

JOHN MAUNDER – KING'S IN PINK

Good afternoon everyone. First of all, I would like to thank you all for coming to this event today. It's a wonderful thing to all band together to raise money for a charity, and I am sure that you will all agree that Sally and her team have done a fantastic job in putting it all together.

All money raised from today's event goes directly to the Queensland Institute of Medical Research Berghofer, or QIMR as it is known as. QIMR is based over at the Royal Brisbane Hospital, and teams of scientists there slave away to make the modern breakthroughs necessary to beat today's global health burdens such as cancer, infectious diseases and mental health disorders.

Today, it would be unthinkable to be without the modern medical treatments that have been made available through the application and brilliance of dedicated scientists in years gone by. QIMR's passion, commitment and energy is what makes them one of Australia's largest and most successful medical research institutes. QIMR can be credited for more than half a century of work at the forefront of Australia's effort to prevent, detect and treat disease. Through their accomplishments, QIMR has become a symbol of hope, not just for Queenslanders, but all people, everywhere.



Every day at QIMR Berghofer there are over 700 scientists and support staff undertaking research in more than 50 specialised laboratories. They have exceptional people with world-class skills and dedication, but they can't do it without the backing of their community.

As I said, one of QIMR's three research programs is cancer research. Cancer is one of the major causes of illness and death in Australia, and in particular Queensland. To highlight the significance, if you look at the person standing on your left, statistically, in your lifetimes, either you or them will get cancer. In terms of a financial perspective, the global health cost

of cancer is \$1.4 trillion, which is equivalent to all of Australia's Gross Domestic Product. At QIMR, half of the laboratories are devoted to researching cancer.

I must admit, I didn't realize the impact cancer had on our nation, and I certainly didn't realize the tiring efforts that people, charities and research groups went to try and eliminate it. But now I do.

I started at Kings in 2009. I had three wonderful years here, leaving at the end of 2011. While I was here I studied a Bachelor of Engineering. Like many here, my college time revolved around a fair bit of socializing, and not much study, but I had a good time and that's what mattered. But as you are about to find out, a lot of things have changed since I had my last meal in the dining hall.

Almost 10 months ago on the 14th of December at 11am I was at the Regatta Hotel. A few quick XXXXs with my old man in anticipation of my graduation from engineering that afternoon. I was sitting outside, and lunch had just been delivered. It was a chicken "parmie" and it looked delicious. But then my mobile rang. I looked at the phone, and didn't recognise the number. I excused myself from the table, and walked around the corner to see what this person on the phone wanted. Little did I know, my life was about to change forever.

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The conversation that day on the phone went something like this: "Hello John, its Dr Stephen Allison here. We have been looking at the pathology results from that lump, and it turns out its actually blood cancer". He went on to tell me that I should contact an oncologist, which is a cancer specialist, and make an appointment immediately.

Now I cant really explain how I felt after this. I remember saying, "Ok, thanks Stephen. Thanks for calling, bye". Why I was saying thankyou, I don't really know. Meanwhile, I felt like my internal organs were about to fall out of my chest.

I went back to the table and sat down and picked up my knife and fork and started eating my “parmie”. My parents said who was that. Mid mouthful, I told them it was the doctor, and then they asked what he wanted. “He said I have blood cancer” I said. “I’ll probably need to stay in Brisbane next week to have an appointment with an Oncologist”. And then Mum started crying. Then Dad put his arm around me and I started crying as well.

I couldn’t understand what was happening. A few weeks previously, my routine pre-medical tests have found a lump in my groin. A while later, three days earlier than my graduation, a general surgeon had removed a lump in my leg. He had previously assured me that he sees this kind of thing all the time. Removes swollen lymph nodes every day of the week he said - a 99.9% chance it would be nothing.

But it was this surgeon on the phone who had been left to tell me the news, that I had been the one of the 10 or so people in Australia that would get this type of rare, incurable blood cancer this year. Since that time over 8000 Australians have been given the news that they have blood cancer as well.

