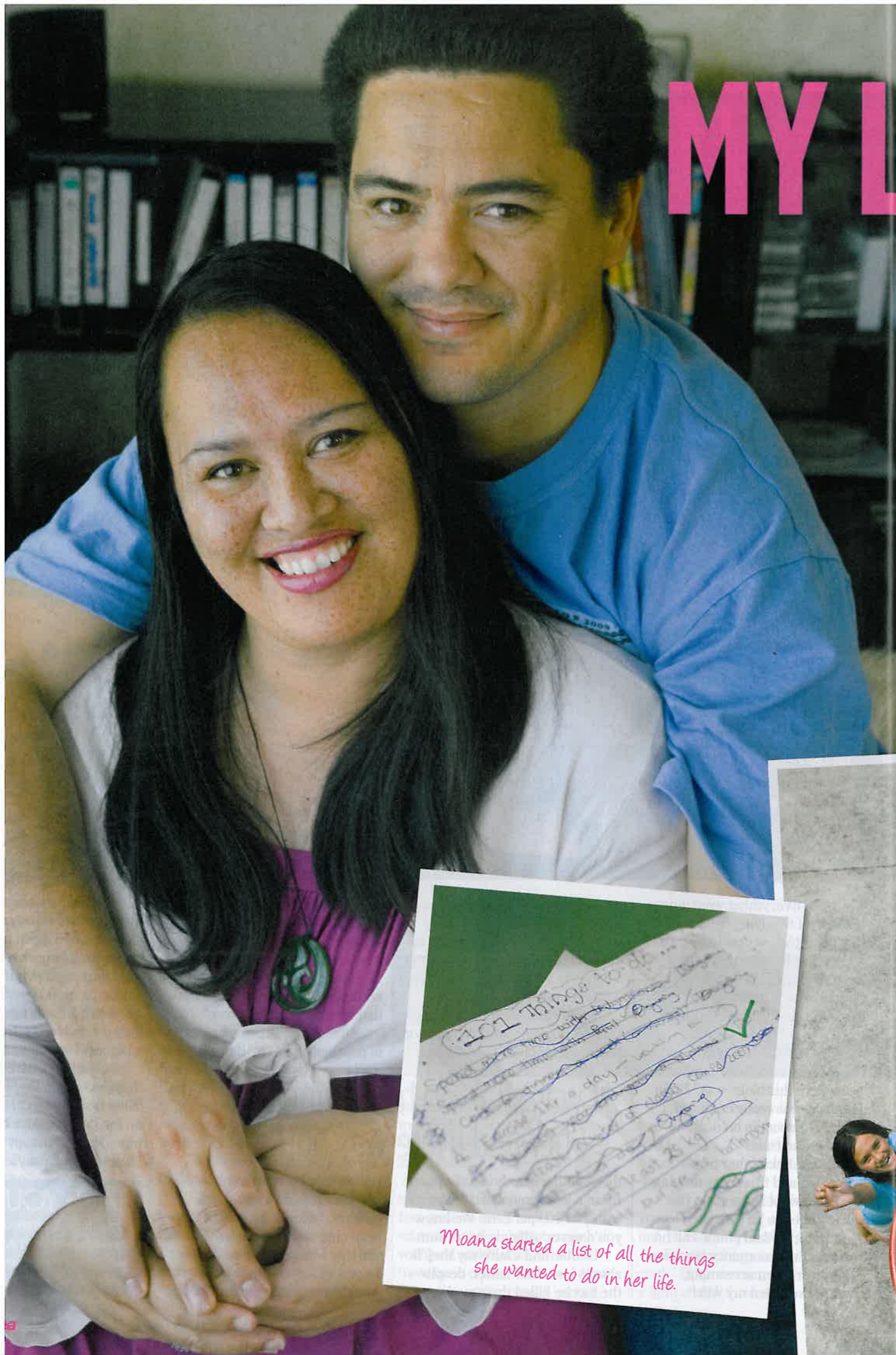


MY LIFE AFTER CANCER



A diagnosis of breast cancer motivated Moana Papa to live life to the fullest

Moana Papa spent a decade motivating teenagers to live their best lives, but it took breast cancer to spur her to take her own advice.

The South Auckland mum was a careers advisor at Tangaroa College in Otara before she was diagnosed with stage-three breast cancer in 2005, which turned her life upside down. Now in remission after having her left breast removed as well as radiotherapy and chemotherapy, Moana, 36, has undergone a huge transformation. She promised herself that if she survived, she would do all the things she's ever wanted to do – and made a list of 101 things she wanted to do in her lifetime. Quitting her job and enrolling in a communications degree was

just the beginning. Acutely aware of the importance of family, she booked holidays with her husband Paul, 39, son Devlyn, 14, and daughter Rionne, nine. Next, she vowed to use her brush with death to strengthen other women facing the same foe.

