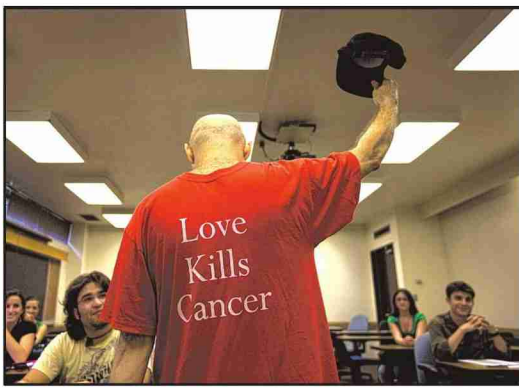


A record of one man's battle with cancer



COURTESY OF JOHN KAPLAN

John Kaplan, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer, continues teaching college journalism during his cancer treatment.

If how someone faces cancer isn't of interest to you, it likely will be someday. As the documentary "Not As I Pictured" declares, one out of three Americans will either get cancer or experience its pain through a family member.

Cancer patients often are moved to keep written journals of their experience. Since John Kaplan has been a photojournalist all his adult life, it seemed natural for him to keep a photo and film diary instead. He started it shortly after he was diagnosed, at 48, with a potentially deadly form of lymphoma.

Eventually, the Floridian turned the visual record of his cancer journey into a film, which will be shown nationally on PBS stations, including WVIZ Channel 25 in Cleveland, at 4 p.m. Sunday (repeating at 4 a.m. Monday).

The film bluntly depicts his cancer treatment and the side effects, like hair loss and retching. It conveys the extreme discomfort that chemotherapy brings on.

But Kaplan's film also shows how cancer distills life to its essence — as many of those who have, or have had, cancer discover. In Kaplan's case, it gives him a chance to focus on what matters most to him, his wife and young children, of course, but also his photography and his teaching of international journalism.

Kaplan's profession involved other people's tragedies. He recalls how, early in his career, he shot portraits for Life magazine of a 50-ish woman in the last stages of lung cancer, saying goodbye from her hospital bed to family and friends.

Then, cancer was someone else's story. Now it is his own, and Kaplan tells it with minimal frills. There are awkward, even corny, moments in the 54-minute film. At times, the viewer wonders what kind of a person would want cameras present, recording such personal and physical moments of vulnerability.

But the camera, we see, gives Kaplan the detachment he needs to see that while he is dealing with an illness, he is more than just its victim. He faces cancer as a process, turns it into a story, and uses it to make his life smaller, yet more human.

— Evelyn Theiss

