

Wedding day for Charlotte

This is what Lisa Sparrow's daughter had wished for. Now she was making the dream come true. Here Lisa, 32, explains

I was our engagement party and my daughter Charlotte was the centre of attention as the song 'Kanye'. Then later that evening she refused to eat any dinner and fell asleep in her chair.

I said to my fiancé Simon: 'She's not herself. She loves her food and she's always the last one dancing.'

A week passed. Charlotte's appetite did not improve and she didn't want to go to school.

Our GP referred her for an ultrasound. Afterwards I saw the hospital consultant, along with Charlotte's dad Chris. I'd guessed something was wrong for her to be acting so quickly.

We sat in front of him as he looked on in the eye and said: 'I'm sorry, Charlotte has cancer.'

It was a rare form called neuroblastoma stage four. She had a tumour as big as an orange on her kidney and the cells had spread to her thigh bones and knee joint.

My shock was mirrored in Chris's face but neither of us dared to react. We didn't want to upset Charlotte who was busy

playing with her toys. She was five years old. I composed myself and explained to her: 'You've got a nasty lump in your tummy. The doctors would like you to stay in hospital so they can fix it.'

I took her hand and we walked to the children's cancer ward.

Many youngsters were having chemotherapy and Charlotte asked: 'Why haven't they got any hair, Mummy?'

I replied: 'They're having medicine to help them get better. Sometimes it makes their hair fall out.'

She began having treatment. Six weeks passed and I wouldn't know her side. I slept in a bed next to hers and made do with speaking to Simon on the phone.

One day he rang me at the hospital and asked: 'Lisa, how do you fancy getting married in three weeks' time?'

Simon's idea.

We'd booked our wedding for a year away but with Charlotte's illness it had gone out of my mind. New Simon was telling me: 'Let's get married. The register office has a spare date.'

I said: 'I'll have to think about it.'

I put the phone down and Charlotte asked: 'Was that Simon, Mummy?'

'Yes,' I replied. She was to visit I dashed to the shops to buy a dress.

Then a week before the big day Charlotte got an infection. She had a temperature and couldn't eat. We didn't know if she'd be well enough to leave hospital.

I begged the doctor: 'Please let her come. It would break my heart if she couldn't be there.'

On the evening before the wedding he finally agreed and said: 'Yes, she can go.'

I said to her: 'Right, let's have some tea.'

We stayed at a hotel that night with the rest of the bridal party. 'I'm hungry, Mummy,' Charlotte

Charlotte and me



got married in three weeks.' Her eyes lit up and she said: 'Please do it. Please get married. Mummy.' I want to be a bridesmaid.'

I was about to say: 'I haven't even got a dress...'

Then I stopped. It didn't matter. If a wedding was what Charlotte wanted, then that was what I would give her.

Simon booked the day and I planned the details beside Charlotte's hospital bed. While she slept I wrote the invitations.

When Simon came to visit I dashed to the shops to buy a dress. Then a week before the big day Charlotte got an infection. She had a temperature and couldn't eat. We didn't know if she'd be well enough to leave hospital.

I begged the doctor: 'Please let her come. It would break my heart if she couldn't be there.'

On the evening before the wedding he finally agreed and said: 'Yes, she can go.'

I said to her: 'Right, let's have some tea.'

We stayed at a hotel that night with the rest of the bridal party. 'I'm hungry, Mummy,' Charlotte

for her. I discovered I was pregnant and expecting a boy. She had an older brother, Joseph, so the idea of a baby brother was a novelty for her. She asked: 'Can I feed and change him and help you look after him, Mummy?'

From then on she'd play with her prams and dolls and I'd hear her practising for the arrival. She'd say: 'Go to sleep now. Do as you're told.' It was exactly what I used to tell her.

After several months surgeons operated to remove the tumour on her kidney. The surgery lasted eight nail-biting hours. But just two days afterwards she was sitting up in intensive care and singing Gracie songs with her headphones on.

Four weeks later she was strong enough to go back to school for half days. She showed her friends the Hickman line in her chest and said: 'No one's allowed to touch me. It could really hurt.'

The next moment I saw her hanging upside down from a rope in the playground. She was fearless. She began having chemotherapy again. After that she had stem-cell treatment and had to be in isolation for six weeks.

With each passing day she became more and more poorly. On Bonfire Night I carried her to the window so she could watch the fireworks. After five minutes she said: 'It hurts, Mummy. She had to go back to bed. Next she was transferred to the

intensive care unit and put on a machine to help her breathe.

One night after everyone had gone home and it was just the two of us, she said: 'Mummy, I'm going to die, aren't I?'

It was the first time she'd ever mentioned death and I didn't know what to say.

'No, darling,' I replied. 'They're going to make you better.'

But she'd suffered so much and her frail little body was struggling to cope. She'd begun lapsing in and out of consciousness.

The next day a doctor called me and Chris into a room and said: 'We can't do much more. It might be time for you to think about turning off her life-support machine. But it's up to you. You must decide.'

I cried and cried. We didn't want to let her go but it wasn't a room for us to be selfish. We thought: Charlotte and we couldn't let her suffer any more.

The nurses covered the wires attached to her so she looked as normal as possible and Joseph came in to see her. He kissed her cheek and said: 'Goodbye, Charlotte. I don't know why they couldn't cure you.'

He sobbed as he left the room. He was only ten.

That afternoon they switched off the machine and Charlotte passed away in my arms. She was six years old.

By then I was six months pregnant with the baby brother she would never meet.

We held the funeral. Everyone wore pink and listened as we played her favourite songs from Gracie. We carried her coffin out

of the church to Abba's Dancing Queen. It reminded us of how she was always singing and dancing. It's 18 months since Charlotte died and she has a new little brother called Alfie. She would have been a brilliant sister. We always smiling.

We have set up a charity called Charlotte's Smiles from our home in Paddock Way, Hinxley, Leicestershire. It raises money for treats and activities for children with cancer. Charlotte loved to help others, and this way she continues to do so.

For more details on Charlotte's Smiles or to make a donation, email charlottes.smiles@bt.com



Charlotte and Joseph



In hospital



of the church to Abba's Dancing Queen. It reminded us of how she was always singing and dancing. It's 18 months since Charlotte died and she has a new little brother called Alfie. She would have been a brilliant sister. We always smiling.

We didn't want to let her go

Charlotte's Smiles from our home in Paddock Way, Hinxley, Leicestershire. It raises money for treats and activities for children with cancer. Charlotte loved to help others, and this way she continues to do so.

For more details on Charlotte's Smiles or to make a donation, email charlottes.smiles@bt.com



Joseph and Alfie



Our family



Charlotte before



My daughter

Us

Edited by Zoe Wright. E-mail fab.zoe@bauer.co.uk