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“That was really, really tough.”

She hoped to rest once maternity leave began. But Matilda arrived three weeks before her due date, on Houbaer’s first day of maternity leave.

The duo later spent a couple of weeks in the mother and baby unit but despite the rocky start Houbaer says she cherishes being a mum.

She went back to reading the weekend bulletin on 7 Nightly News when Matilda was seven weeks old. She has loved having the opportunity to juggle work and family life, despite the challenges that often come with doing that.

There were times Matilda refused to take a bottle so husband Dave would bring Matilda into the office and Houbaer would be at her desk reading through news bulletins, prior to recording, while also breastfeeding her daughter.

“I consider myself very, very lucky and I’m grateful I get to wear both of those hats in one day – at 3pm I can be changing a nappy and at 4pm I’ll have my hair and make-up done and be on screen,” says Houbaer.

“I enjoy being able to do both, it’s great to be a mum but it’s also really nice to have that sense of identity being back in the newsroom. I get to be back with my colleagues and friends, staying up to date with what’s happening in the world and I find that really interesting.”

Houbaer worked as a flight attendant and also ran a restaurant in the UK before studying journalism at the University of Tasmania.

Both her parents are journalists but she never planned to follow in their footsteps.

“I was very adamant my whole life I’d never get into journalism,” she laughs.

Her grandmother told her she’d be good at it, so, after her grandmother died, Houbaer decided to give it a shot and it’s a decision she doesn’t regret.

“I absolutely love newsreading. I love being live and being able to tell these history-making stories that spark conversations at dinner tables around the state,” she says.

Houbaer says she’s always been an empathetic person but becoming a mum has made her even more empathetic.

“It’s definitely not what I expected,” she says of parenthood. It’s better than I expected but it’s also a lot more demanding.

“The best bits are obviously watching her grow into the most beautiful, engaging little poppet. She gets a lot of people’s attention, she’s so happy and smiley ... she’s fascinated by what’s going on around her.”

She says it’s also been “really beautiful” to watch a bond form between her husband and daughter, and also for grandparents and extended family to get to know Matilda. Houbaer has also enjoyed the chance to meet other mums.

“The highlight has definitely been people meeting her, family meeting her, because she just brings so much joy – babies just bring so much joy in their own little way,” she says.

## JAY CHIPMAN

JAY Chipman was a seemingly fit and healthy 30-year-old mother of two young boys who was preparing to embark on a family trip to Queensland when a cancer diagnosis rocked her world.

It was about a week before Christmas, in 2014, and Chipman had gone to see her GP



because she had a strange feeling in her throat.

“I hadn’t even felt unwell,” Chipman recalls.

“I just felt like I had something caught in my throat. It was a bit weird, like a lump in my throat sort of feeling.”

It turned out she had a tumour growing on her chest, which wrapped around her major arteries and was pushing everything up towards her throat.

Her family holiday was quickly abandoned, as Chipman began a gruelling six months of chemotherapy that required long stints in hospital.

She was fortunate to receive the all-clear after her treatment finished and as a result the now 37-year-old doesn’t take life for granted.

She values the time she gets to spend with her husband Dan, sons Jack, 19, and Max, 12, and their surprise daughter Hazel, 5, who came along after Chipman’s battle with cancer.

“She was our surprise baby,” Chipman says.

“When I was diagnosed with cancer, the doctors said ‘you’d better freeze some eggs because you won’t be able to have any more babies after chemo’.

“But we didn’t go ahead with it as the oncologist said we had to proceed with treatment straight away. And we were grateful to already have two healthy boys.”

But six months after she finished cancer treatment, Chipman discovered she was pregnant.

“It was amazing,” she says of the unexpected news. “But it definitely was a shock. She’s been like the last piece in the puzzle. I can’t even imagine our family without her.”

During her recovery, Chipman found herself reflecting on the support services available to cancer patients and their families, and some of the areas where improvements were needed.

Three years ago, she set up Homely Retreats ([homelyretreats.com.au](http://homelyretreats.com.au)), a charity providing short getaways for cancer patients and their loved ones, to give families a chance to rest,

**The Chipman family – Dan, Max, 12, Jay, Hazel, 5, Jack, 19, and their pet dog Buddy, Picture: Zanzo Portraits.**

reconnect, have fun and create precious memories together during such a difficult time in their lives.

“When you’re in the moment and you’re absolutely coping day to day and in survival mode you haven’t got the brain capacity to think about booking a holiday for your family,” says Chipman, who previously worked in a furniture importing business but now works solely on running her growing charity.

“We talk to them on the phone, we do everything for them, we book the accommodation and provide them with a hamper, with vouchers for things like local cafes and animal parks. All they have to do is pack their jammies and go.

“Often we hear people say that until they had a break they didn’t realise how detached and stressed the family was and they return home feeling recharged and so much more relaxed.”

She says many families are worried about financial security following a cancer diagnosis, so a holiday is often considered a luxury.

Chipman says milestones such as Mother’s Day and birthdays take on new meaning for someone who has had cancer. Her boys were just 4 and 11 when she got sick.

“Birthdays are a big one for me,” she says.

“Because I guess there was a period in time when I was probably thinking, ‘Will I be here for the next birthday?’”

The Chipmans live near the beach at Lauderdale and are likely to spend Mother’s Day going on a family walk together.

“I’ll probably also get a cup of tea and a piece of toast made for me,” Chipman says.

“I feel totally grateful that I am here and I get to see my kids grow up. We often take it for granted, especially when we are tired and grumpy and life isn’t going our way. It’s nice to be healthy again and enjoy the kids ... it definitely gives you a new appreciation of what’s important.”

“*She’s been like the last piece in the puzzle. I can’t even imagine our family without her*”