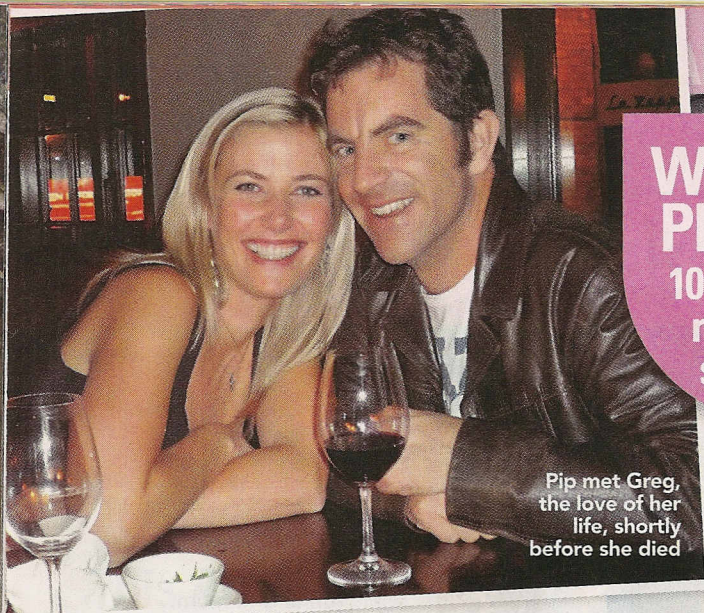


**WEEKLY
PEOPLE**
100% Kiwi
real-life
stories



Pip met Greg, the love of her life, shortly before she died

A shock diagnosis sparked this woman's warning mission

MOURNING MUM'S heartfelt

Philippa Mills waited 33 years to meet the love of her life, but illness snatched away her chance to build a future with him.

Trish Mills says her emotions are still raw after the death of her fun-loving daughter in June, but she's hoping her story will motivate others to be vigilant about their health.

Philippa (34), fondly known as Pip, was diagnosed with metastatic melanoma in August 2010 and told she had between nine and 12 months to live.

Trish lights up when describing her daughter, the eldest of two. "She worked in advertising and was also a makeup artist. She was such a good girl with a fantastic, dry sense of humour."

The diagnosis came as

a shock. Trish and her husband Jeff were overseas and waiting for news from home – expecting to hear from Pip that she was engaged. Instead, they were told she had been rushed to hospital.

"We were in England at the time and before we went she had met someone, and he had asked for her hand in marriage. We were waiting for an excited text, but we got a call saying she was in hospital with pneumonia."

It turned out to be more than pneumonia, but Pip's partner, Greg Shepherd, hadn't wanted to tell her parents over the phone.

"She was such a fit, healthy girl. We all went into shock."

Pip had worked selflessly for others over many years – for prostitute outreach programs, helping elderly people or through her church.

For a young woman so full of life, the treatment was harrowing. She lost her hair during bouts of chemotherapy, underwent radiotherapy and endured several surgical interventions. "There was a tumour that shrunk so much that her hip broke,"

'We were waiting for an excited text but got a call... she was in hospital'

Trish says. She had to have a full hip replacement.

But Trish said the support her daughter received made it slightly more bearable. Pip and Greg often visited Auckland's Dove House, a

hospice palliative care facility, where she also spent hours with her mum. "Mercy Hospice in Ponsonby was so supportive," Trish says.

Dove House collaborated with Mercy to provide regular respite in the 24-hour care unit.

People from Pip's professional life also rallied around to help, organising a charity auction that raised \$86,000 for her treatment. There was also a silent auction on Trade Me. Leftover funds will be distributed between Eastern Bays Hospice and Mercy Hospice.

Items donated for the auction included a business-class trip around the world from Air New Zealand, a mystery weekend, products from Estée Lauder, art by Otis Frizzell and All Whites shirts.



Jeff and Trish are cautioning people to be vigilant about their health after their daughter Pip (on right in photo with sister Libby) died from cancer

PHOTO: JOHN MCCOMBE



Jan's hair reached her knees, but she went under the razor for a good cause

'Why I cut my hair AFTER 43 YEARS'

Pip herself donated her designer wardrobe and makeup artist's kit to the Look Good Feel Better organisation, which helps women with cancer.

Trish still struggles to comprehend how her daughter became so sick so quickly.

The melanoma developed from within her body and there was no primary source. "She'd had something cut out of her leg when she was about 25. We think a minute cell might have tucked itself under a muscle and reappeared when her immune system was low."

Since Pip's illness, Trish has realised how important it is to get specialist attention for anything that seems even slightly suspect. "She'd never had a sick day in her life."

Trish is pleased her daughter was able to meet Greg before she passed away. "She'd say to me, 'I don't want the crumbs, Mum, I want the cake.' She didn't want to compromise for anyone."

Trish said Greg was a huge support for Pip right until her last breath.

She said the saddest thing was that Pip had waited so long to meet someone special and they had their future snatched away just as they were moving in together. "She used to say, 'I feel flipping ripped off,' but that was it – we never saw any real anger out of her."

Trish said her daughter would be remembered as a family-loving girl with a big circle of friends, who lived life to the full. ■

Susan Edmunds

Jan Espin last cut her hair in 1968, before man first walked on the moon.

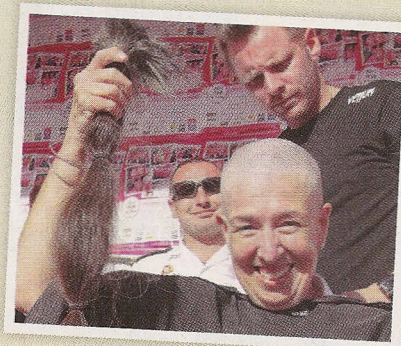
Her knee-length hair has seen 12 prime ministers and two Rugby World Cup wins. But in minutes the locks she'd had for 43 years were gone.

Jan, an ambulance officer in Tauranga, never dreamed of cutting her hair until her friend Jude Yates was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"She was given a clean bill of health, but then it was back. I wanted to do something, so I shaved my head and donated the money to Breast Cancer Support Services." She also donated her hair for a wig.

Jan (59) often wore her hair up, but it could pose a danger.

"Walking past door handles could be a problem – you could find your hair caught on them.



"I used to tuck it in my belt so it wouldn't get in the way."

Jan's new look is taking a while to get used to.

"You walk past the mirror and gasp, 'Who's that?'" she laughs.

She has no regrets about her bold decision, but she's likely to grow her hair long again.

"It's been an amazing experience. I don't hide my shaved head because it's making people aware."

Vicky Tyler

PHOTOS: ROSS BROWN