to myself 'yes, you did it'," Glennis says.

"I want my family to remember me as someone who does the impossible."

Glennis uses fond memories from her travels to get through the harder days. She also plans what sort of fun or 'mischief' she might get up to next.



Glennis and John say travelling with family is a wonderful experience, which has brought the whole family closer.

“At the moment, John spends three days a week up at Coffs working, so on those three days I get to be in charge,” Glennis explains, with a big grin.

“When he’s home I’ve got to behave.”

After 51 years of marriage, the couple are easy and open in the way they express their admiration and appreciation for each other.

“John’s been the most wonderful support, and is so positive; he’s marvelous.”

“He lets me do the things he knows I want to do.”

Glennis has trouble using her hands, which now limits what she can do around the house.

“Because we’re old school, I always did all the cooking, so now I’m teaching him how to cook.”

John describes himself as “one of the lucky ones” and his life with Glennis as “wonderful”.

“She’s always been a positive and forceful person, which comes from the years she spent as the only woman working in a very male-dominated industry.”

“She’s had to stand up for herself, and she’s certainly achieved a lot.”

“I learnt a while back that it’s a lot easier to swim with the tide, than against it,” he says, with a knowing smile.

John also says their experience with cancer has taught him that there *is* hope and that treatment *can* work.

“You’ve got to be positive – you’re three quarters of the way there then.”

“You’ve got to be positive – you’re three quarters of the way there then.”

When Glennis heard about the “Our Stories” project, she was enthusiastic about the concept, but not sure she had much to offer.

“My story is pretty ordinary,” she initially said.

When it was explained that sharing “ordinary” stories was exactly what the project had set out to achieve, both Glennis and John were more forthcoming.

“If we can help take the fear out of cancer and its treatments, that would be a good thing,” John said.

“Exactly,” Glennis agreed.

Thank you for sharing Glennis and John

More about Glennis

Glennis is the kind of person who permanently has a smile on her face and doesn't seem to work hard to keep it there.

She and her husband John met at Mannering Park in the early 1960s and were married there in January, 1966.

They have three children, and eight grandchildren.

Glennis has been a respected and well-liked member of the Coffs Harbour business community since she and John opened their first plumbing supplies business in Orlando Street in 1981.

She and John recently moved to Lake Cathie, although John still spends up to three days a week working in their Sawtell business.

An active supporter of local groups including the Hastings Cancer Trust, Glennis has an infectious 'can do' approach to life, and has been helping the Trust to organize a fundraising concert at the Glasshouse in August (2017).

Glennis and John agreed to share their experiences with the Hastings Cancer Trust "Our Stories" Project to help take the fear out of cancer and its treatments.

When her story was complete, Glennis emailed the coordinator, Jan Dennis, to thank her, and added "I truly hope that it will make a difference to someone who reads it".



This image of Glennis and her staff is indicative of the fun and enjoyment she has always shared in her relationships with customers and staff.

¹ More about the SAPPHIRE clinical trial

Since 2014, the Mid North Coast Cancer Institute has run a clinical trial called SAPPHIRE. This trial was offered to only seven sites in Australia, of which only two sites were selected in NSW.

The SAPPHIRE study was offered to women diagnosed with metastatic breast cancer. The patients were given Pertuzumab, (a new treatment option), subcutaneous Herceptin (a 5 minute injection under the skin, which was, prior to this study, only available as a half hour intravenous therapy) and a taxane (chemotherapy).

This drug combination has now been added to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme so eligible women with the same cancer can access this treatment.

Port Macquarie has a leading Oncology Clinical Trial Unit that allowed access to this therapy. The Clinical Trials Unit currently has 70 clinical trials in various stages with many new therapies to offer eligible local patients.

Recently, MNCCI Senior Clinical Research Co-ordinator Cheryl Rine received a Premier's award for 'Innovation in Cancer Clinical Trials' for her collaboration on the development of an app. This app is available for Doctors, patients and their carers to seek information about a clinical trial that might be suitable for them. It is available on both iOS and Android (named ClinTrial Refer).

For more information go to mnclhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services/mid-north-coast-cancer-institute/port-macquarie-mncci/

“Our Stories” Project – empowering people to share their stories.

To see read more stories, go to www.hastingscancertrust.org.au/our-stories

Contact: OurStoriesProject1@gmail.com



This story was written by Jan Dennis, from interviews with Glennis & John Squires in March/April, 2017. It forms part of the “Our Stories” Project, which is funded by a 2016 grant from The Hastings Cancer Trust.

The Hastings Cancer Trust, a local, not-for-profit organisation that supports a range of local cancer services via their annual grants program.

For more information go to www.hastingscancertrust.org.au.