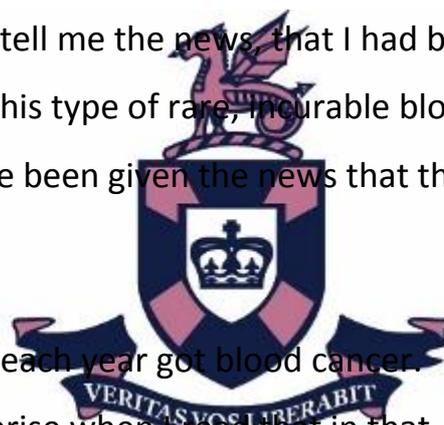
These statistics shocked me. I had no idea so many people each year got blood cancer. WHAT IS GOING ON!!! You can understand my further surprise when I read that in that same time 7000 Australians lost their battle with blood cancer. That is more than one every hour. Thousands of Australians walking around, not knowing when it will be “their” hour. The prognosis for sufferer’s isn’t that good at the moment.

But once I got over the initial shock of all this, I had to work out how I was going to beat this.

Over the next two weeks, I had dozens of doctors appoints. I had x-rays, pet scans, ct scans and blood tests. Bone marrow collections, ECGs, EKGs and lung function tests. I even had to make a very uncomfortable visit to the fertility clinic because the chemotherapy had a

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chance of making me sterile. I spent my Christmas in 2012 floating between waiting rooms of medical centres.

Finally, by the 31st of December I was ready to start treatment. It was New Year's Eve. Most of my friends were already pre-drinking the new year in, but at that same time I entered the clinic ready to embark on 9 hours of intravenous injections of some of the most toxic chemotherapy drugs around. I was literally being injected with poison. By 5pm that afternoon, I thought I was finished, but then the nurse told me I would need more again tomorrow. I felt like I wanted to die.

I woke up the next morning a quivering mess, with a pounding headache and churning stomach – a taste of what was to come for the next 6 months. I started my next lot of injections, and I had an allergic reaction to one of the drugs and my throat started closing over. Brilliant – like things could get any worse... Not that it really bothered me, at that stage death by suffocation was looking pretty good...

Once they got that all sorted, the day was finished and I had a break for 12 days before I was to go through it all again. For that next week, I literally felt like death. I felt like I was fighting the worst hangover of my life, whilst being seasick, with the flu. Then my hair fell out, I had bleeding noses, nausea, constipation and migraines. Not to mention that I also got another rare side effect that the chemo wiped out my immune system, so any cold or infection could kill me.

But somewhere there, in the first few days of this year, something changed. I don't know if the chemo changed something inside of me, but instead of being depressed about having this wretched disease, I started feeling relieved that I even found it. Most of the time, people don't find out they have these rare cancers until its already too late. I had been given a fighting chance.

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Then I realised, that if I hadn't have chosen to study medicine, they never wouldn't have picked the cancer up. Sure, I would have spent New Year's Eve at the Gold Coast with all my friends instead of the hospital, but give it a couple of years after that, and I would have been dead.

Now, I'm not going to tell you that there is a divine power controlling our path through life. Sure, if that's what you want to think then that's fine, but that's not the point. The point is, I had been given a chance to beat this, and at that stage, I decided that the least I could do was grasp at that chance.

So I decided to try and continue my studies and start my medical degree that semester, whilst getting that poisonous cocktail of drugs every fortnight. Sure it would be hard, but I didn't really have much to lose.

I found that once I started university that year, the hard things were what started to motivate me the most. My parents didn't expect me to go back to start class that month, in fact nobody did – not even me, but I wanted to prove everyone, including myself, wrong.

So I pushed through the first month, and I would be lying if I said it was easy, but I coped. I then looked for what more I could do – then it clicked. I had a horrible disease, but I had been given an incredible story, so the least I could to was make something good out of it. So I signed up to the Leukaemia Foundation's World's Greatest Shave and wow, I had no-idea what the response from that was going to be.

20 of my friends and family immediately joined a team with me agreeing to shave their heads, and within 24hrs we had raised more than \$10,000.

