

At Home with

Olivia Newton-John

Interview by Ben Sorensen

As October is all about raising awareness for (breast) cancer, we thought it only fitting to interview Olivia Newton-John who is 'thriving' since overcoming her own battle with the disease in the 90s. Olivia is probably most fondly remembered for her role as Sandy alongside John Travolta's Danny in the 1978 hit musical *Grease*. But here are some perhaps unknown facts about Livvy... She is actually from England not Australia, she has had over 15 top 10 hit singles (including five at number one!), received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) from Queen Elizabeth, and is part owner of the Byron Bay hinterland accommodation and day spa retreat, Gaia. Ben Sorensen spoke to Olivia who now lives in Florida with her husband, John Easterling and beloved dog, Jack.

After the death of your daughter's best friend to a rare form of cancer, you became the National Spokesperson of the Colette Chuda Environmental Fund. You were in this role for ten years, but why did you choose this particular fund?

That was a very difficult time for me and, the Chudas were and still are extremely close friends. I wanted to lend my name to it because it is important to know what is in products and what we are exposing our children and family to. If my celebrity can help make a difference, I want to contribute in any way I can.

In the 90s, you faced your own battle with breast cancer. What was your initial reaction when you found out?

My initial reaction was 'why me?' Then you get past it and realise, I have a daughter, a family - I am going to beat this. Today, almost 18 years later, I am cancer free and a 'thriver'!

Was your diagnosis like an 'awakening'?

I think having cancer definitely made me re-evaluate what was important in my life. Up until then I put a lot of emphasis on other people, but the cancer journey really makes you look at your life and teaches you that you need to take care of yourself. As women we tend to be nurturers and want to take care of everyone else first.

How difficult was this experience for you?

It was very difficult, but just when you think you cannot handle something like cancer you realise you are much stronger than you first thought.

How did the support of your family and friends help you?

My friends and family were incredible. It is very important to have people around you who can be there to fill others in about your progress and treatment so you can focus on the healing and not on the illness. I tell everyone to assign a family member (a husband, sister, brother, wife, mother) to keep everyone informed as to your treatment and updates so that you can focus on getting well.

What did you learn about life on your journey?

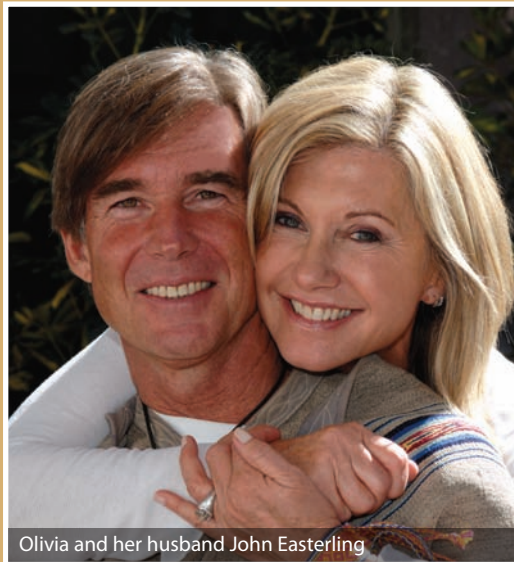
I learned that life is precious and that you need to be grateful for each day.

What does it mean to you to be a survivor?

I hate the word survivor. Instead, I prefer 'thriver'. Survivor sounds like you are 'hanging on' and I am past it and THRIVING!

Do you view life differently now? If so, how?

I have always viewed life as a gift. It is important to have gratitude for everything you have.



Olivia at her GAIA retreat in the Byron Bay hinterland.

Olivia and her husband John Easterling

www.olivianewton-john.com

This experience inspired your self-penned and produced album 'GAIA'. Can you tell us more about why you wanted to produce this sort of album?

Music has always been a healing tool for me. When I was going through cancer I thought to myself: 'It is time to retire and enjoy life,' but these songs kept coming to me in the night and that is how GAIA was born. My newest CD, *Grace And Gratitude Renewed* is also a healing album that I wrote to help me through a difficult time. My good friend and producer Amy Sky co-wrote the CD with me and it is one of my favourites to date.

You have now become an iconic positive inspiration for the millions of people battling cancer. How does it feel to be that person?

Oh thank you. I am just happy I can use my experience to help others and show them that they too can get through difficulties!

Tell us about the creation of the Olivia Newton-John Cancer and Wellness Centre Appeal.

I am so proud of the ONJCWC. They approached me about seven years ago to lend my name to a cancer centre in my hometown of Melbourne, but I said I would only do it if there was a wellness centre included as part of the facility. It is very important to heal not only the body, but also the mind and spirit. Now, seven years later we finally broke ground and began construction and I am so excited. It will have state-of-the-art treatment facilities and a wonderful wellness centre where patients can get a massage, meditate or just have a cup of tea in a beautiful garden.

What issues do you feel are the most pressing in the world today?

With all of the toxins and chemicals we are using to destroy the ozone, I think we really need to focus on healing the planet and of course, maintaining nature. My husband and I do a lot of work to preserve the Amazon Rainforest and educate people to the importance of a living rainforest versus a dead one. There are so many global issues that come from destroying the rainforest. I think once we heal the planet we will see less illness, as we are all connected like pearls on a chain. Unless we start to take care of the planet and stop poisoning it, we will see more illness and horrible things happening. My contribution will be to continue to try and raise as much awareness as I can. HOME



Ben Sorensen is a multi award-winning radio and television presenter and hosts Australia-wide radio segments, *Ben Sorensen's REAL Country* and *Ben Sorensen's Druid's Garden*.
www.bensorensen.com | www.druidsgardenonline.com

First thing I do when I wake up... *is thank the world that I am still here, kiss my husband and have a shot of Zamul!*

Favourite item in my wardrobe... *hmm, that is a tough one... I love scarves.*

I like to keep fit and healthy by... *walking on the beach with my husband and dogs, playing tennis and taking my husband's Amazon Herbs.*

I am currently listening to... *Jack Johnson and my daughter Chloe's new music.*

The last meal I cooked was... *hmm, I think it was eggs for my husband for breakfast. He loves eggs!*

I like to relax by... *sitting with husband and dogs and taking walks in the sunshine.*

If I could change one thing about my home, it would be... *the only thing I would change would be the amount of time I would spend there! I travel so much, but I would like to change that and spend more time at home.*

Favourite thing to do when I get home... *make dinner for my husband and walk the dogs.*

At home the room I spend the most time in is... *hmmm, probably the kitchen. I love to cook healthy meals!*

My top home decorating tip is... *go with your gut instinct and do what YOU like - you have to live there! Plus, if you can do something 'green' to help the environment (like use recycled materials) that is even better!*

My garden is... *organic and serene.*

My favourite holiday destination... *for sure my Gaia Retreat and Spa near Byron Bay - it is my heaven on earth!*

Life is... *a gift and my philosophy is no matter what, live a life of grace and gratitude...it goes by so quickly.*