



From the Fire ...  
to the Frame

After a life-altering diagnosis,  
one UK man discovers a new  
world at the end of his lens.

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Helping others has long been known as a catalyst for better mental health and new social connections. While science gives us plenty of examples of the benefits of doing for others, we found evidence of this in the beautiful story of Ian Randall and his volunteer work.

A fire officer in the U.K. for 18 years, Ian was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma (bone cancer) in 2010. He made a good recovery but was unable to resume his career fighting and investigating fires. Still a relatively young man, Ian wasn't ready to stop working and contributing. So he volunteered to work with Sarcoma UK, a national charity working to help people diagnosed with this disease, as Ian was. He offered to become their official photographer, and didn't have to offer twice. He started within a week!

"One of my first projects was taking

pictures of their runners in the London Marathon," he explains. "They had about 15 runners then, but it's really exploded in recent years. Now there are usually around 65 people running for Sarcoma UK. It's quite hard to spot them amongst 40,000 participants, but some are easily identifiable by their Sarcoma UK vests."

Being diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma changed Ian's life. He's now committed to doing what he can to help other people who are facing some of the difficulties he experienced.

He explains, "When I was diagnosed, I was told not to look up my condition on the internet, because it's usually bad news. So it wasn't until after treatment that I came across the Sarcoma UK charity online. I wanted to try and help other people who were going through rehab and pass on any positive aspects of my experience."

"I had physical and mental prob-

lems, which meant I couldn't do physical activities, but I could make use of my interest in photography."

#### Finding a New Focus

It's been a whirlwind of event photography, portrait photography and medical shoots. Ian has met a lot of people who've been affected by the disease, and with every new project, he learns more about the charity and those brave people who benefit from its work.

"Some people have lost family and friends to the disease. I'm pretty quiet usually, but having the camera gives us a focal point for our conversations and helps me talk more easily. People open up, and it helps me talk about my experiences too."

"The charity uses my photos on their website, on social media, in brochures, and in their subscribers' magazine. My photos have been used in numer-

ous projects over the last 10 years, and it's nice to see how the designers use them," Ian continues.

As part of his work for Sarcoma UK, Ian photographs the charity's annual quiz night, its big fundraiser attended by British celebrities and politicians. In 2014, he was asked if he'd like to get involved in producing a charity calendar. Always keen to help, he didn't hesitate to say yes.

"A group of fellow cancer survivors and their families came together, and we shot photographs for the Bone Cancer Research Trust Calendar 2015," he explains. "It attracted a lot of press interest, sold well, and did a brilliant job of raising awareness of bone cancer. I tried new photography techniques too."

A few years later, Ian was invited to photograph a fashion show. "Having a chance to shoot at London Fashion week in early 2016 led me to shoot for

Models of Diversity, where I met some amazing and inspiring people," he says.

In 2016, he was invited to take photographs at the Prime Minister's Office in Downing Street, when they made Sarcoma UK their official charity of the year. "I also went to the Houses of Parliament in 2018 to represent Sarcoma UK as part of the Cancer 52 awareness campaign," Ian explains. "It was raising awareness of the lesser known cancers that don't get any government funding."

Ian also started photographing sporting events and has now received his Football Association (soccer) Photography license and shot Premiership and League games. "Shooting the 2018 Women's FA Cup Final at Wembley was a dream come true," he says. "Then last year I did another photo shoot at Downing Street when Sarcoma UK was invited back to launch their Genomics Development Pro-

gramme" — important research that will hopefully lead to earlier diagnosis and better treatments.

#### From a Hobby to a New Career

"Photography was always a hobby," Ian explains. "But before I got ill, I didn't have time to pursue it properly. I was working two jobs — one in the fire service and then on my days off I was doing fire safety inspections and risk assessments."

During his recovery, Ian had to take stock. He realized he wouldn't be able to go back to work and started to look at other ways to keep himself busy without overdoing it.

"I had a chat with the fire brigade incident photographer, and he told me I just needed a cheap Canon camera and he'd show me the basics. He lent me his equipment and taught me how to use Photoshop. Then I went on a course," he explains.



***“I asked them to tell the patients that I too had been a patient, so I knew what they were going through.”***

Since then, Ian’s photos have appeared on *BBC News* and in the press. “I’ve had a lot of practice over the years,” Ian says. “I now do weddings, portraits, corporate events and sporting events. A lot of what I do is helping people out.

“I do weddings in the summer — it’s a lot of pressure and tiring, but I get huge satisfaction and joy when the edits are completed. And the newly-weds are always overjoyed! My main thing now is the football photography. I volunteer at Queens Park Rangers women’s and younger teams, and they use my photos on their website and on social media. It’s not paid, but I enjoy it. Some of the players buy my photos, which helps to cover expenses. I also work for a football photography agency, which covers league games.”

So what does Ian enjoy the most about his volunteering work?

“The highlight is always shooting the London Marathon,” he says. “It’s very emotional and challenging. It takes a lot of concentration to get good shots of the Sarcoma UK runners in the crowds, but I enjoy it.

“I’ve done a couple of weddings abroad,” he adds, “which were highlights too. I did a wedding at Ravello in Italy and got some stunning photos. I also attended a wedding in Iceland. These assignments cover all my costs, and I’ve seen some lovely places. In Iceland I got a free helicopter ride!”

Ian’s still working with Sarcoma UK.

“My latest project for them was taking shots of patients in clinic with their doctors,” he explains. “I said I didn’t want to be there if they were given bad news. It was difficult. It felt intrusive. I asked them to tell the patients that I too had been a patient, so I knew what

they were going through. It’s a fine balance between being professional and getting personally involved. But it was a very worthwhile shoot. They’ve used those photos a lot.”

Ian has thoroughly enjoyed sharing his time and skills with others while developing his own passion for photography into a growing career. It gives him a great sense of achievement after a difficult time, and he’s particularly passionate about supporting Sarcoma UK and helping those still fighting the disease. ♦

**Read more:**

Visit Ian’s website at [www.ianrandall-photography.co.uk](http://www.ianrandall-photography.co.uk) or follow him on Instagram.

Learn more about Sarcoma UK and the important work they are doing at [www.sarcoma.org.uk](http://www.sarcoma.org.uk).