'I used to help young people decide what to do with their lives so I thought I'd better listen to my own advice,' she says.

The 'yes' woman
'Cancer changes your perspective and you learn what's important – spending more time with the kids, that was the big thing. And I loved my job but I decided to explore what's out there. You know that film *Yes Man*? Well, I've been Yes Woman,

leaping into things. It's all about seizing the moment.'
Moana, who's a volunteer with the Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition (BCAC), is on a mission to improve the odds for those women most in danger of dying from breast cancer.

'It wasn't until I got cancer that I found out how woeful the statistics are for Maori and Pacific women – because they don't go to the doctor when they see something,' says Moana, who's half Maori and half Samoan.

'By the time they do, it's at stage three. Maori women are more likely to die of breast cancer than a non-Maori person.'

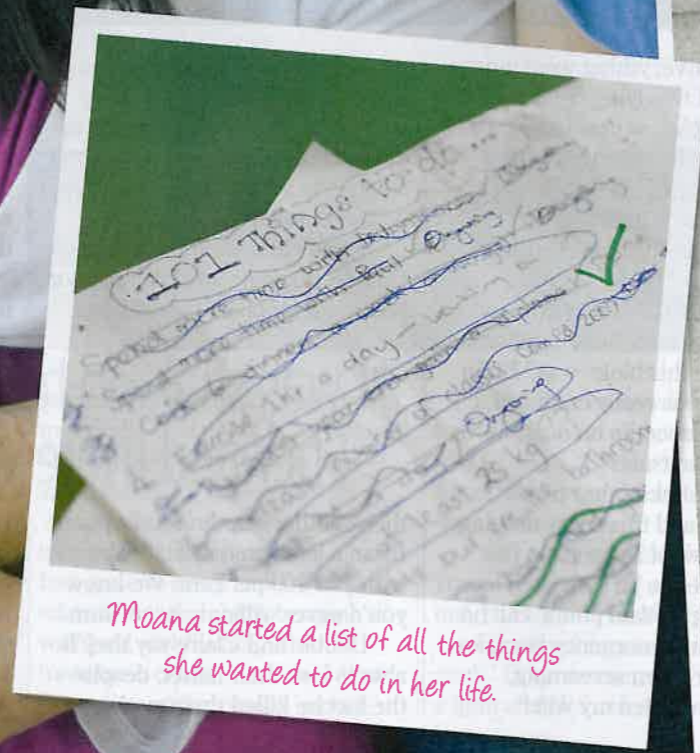
As well as encouraging women to be vigilant with their health, Moana, now job-hunting among not-for-profit organisations, has started a support group for patients of Maori or Pacific Island descent. 'Support makes the experience more bearable,' she says. 'When

I went through treatment I felt incredibly isolated. I had my immediate and extended family helping but I didn't know of any groups, and didn't know how to approach any survivors to talk to.'

Even though the cancer could return, life's too short to worry about that possibility, Moana says. The scars from her harrowing battle have finally healed.

'It feels like I've just woken up five months ago,' she says. 'The trauma stays with you so long. It was only about five months ago that I went, "I think I'm OK and now I can help other women." It takes that long to get over it.' **NI**
By Trudie McConnochie

Pictures: Nicola Topping



Moana started a list of all the things she wanted to do in her life.



Moana vowed to spend more time with her family.

THE FACTS

- In New Zealand, breast cancer is the most common cancer in women and the leading cause of cancer deaths in women, claiming 600 lives every year.
- One in nine Kiwi women will develop breast cancer – 2500 women are diagnosed each year.
- Around one per cent of those diagnosed with breast cancer are men – 20 Kiwi males a year.
- Maori women are more likely to get breast cancer than non-Maori women and are 72 per cent more likely to die from the disease.
- Of women who get breast cancer, 95 per cent have no family history of the disease, and three-quarters are 50 and older.
- Screening mammograms don't stop you getting breast cancer, but reduce your chance of dying from it by about 33 per cent.
- For more information about breast cancer and the Breast Cancer Aotearoa Coalition, visit www.breastcancer.org.nz.

tell New Idea

Have you survived breast cancer? How did it change your perspective on life? Tell us about it. Write to New Idea, PO Box 1467, Auckland 1140, or email newidea@pacificmags.co.nz.