



Not As I Pictured: a Pulitzer Prize-winning Photographer's Journey Through Lymphoma



A Film by John Kaplan

Author: John Kaplan

Available at: www.notasipictured.org

Information: 54 mins., 2010 | available free for patients & families

OncoLink Rating:



All of us who live in CancerLand have stories to tell. Stories of diagnosis and treatment. Stories describing painful surgeries and multiple rounds of chemotherapy. Stories about receiving radiation. Hopefully, these CancerLand stories that we are often so eager to recite, end on a hopeful note - with meaningful insights about recovery, healing and survivorship.

Yes, every cancer survivor has a story (or two) to share, but few cancer survivors have John Kaplan's photojournalistic skills to tell them with. That may explain why, days after viewing the multimedia collage of still pictures, video, music and narrative voiceover that is **Not as I Pictured**, that the experience still lingers - the images, the words, the feelings.

Only a photographer whose work has graced the pages of *Life* magazine and earned a Pulitzer Prize could capture such haunting images of hair loss: strands of hair gathered in clumps in the patient's hand, a silhouette of the now bald photographer captured in the shadows of the sidewalk. Possibly only someone whose professional portfolio includes photo-essays of lung cancer patients as well as portraits of small children surviving the horrors of war, would have the courage and journalistic sensibilities to document his own battle with cancer.

There is more than a bit of irony in the fact that the photographer - usually a voyeur of sorts, capturing the action at a safe distance, mostly faceless and hidden behind the shield of a camera - becomes instead the subject of the story. His intent is to allow us to witness his experiences as a cancer patient up close and personal. He succeeds, without question.

Kaplan openly shares his life with his viewing audience. We meet his wife and two small children. **Not as I Pictured** follows Kaplan into a college lecture hall as he shares his diagnosis with his photojournalism students and boldly takes off a baseball cap to reveal his bald head. Without a moment's hesitation or self-consciousness, we observe Kaplan remove his shirt to shoot a self-portrait; he holds his camera at arm's length and points it towards a mirror.

We are introduced to his team of doctors and see Kaplan perched on an examining table waiting impatiently for test results. The video camera also captures a drowsy Kaplan during a chemo infusion fighting off the sleep inducing effects of Benadryl. Clearly the urge to document his journey as a cancer patient is a strong one; according to Kaplan it gives him a feeling of "doing something to fight the cancer."

Not as I Pictured begins with a compelling rhetorical question: Does anyone live a picture perfect life. It ends with Kaplan getting the good news that his lymphoma is in complete remission. A 16 page companion guide accompanying the DVD features coping strategies for patients and caregivers.

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