

SECRET HEARTBREAK

The star opens up about her grief over her father's death

TV stunner Lana Coc-Kroft made headlines when she had a near-death experience after suffering Toxic Shock Syndrome while filming *Celebrity Treasure Island* six years ago, but until now she has kept an earlier experience with death closer to her heart.

For the first time, Lana, 42, has broken her silence about the devastation her close-knit family faced with news that her father, Lance Coc-Kroft, was dying.

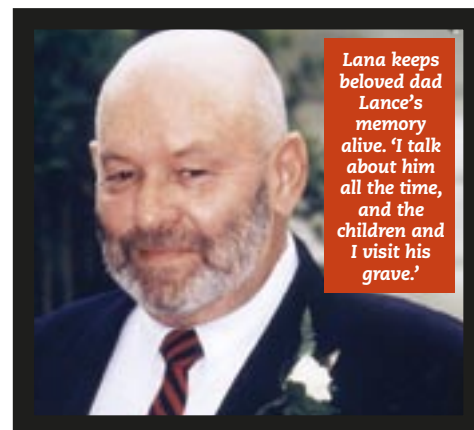
Lance was diagnosed with lung cancer at 59, and lost his battle five months later, shortly after his 60th birthday. "He was too young to die," says Lana, who is clearly emotional, nearly 10 years on.

"Dad was a really good guy. I think he knew he was ill before he was diagnosed. He was living in Australia for 10 years and in my mind he came back to NZ because he knew something was wrong."

Lance, who worked in security until he became too sick, died of complications associated with the cancer. "My father never thought he was going to die. Deep down he still thought there would be a miracle cure and that he'd be OK."

Lana recalls his shock diagnosis. "When he started coughing up blood he phoned me and said, 'Something is up.' I picked him up and we popped off to the doctor's. He had his diagnosis within 24 hours. We knew pretty quickly how bad it was."

He kept fighting, living four months longer than doctors predicted. In the last few months, the family turned to Mercy



Lana keeps beloved dad Lance's memory alive. 'I talk about him all the time, and the children and I visit his grave.'

Hospice Auckland for support. Lana helped her dad "live every moment" and was grateful he met her first son Damien, now 10. Since he died, she and her long-term partner, property developer Steve Gleye, have become parents to son Bronson, eight, and daughter Tyler, three.

"My father lives on vicariously through me - I talk about him all the time, and the children and I always visit his gravesite."

Lana's dad had a week in hospice before moving into her brother's house, where he spent his last days with 21 close family members, made possible by the care and daily visits of hospice staff and volunteers. "It meant we had an amazing last couple of weeks with him."

"When you get diagnosed with a terminal illness, everyone reacts in different ways ... Hospice is like a home away from home. It was an educational process for us seeing what the service provided for us at a really needy time."

"My dad died with the utmost dignity, thanks to the support of hospice. Something really awful became a really amazing thing."

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'Dad was too young to die ... [but] he died with the utmost dignity, thanks to the support of hospice'

Help Lana help hospice

Lana is sharing her story to help raise awareness of hospice services. This week Lana is encouraging Kiwis to support the first nationwide Hospice Strawberry Festival. Thirteen hospices around NZ will take part in the community event, which will raise funds to provide their services at no cost to patients and their families through the sale of a bowl of strawberries and ice-cream (\$5) and a specially designed collectable "Strawberry Angel" Christmas decoration (\$10). The festival takes place

at various locations around NZ from November 3-10. For information, visit www.strawberryfestival.org.nz. There are 29 hospices throughout NZ, providing a range of services for the local community. In 2008, more than 13,000 people received care and support from hospice. There were 126,000 community visits to people in their homes and nearly 5000 admissions to hospice inpatient facilities. If you're interested in knowing more about hospice or volunteering, visit www.hospice.org.nz.