

Cancer patient finds ‘glints of hope’ to inspire others



Father compiles book of individual stories to support people and their families after diagnosis

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“Life limiting and incurable” were the words Kevin Donaghy’s doctor used to describe his melanoma but four years later the IT consultant still clings to hope.

Donaghy, 54, had his life derailed when he was diagnosed with stage four metastatic melanoma, a year after discovering an unusual lump on his arm.

He started immunotherapy treatment in January 2020, two months before the first Covid lockdown. “Cancer is one thing, but a Covid lockdown was something else as well. It was quite bleak,” Donaghy recalled.

Skin cancer in Scotland is on the rise, reaching a record 1,525 cases in 2021, more than double the number of cases 20 years ago.

Donaghy’s diagnosis forced him to “hide from the sun” and “cling to the shade”, to avoid damaging UV rays. The cancer then metastasised to his lung and spine, and the treatment left him suffering from ulcerative colitis for more than five months.

But the grim experience inspired him to write *Stories of Cancer and Hope*, an anthology of miniature memoirs that detail people’s journeys to find glints of hope after diagnosis.

“I came up with the idea, perhaps because I felt so alone,” Donaghy explained. “I thought that people getting together and sharing their experiences of cancer with the theme being hope and what hope means to them could help other people that were going through a similar experience.”

The book features 39 diverse first-hand accounts from people across the UK, of all ages and backgrounds, facing a range of cancers. “There are some stories that don’t have a happy ending, unfortunately, because that’s the reality of cancer. Not everyone survives,” Donaghy said.

While the details of each story are very different, the common thread is loneliness, and the impact diagnosis has on the mental health of patients and their families.

Donaghy told his wife, Sophie, 52, and two children about his diagnosis shortly before Christmas in 2019 at their home in Melrose, which he said was an “incredibly tough conversation”. His daughter Katherine, 20, was due to take a gap year before university, but decided to stay at home with her father instead.

When he conceived the idea for the book, it quickly became a family affair. His daughter, who studies illustration at Dundee University, designed the cover art, his son Stephen, 22, edited the text, and his sisters, nieces and nephews all contributed too.

“As a family, it’s brought us a lot closer,” he said. “My mother, my sisters, nieces and nephews have all been involved in this project, and we had a party a couple of weeks ago to celebrate the book coming out.”

Donaghy had 1,500 copies of the book printed, which have been donated to local cancer charities including Maggie’s and The Cancer Club.

He also sends copies free of charge to anyone who asks for one, to deliver his vital message to the newly diagnosed.

“There are other people that have been through this journey, and the hope is that by reading these stories, you don’t feel alone,” he said.