

Mission of joy

Photojournalist John Kaplan documents his battle with cancer in new documentary 'Not as I Pictured'

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About three years ago, John Kaplan was just the Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist. His photo-essays had a variety of subjects, including American 21-year-olds, torture victims from Sierra Leone and Russia's troubled youth.

He never imagined he, himself, would become the subject.

"I always recommend to students and other professionals - don't document yourself, it can be self-serving," Kaplan said.

The tables turned when the 48-year-old was diagnosed with lymphoma, a cancer that attacks the blood and lymphatic cells of the immune system. Kaplan started documenting his life with cancer with his camera.

His pictures and journey are featured in a new documentary entitled "Not as I Pictured," which will make its television debut Sunday on KLBP at 3 p.m. The documentary will also air Monday on the same station at 10 p.m.

Kaplan said the project began as a coping mechanism, but quickly became something bigger.

"I began the process purely as a way to cope with fear," Kaplan said. "It was a cathartic way to cope with unknown and scary. I realized very early on, that if I could go into remission, it could truly help other families."

As one would expect from a Pulitzer Prize-winner, the photographs are heartbreakingly beautiful.

There's a shot of Kaplan's hand in spotlight after he's run it through his hair, and you can see the mass

of hair that he just grabbed.

There's a shot of a bald Kaplan on a hospital bed in agony and in the background, his wife has her hands to her face.

Then, there are shots of him with his family, walking along a beach. In the film, you can hear the family, shouting, "Energy, energy, positive energy."

It's jaw-dropping stuff, and 95 percent of it was self-photographed. However, Kaplan said it always was secondary to his treatment.

"I needed to always remember that I had to be there for what my doctors told me to do to get well," he said. "The process had to be secondary. I purposely kept it low-tech."

Another thing Kaplan didn't want to do was play with people's

See Joy, Page 6C

emotions. He wanted to rather present something "well-grounded in medical research," he said, mentioning that though each "cancer patient has a unique clinical diagnosis, we all share the need for cancer coping."

Before cancer, he never was a cynic. However, if you would have asked him three years ago if anything positive could have come from his cancer experience, he would've replied, "of course not," he said.

The battle taught him how to believe.

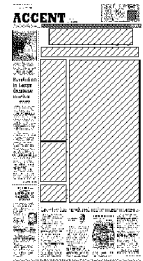
"When and if you hear that sinister word, you have to believe all is not lost," he said. "The im-

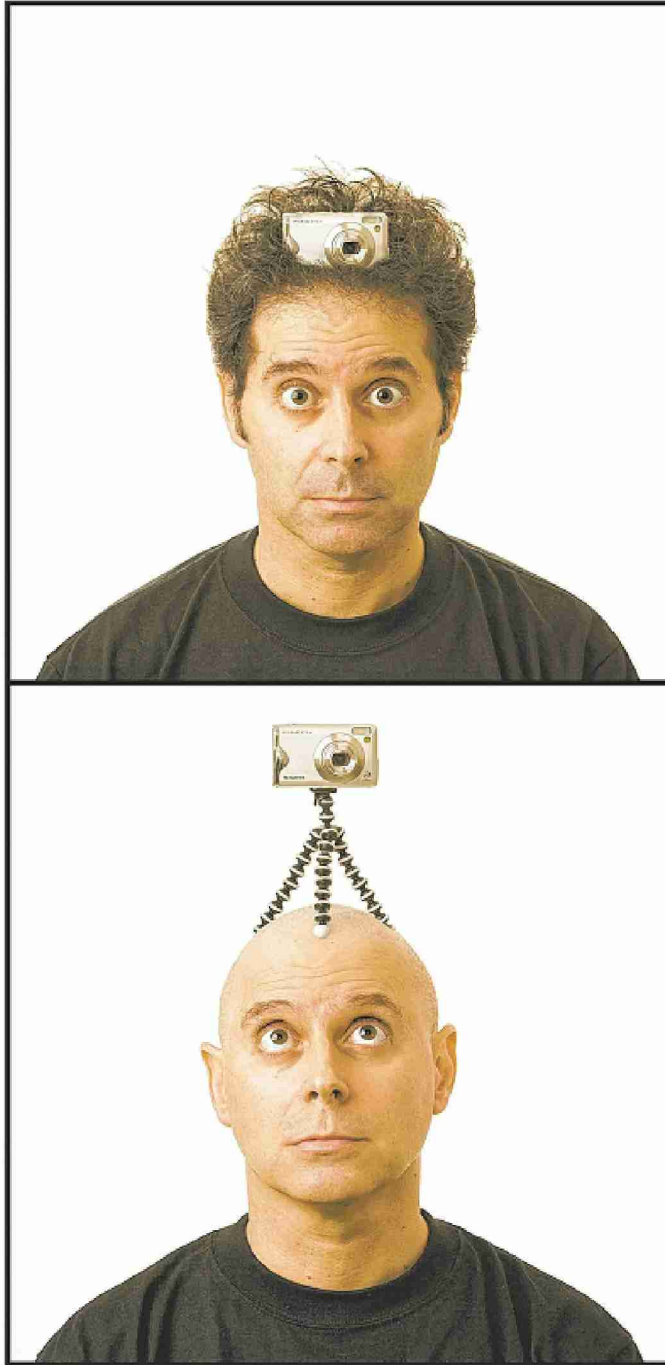
portant theme of the film is that so many cancers today are beginning to fall into realm of chronic illness and not death sentence. You have to forge your path, have to have a will to want to fight the illness and think about what it is you value in life."

The award-winning film has become a mission of joy for Kaplan. He is currently giving away the first 10,000 copies of the DVD to those who have been affected by cancer, via his website www.notasipictured.org

Kaplan is currently doing well, in remission after completing his treatments in November 2010. His cancer might come back, but Kaplan, the non-cynic, is not worried about that now.

"I've never been a blamer type," he said. "Then and now, I haven't questioned it. I've just believed I can beat it."





Humor is used throughout John Kaplan's film to give viewers an emotional break from the intensity of the cancer treatment process. This is from a section, animated in the film, that asks, "Just how does one photograph himself with cancer?" Kaplan is now in full remission and says he looks like himself again.

SUBMITTED PHOTO



On the first day of his international journalism class at the University of Florida, **John Kaplan** tips his cap to his students after explaining he had been diagnosed with cancer. **Despite six months of chemo treatments, he never missed a class but was not permitted by his doctors to fly with his "Florida FlyIns" students to Guatemala.** SUBMITTED PHOTO