

MAMPHO OPPORTUNITY

By PETER ROBERTSON
THROUGHOUT his twenties, Jamie Finlay seemed destined for a big future in advertising.

But a form of cancer, Hodgkin's Lymphoma, forced him to rethink his career plans. He quit his job with a major ad agency and decided to travel the world.

It was a voyage of discovery, and the pictures he took on that trip were so remarkable that Jamie, 31, is now a successful photographer.

Jamie says: "The cancer left me drained and depressed, but now I have more energy than ever before. Photography has given me a great new life."

He has always been a keen sportsman and, at university in Pittsburgh, he excelled in athletics and American football.

But, at 22, he discovered a worrying lump on his neck.

"After three weeks it grew from the size of a pea to that of a golf ball. I was recommended to a doctor, who gave me a very thorough examination, took his rubber gloves off and said, 'Jamie, I'm 95 per cent sure you've got cancer.'"

"I'll never forget, that was at 2.30pm on November 9, 1990," he recalls with a shudder.

"My instant reaction was 'Right, let's get rid of it.'"

Further tests confirmed that Jamie had a cancer which attacks the body's lymphatic system, but luckily the disease was confined to the neck area.

He had to endure six weeks of daily radiation, during which he lost all the hair from the back of his head, which will never grow back fully.

Yet he says: "I remained extremely positive about the situation. I kept telling family and friends 'I'm still here, I haven't gone yet.'"

Jamie was forced to drop two of his four university courses, but bravely continued with the rest. "I wanted to be focused, doing something rather than sitting around moping," he explains.

IN February 1991, scans revealed that radiation had successfully eliminated the tumour.

And within a year of the initial diagnosis, Jamie completed his university degree and landed a job as an account executive with international advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather.

He had come from a family of business high-flyers. His father is a retired senior executive for food giant Heinz, and a former chairman of Dawson International. His brother, Rory, is an executive for chewing-gum firm Wrigleys.

Jamie, who was educated at Cranleigh public school in Surrey, won his university place at Pittsburgh while his father was working there in the Heinz head office.

"I majored in rhetoric and communication, which is an accepted qualification for advertising, marketing and PR in the US," he says.

Jamie's first job was working in O&M's Chicago office for

Cancer fight led adman to a new career

clients such as Western Publishing, producers of the *My Little Pony* books. Then he transferred to the London office, where clients included Ford cars and Unilever.

"I didn't think about the potential stress of such a job," he maintains. "I was young and just thrilled to have left university and got a good job in a field I wanted to work in."

"O&M were very supportive of me with regard to my illness, but it didn't affect my performance in any way.

"It actually gave me a unique sense of perspective on pressurised situations. I'd think: 'There are a lot more serious things in life than not getting a commercial ready on time.'"

Every February, Jamie would travel to Pittsburgh for tests with his medical team there.

"For a few weeks before each of those return visits, I found it very hard to concentrate because I was thinking what if they find the cancer again?"

On his 1996 visit, Jamie was given the all-clear, five years after his cancer had first been "cured".

Unfortunately, within a few weeks, he suffered viral infections, his left elbow swelled up

and he tore all the ligaments in his left knee.

"I think my body basically just collapsed after going through so much in the previous five years," says Jamie.

"Whatever, in the summer of '96 my doctor strongly advised me to get away from the stressful environment I was working in, and to take a proper break.

"I was very reluctant to leave advertising. It was something I'd spent years preparing and training for and really enjoyed in practice. My ambition was to run the London office of O&M and get on to their worldwide board."

That October, after months of serious thought, Jamie handed in his notice at O&M.

"I had no idea what was going to happen to my career. I just knew I had to get my body rested and back in shape again.

"I decided I'd give myself one year to travel to parts of the world I'd always dreamed of seeing. What I'd been through had taught me the fragility of life, and I thought 'If I die, I don't want to have missed such a great opportunity.'"

Jamie's trip, from January to December 1997, included India, Nepal, Scotland, Australia and New Zealand. He also drove alone

across America and, while in Africa, climbed Mount Kilimanjaro and bunjee-jumped at Victoria Falls.

Having enjoyed taking pictures for fun since childhood, Jamie used his new £200 Minox 500SI 35mm camera to make a photographic record of his trip.

The results impressed not only friends but established photographers too.

In the spring of 1998, Jamie held his own exhibition at Chelsea Harbour Design Centre in London. And, at the end of 1998, two of his pictures were exhibited at a gallery in New York.

"I never dreamed of exhibiting my photographs before," he admits. "I didn't even think of myself as a photographer."

To his surprise, many people bought prints of Jamie's pictures. Denise Prior, house manager from the Royal Geographical Society, visited Jamie's exhibition and promptly invited him to display his pictures there.

"I couldn't believe my luck. It was a dream come true," says Jamie.

"I began to realise that maybe this was a new career possibility for me."

To that end, Jamie set up his own website www.jamiefinlay.com in 1999, and work has been flowing in.

LAST year the MCC hired Jamie to portray life at Lord's cricket ground, which included the World Cup tournament.

His services have also been sought by Sports & Outdoor Media, the Lord's Taverners, the National Association of Flower Arrangement Societies and Macmillan Cancer Relief. Jamie's mother runs a branch for this charity.

All that and Jamie has never trained or qualified as a photographer.

However, he recently finished an introduction course in black and white photography, and even that has proved fruitful because the course director has asked Jamie to teach a workshop in colour photography and assist in marketing the school.

"I can hardly believe what's happening. I'm a very lucky guy," he says modestly.

"This new career is all the more exciting because it's so unexpected. Best of all, the lifestyle and independence it provides are more suitable for me than a high-powered position in advertising."

The key to Jamie's new-found success may be his unique views, both through the lens and on life itself.

"People who've stood next to me while I've taken a picture have often said, on seeing the resulting photograph, 'I didn't see what you saw.'"

"I would never claim to be anything special, but I do believe my illness has made me look at so many things in different ways.

"In particular, I see beauty in things which I previously considered dull or didn't even notice at all.

"Ever since I experienced the cancer, I have appreciated every day that I wake up to, whether the sky is blue or grey."



ON THE UP: Jamie takes a breather at 15,000ft in Nepal with Mount Everest behind

Jamie's prize shots



HOT SHOT: The Maasai people in Kenya



ON LINE: Scotland



WILD: Scots castle



HARSH BEAUTY: Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe