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Alum's film catalogues cancer through humor

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When John Kaplan was diagnosed with a case of lymphoma, his reaction to the immediate shock involved turning to his natural instinct and taking pictures of himself.

Kaplan, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist and former *Post* employee, put those images and a series of videos together to document his bout with cancer in the film *Not As I Pictured*.

"I needed this coping outlet. I didn't know whether I'd go into remission or not, and that's a lot to carry," Kaplan said.

The film utilizes humor and music to show Kaplan and his family's reaction to his potentially fatal disease, using images such as Kaplan's hair-covered pillow after he begins his chemotherapy treatment and his daughter's drawings of him both with and without his hair to demonstrate the impact cancer can have on a family.

Even though he discourages his students from turning the lens on themselves, Kaplan said it felt natural for him to do so.

"I didn't mind seeing myself at my most vulnerable or not at my best physically. I just felt like ... I didn't ask for (cancer), but I've got nothing to feel guilty about," Kaplan said.

Kaplan worked with the Enlight Foundation and the American Society of Clinical Oncology to give away 10,000 free copies of *Not As I Pictured*, with an educational pamphlet about fighting cancer inside the DVD's packaging.

"It's a vehicle to try to help other people because we got so much unexpected help along the way," Kaplan said.

At one point in the film, Kaplan receives a letter from a man in Detroit telling him that his brother, Ryan Kohen, had drawn inspiration from one of Kaplan's pictures after being diagnosed with brain cancer.

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Kaplan's Pulitzer Prize-winning picture of Phil Anselmo, the lead singer of Pantera, focused on the word "strength" tattooed into the right side of Anselmo's head.

After surgery to remove his tumor, Kohen had a scar on the right side of his head shaped similarly to Anselmo's tattoo, something that Kohen turned to for inspiration throughout his treatment.

As soon as Kaplan went into remission, he flew to Detroit and had the picture blown up for Kohen. Then he brought it — and Anselmo — to Kohen's house, allowing the man to

meet one of his heroes.

"I couldn't believe that his cancer went into remission and the first thing he did was fly up to meet us," Kohen said.

Kohen, who still speaks with Kaplan a couple of times a week, has seen *Not As I Pictured* several times and said it shows a wide spectrum of emotions.

"I think it's incredible, and I think it's gonna help a lot of people who are dealing with (cancer) in their family. ... People laugh at parts, people cry at parts, but ultimately it's uplifting," Kohen said.

To pick up a free copy of Kaplan's film, go to www.notasipictured.org.