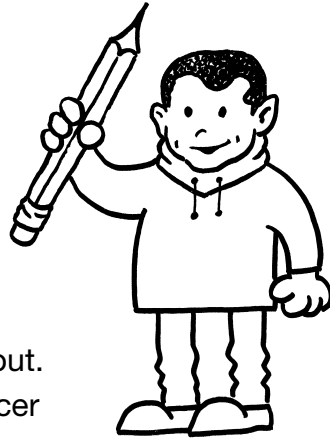


Chapter One

Hi-my name is Connah

and I want to tell you about myself. I love football. My favourite team is Man City. And I'm a great dancer. And... what else? Oh yes. And I have cancer. That's the main thing I want to tell you about. This book is my totally true cancer story but since I'm only little and I don't remember much Nana and Grandad will help me, won't you?



Of course
we will



the Boring Background Stuff

The first thing I have to tell you is – it's all very complicated. My mum left my dad and me when I was just a baby and then my dad couldn't get a job where we live so he had to go away too to work in the city so now I live with Nana and Grandad. But Grandad spends a lot of time away because he has to work in the Yemen as he is in the oil business – and I hope he doesn't get kidnapped (or maybe I mean grandad-napped because there is a lot of that there). So sometimes he's away but a lot of the time he lives with us. So most of the time it's just Nana and me – and she's a real hero because I wouldn't be alive if it wasn't for her. Anyway. That's all I want to say about that. I don't want to talk any more about that mum-and-dad stuff.

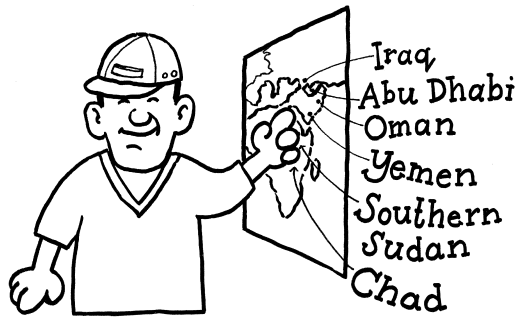
I love
you Nana

And I
love you
too





Connah: Grandad really is a hero. He's worked in these countries – and they're all very dangerous.



Connah: Now, I want to tell you about my cancer. Grandad, what exactly is cancer?

Jim: That's a complicated question. Let's ask the doctor.



Doctor: Well, you know you've got arms and legs and a head and so on.

Connah: Yes

Doctor: And these are made of muscles and bone and brains and so on.

Connah: Yes. I know that.

Doctor: And the muscles and bones and brains are made of cells.

Connah: What's a cell?

Doctor: Well if you look at a house. It's made of walls, and the walls are made of bricks. Well the cells are like the bricks of the body

Connah: I knew that!

Doctor: Of course you did. Now these cells don't live forever. After a while, they die and new cells take their place. The body is constantly changing and we're constantly making new cells and getting rid of the old cells. That's what the body does.

Connah: OK. I think I understand that.

Doctor: Well, to make new cells the body has a supply of special cells, called stem cells – and a

stem cell can change into a muscle cell or a brain cell or any other kind of cell depending on what is needed.

Connah: That's amazing. How does the cell know what kind of new cell it should become?

Doctor: Well we think it's because it gets messages from the other cells around it. We don't really know the full answer.

Connah: And so what's cancer?

Doctor: I'm just coming to that. You see, sometimes something goes wrong with the cells and instead of becoming a normal cell it becomes a cancer cell and that's a problem. The cancer cells start to take over the body and that's when people get sick.

Connah: Can't you kill the cancer cells?

Doctor: Sometimes we can cut them out. Sometimes we can kill them with chemotherapy drugs and sometimes we can kill them with radiation. Those are the main ways we try to kill cancer cells. But often we can't kill them.

Connah: And then the person with cancer dies?

Doctor: Well, yes, sometimes.

Connah: Except me. I'm still alive.

Doctor: Yes, you are. You're a special boy.

Connah: Thanks doc...

Doctor: You're welcome. Anytime you want to know anything, just ask.



Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is a way of treating cancer using powerful drugs.

Surgery

Surgery is a way of treating cancer by cutting out the cancer.

Radiation

Radiation is a way of treating cancer using a machine that shoots a narrow beam of X-rays at the cancer cells.

Another way of delivering radiation is to inject something radioactive (called an isotope) into the patient.

What is a tumour?

A tumour is the name we give to a large clump of cancer cells connected to each other.