That night, I sat at my computer, refreshing my emails, watching the generous donations from my friends and family roll in, as well as their messages of support, and I cried again, but this time it wasn't sadness or anger. For the first time in months, I was happy. For a minute then, I forgot that I had cancer, and realised that I had the most supportive network

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of people around me anyone could ever wish for. I used this fundraiser as my vehicle for the following weeks, and by the end of it, we raised over \$100,000.

The next few months, I continued with my treatment, and university and eventually the 17th June rolled around. I was ready to go in for my last round of chemo. Finally it was over. I had never felt so relieved.

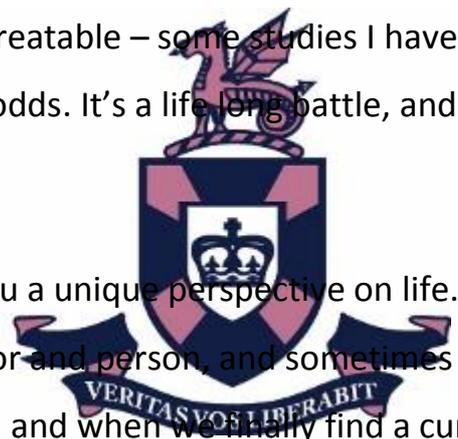
Now, the 6 months leading up to that point hadn't been easy. I can assure you. Whilst chemo did have its benefits, like the money I had saved on haircuts and beer, most of the time it was pretty average. And my journey was far from over. I am continuing to have some treatment now for the next couple of years, and I'm still not cured. The cancer is still just sitting there, waiting to re-present itself. Statistically, probably in the next few years and each time it returns there is a chance that it won't be treatable – some studies I have read say that I'm at a coin flip to make 40, but I like those odds. It's a life long battle, and I'm prepared to ride it out.

Going through what I have been through certainly gives you a unique perspective on life. I have no doubts that this will make me a much better doctor and person, and sometimes I am glad that the cancer picked me. I am ready to beat this, and when we finally find a cure, I will look back on the journey and I see how it has sculpted me as a person.

I have always been a very driven person, but it wasn't until after this that I realized that perhaps I wasn't being driven by the right reasons. When I started engineering, I did engineering because I was good at maths and physics and I would find it easy, but probably the main reason was because engineers made a lot of money. Now not saying that being driven by money is a bad thing, it's far from it, but it took something like cancer to make me realize that there are more important things in the world than that.

After being on the receiving end of it, I now realize that one of the most important things is giving back to others. A lot of my friends and family see this now too, and this is part of the

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reason that myself and three other Kingsmen rode the 220km Rio Tinto Ride to Conquer Cancer a few months ago raising another \$22,000 for QIMR. But the 220km are nothing in the journey I have ahead of me in becoming the best doctor that I can be. My cancer is what motivates me. Modern medicine has given me a chance to one day beat my cancer for good, and now I feel that it is my duty to give back to medicine some of what it has given to me.

It is incredible to have raised over \$120,000 for cancer support and research, but the credit should certainly not fall to me. I would be amiss not to acknowledge the 1000's of people who have sponsored the team as well as my friends and family who joined my cause - rattling collection tins for months. Not much fun at that moment in my life but every now and then something incredible happened – like finishing that bike ride with a few of my best mates. Even if it just lasts for a few seconds, it is so uplifting that for a brief moment, I forget that I have this horrible disease. Everyone who has donated, or come today, may not have realized the extent that they have helped me, but I assure you, it has, and I am extremely grateful.

I have no doubt that I wouldn't have made it this far without the support of my friends and family. Those closest to me - my Mum and Dad, my Brothers and their families, and of course my girlfriend Laura. These are the people that saw me at my worse. Who unconditionally loved me and did whatever they could. Even on the days where I was angry and frustrated and wanting to give up. They were my lifelines and I am indebted to them.

Finally, I would like to again thank all of you for coming along today. After hearing a bit of my story, I'm sure you appreciate how much an event like this means to me. There are still plenty of raffle tickets I think, so encourage everyone to support QIMR, and become a part of the quest to cure cancer. Have a good afternoon everyone.

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