

## Ken's Story

Ken Amer has spent a lifetime behind the lens — but after a devastating terminal cancer diagnosis, the object of his focus has become a men's health awareness mission, in an effort to save others.

Following his own terrifying cancer blow, Ken is urging men not to dismiss the early warning signs of prostate troubles — an issue which, if left untreated, can result in a life changing diagnosis.



*"I want this message to get over to guys — just go and get it checked,"* stressed the well-known photographer, as he comes to terms with the fact that he will live with cancer for the rest of his life.

*"Even for guys over a certain age, from the late 50s, go and get it checked if there are no symptoms. It could potentially be a lifesaver."*

Ken, 66, has, for the last 36 years, run his own business, Orkney Photographic, documenting just about every aspect of Orkney life over the last three decades. Speaking to *The Orcadian* this week, he has shared a candid account of his story, to encourage men to take their health seriously, before it is too late.



It was back in May that Ken, from St Ola, first began to think something was amiss, as he became plagued by recurring and stubborn urine infections. Due to the fact that each infection would clear with antibiotics before then returning, it was only when a third infection became embedded that a red flag was waved. Struggling to pass urine, his health gradually declined to the point that he was wetting the bed, passing blood and vomiting. He also lost over two stones in weight.

A prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, test, which measures the level of PSA in the blood, was the first step, revealing that a worrying amount of the antigen existed in his system.

*"That indicates, not necessarily the whole time, but it can indicate you've got cancer of the prostate,"* explained Ken, a husband, father and grandfather.

*"The high levels can be caused by infections and other diseases or illnesses, but primarily it's cancer. I was smitten with shingles as well, so my body went through quite a bit."*

*"I also got a bladder scan which revealed that I was retaining far too much urine, and it was backing up over my kidneys which is very serious, meaning that toxins are going back into the kidneys."*

Such was the seriousness of the situation he faced, following the scan, Ken was immediately admitted to hospital at the end of July. A catheter was fitted and immediately got to work, draining over 1.5 litres of retained urine from Ken's bladder, which he had been unable to pass due to his enlarged prostate. He admitted to being taken aback when he was told that he would not be going home that day.

*"The enormity of the whole situation started to dawn on me. It was a slow reveal."*

In The Balfour for four days, Ken was hooked up to a drip to flush out the toxins which had built up in his kidneys due to the retained urine. Further tests confirmed that he was suffering from an enlarged prostate, and it was suspected that it was also cancerous. It was also suspected that the cancer had spread to his bones, making it incurable and terminal.



On the moment the terrible news was confirmed, Perthshire native Ken, who moved to Orkney in the early 1980s, said: *"The feeling I got was not shock, but relief at the fact that I knew what it was.*

*"If that was the case, you knew how to address or how to fight it. The nurse, a male, said: 'if you wanted to contact me, phone me any time'.*

*"I thought that was a bit strange, really, because nurses don't normally do that, but he gave me his card and I realised he was a Macmillan nurse. That's when it really hit home 100 per cent."*

Facing a terminal cancer diagnosis is one of life's most harrowing situations, and anyone's worst nightmare. But Ken, aided by a huge support network of family and friends, has faced the news head on, deciding to focus on the positives. His cancer, while not curable, is "containable" — a key source of comfort at a time when the gravity of the situation would weigh anyone down. And, despite the fact that his mobility is reduced while his catheter remains fitted, he remains active, throwing himself into work.

To halt the cancer's spread, his testosterone will be suppressed through drugs and injections into the hip every three months for the rest of his life, and he hopes to live a relatively normal life. He firmly believes that there are positives to take from the situation, highlighting the fact that his weight loss has actually cured him of Type 2 diabetes.

*"I always believe that you've got to deal with the cards you've been dealt with,"* he said this week.

*"Although I had a heart attack ten years ago, I've had a really good life, and I would hope to continue it."*

He added: *"I understand the gravity of the situation; I'm not taking it lightly. But you just have to put that aside and think positive."*

Despite his positivity, there have understandably been low points — moments where his emotions have got the better of him. He has been shocked by the level of support and messages from people right across Orkney since he received his diagnosis earlier this month; the kindness and compassion shown by people right across the islands and beyond has been overwhelming for him at times.

His family — Glynis, his wife of 31 years, son Ally and his fiancée Danielle Ritchie, and three grandchildren, two-year-old Nora and twins Alfred and Margo, who are 11 months — have been key in helping him come to terms with his cancer diagnosis, and his network of friends have also helped him through the hugely traumatic period. He reserved huge praise too for the medical care he has received, paying tribute to the team at The Balfour, for which he expressed huge admiration.

Now, as he awaits treatment to reduce the size of his prostate, which would then facilitate the removal of the catheter, he has urged men not to ignore the warning signs.

One of the most common prostate tests is a digital rectal examination, involving your doctor or nurse feeling your prostate through the wall of the rectum. This, Ken believes, is a test which may put men off seeing doctors about a potential prostate issue. Ken said: “Having someone put a finger up your bum can be a lifesaver, it really can be. It’s uncomfortable, but it is not embarrassing. To say that you’ve had it can be, but it’s not. Just get it done. It’s over in a few seconds. If you’ve got an enlarged prostate, it doesn’t necessarily mean that you’ve got cancer. I’ve got cancer but you just have to deal with that the best you can. To deal with that is to spread the word.”