Connah: Thanks... Actually, I never knew I had cancer until recently. They didn't tell me or maybe I was too young to understand. I'm eleven years old now (actually eleven and three quarters, or something like that) and I've had cancer for over seven years, maybe longer, but they found it seven years ago. Isn't that right grandad?

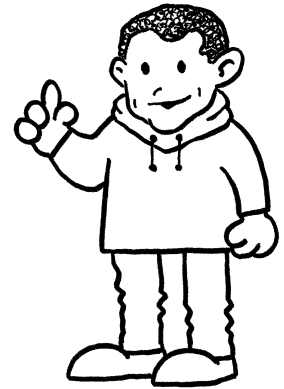
Jim: That's right.

Connah: I just knew I was sick and I had to go into hospital and I have to do things at home. And the funny thing is I just don't remember being in hospital.



Sometimes we wonder if the chemo has affected his memory

But the first thing I have to tell you is that I still have cancer...



It's in my tummy. Most of it has gone. I had it in my, legs, chest and neck but now I just have one lump in my stomach.

Debbie: Connah had eleven tumours when the cancer was first diagnosed – but now there's just the primary tumour – the first one that spread out and created the secondary tumours in his neck and chest. The primary tumour is still there, maybe, it's not quite dead yet. It could suddenly start being active again at any time. But all the secondary tumours have disappeared.

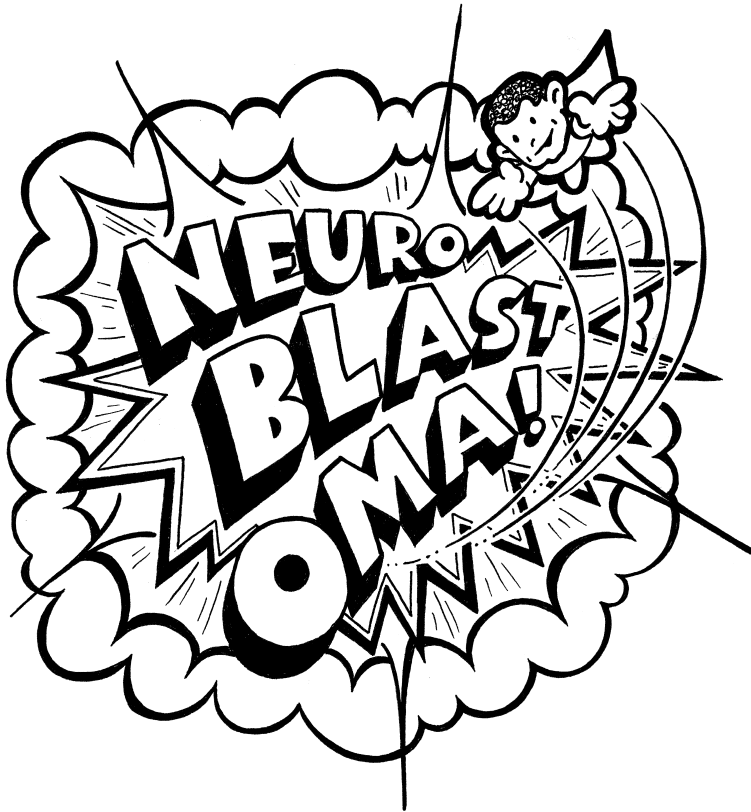
Connah: That's why I still have to do my special treatment that I do for two hours in the evening after school. Now I do that three times a week, but to begin with it was five times a week. It's tiring and boring but I have to do it.

Jim: We'll tell them about the special treatment later

but why don't you tell them what kind of cancer you've got.

Connah: Nana says there are many different kinds of cancer and my kind is called neuro...What's it called Nana?

Debbie: It's called neuroblastoma
Yeah. That's right. I've got...



Jim: Neuroblastoma is a very aggressive cancer. That means it normally grows very quickly.

Debbie: And Connah's cancer was extremely aggressive.

Jim: When they found it, it was already stage 4.

The Stages of Cancer

Stage 1: small cancer in one place

Stage 2: larger cancer, spreading but still in one area

Stage 3: cancer that has spread to nearby places

Stage 4: cancer that has gone to many places around the body.

Neuroblastoma

Neuro – means something to do with the nerves

Blastoma – means a kind of cancer that occurs in a type of cell called a 'blast' – a blast is a cell that has changed from being a stem cell but hasn't yet become a normal cell.

If a neuroblastoma is caught early then it can often be treated successfully. But if, like Connah's, the neuroblastoma has spread widely then treatment is usually not successful.

In Britain, there are about 100 cases a year. In America there are about 700 cases a year.