

The Story of Funny Grandad



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Dear Parents and Carers

“The dog behaved very well at the Doctor’s surgery”

These were the words my father chose to introduce the subject of having throat cancer. He was very rarely ill and knew that referring to the Doctor’s surgery would mean I would know something important was going to be said.

Telling a loved one about a cancer diagnosis is hard and everyone will have their own way of approaching the subject. Talking with young people can be even harder. Our instinct is to protect them from difficult, painful subjects but it is important that they are involved in what is happening within their family. There are a number of excellent books about talking to young people about cancer. We have listed them later in the book. We have written it to help you talk about throat cancer specifically to your family. Some of the things we suggest might not work for you but we hope others will.

This book is, in some ways, a follow on from my father’s original book Laryngectomy is not a Tragedy which we know has helped so many people. We share Sydney’s sense of humour and this will certainly feature in this book. If you find it helpful, please let us know. If you have any suggestions for additions to the book, please get in touch. The one thing we know for certain is that young people will always have something to say that none of us expects so do tell us if there are new questions we should be including.

We would like to thank Mona Rampersad for her kind donation towards the making of this book.

Ros Oswald

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This book has been produced by
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Jessie loved spending time with Funny Grandad and his dog Pickle. She called him Funny Grandad because he told such funny jokes and helped her make up silly songs. He loved playing fetch the ball with Jessie and Pickle. One day Funny Grandad said: "Pickle behaved really well at the doctor's surgery today."

Jessie felt afraid, Funny Grandad never went to the doctors. She was worried he might be very poorly.

When she went home her Mum and Dad explained that Funny Grandad had a lump growing inside his throat that shouldn't be there. They said it was called cancer and Funny Grandad was going to have an operation to take it away.



Funny Grandad was hoping Jessie could look after Pickle whilst he was in Hospital. Jessie felt very excited to have Pickle to look after but worried about Funny Grandad. Her Mum and Dad said that although Funny Grandad would feel poorly at first, the doctor had said he would get better and be able to tell jokes and play with Jessie and Pickle again. Jessie wondered if anything she had said or done could have made Grandad poorly. Her Mum said it definitely was not Jessie's fault or anyone else's.



The day of Funny Grandad's operation came, and Jessie and her Mum and Dad took Funny Grandad to hospital and collected Pickle from Funny Grandad's house.

Jessie had made a list of all the things Pickle would need so that nothing would be forgotten.



1. Bed
2. Food
3. Toys
4. Bowls
5. Lead
6. Poo Bags

Jessie's Mum rang the Hospital and they said the operation had gone well. Jessie felt worried about how Funny Grandad was feeling.

She took Pickle into the garden to play with her favourite ball. It wasn't the same without Funny Grandad.



The next day Jessie went to see Funny Grandad in Hospital with her Mum and Dad. Pickle had to stay at home. Funny Grandad was in bed and had a tube coming out of his nose. He could not talk but could write down what he wanted to say. He asked how Pickle was getting on. Jessie said she had eaten her food and had been for a walk and played with a ball in the garden. Funny Grandad smiled. Jessie wanted to hold Funny Grandad's hand.



"Is it ok to touch Funny Grandad or could I catch the cancer?"

Her Dad said: "No, you can't catch cancer. It is a good idea to hold Funny Grandad's hand and he looks like he needs a nice cuddle."

When Jessie got home she went to sit next to Pickle on the sofa. She was feeling confused. Her Mum had said Grandad was going to get better but she had so many questions.

Pickle put her head on Jessie's knee. She seemed to know how Jessie was feeling. Jessie's Dad noticed and sat next to her.

"How are you feeling Jessie?"

"I am worried about Grandad. There are so many things I don't understand."

"Why not ask me the questions. If I don't know the answers, I will help you find them."

Jessie started to feel better.

“Why is there a hole in his throat, will it heal, will he be able to talk again, will his voice sound different, will he still be able to take Pickle for walks?.....”

“Steady on – I see what you mean. You really do have a lot of questions!”

“That isn’t all of them.”

“I see. In that case let’s look at a book together. That sounds like a good start.”

Jessie and her Dad started looking through the book. Jessie quickly spotted a photo in the book of a dog just like Pickle. The dog was going for a walk with a man who had the same operation as Funny Grandad.

“It looks as if taking Pickle for walks will be possible – wasn’t that one of your questions?”

They looked at the photos and cartoons in the book. They found lots of answers to Jessie’s questions.

Funny Grandad needed a tube in his nose because he couldn’t eat any food until his throat was better. The nurses put food in the tube so Funny Grandad would not be hungry. He would be able to eat normally once his throat was better.

The hole in Funny Grandad’s neck was there so he could breath. The doctors had needed to make the hole when they took the cancer out. Grandad would be able to talk again but his voice would always sound different from now on.

Jessie started feeling happier but the most important question was still unanswered.

“When will Funny Grandad be able to come back home?”

Her Mum said that the doctors would be the best people to answer this question.

Jessie knew that Pickle was missing Funny Grandad. She kept looking all round the house and whining. Jessie made sure they had lots of games with her ball which Pickle really enjoyed.



A week after the operation, the doctor said that Funny Grandad was doing really well and could go home the very next day.

He was coming to stay with Jessie and her Mum and Dad first so they could help him get better.

Jessie felt very excited and she knew that Pickle would be as well.

Funny Grandad could eat again and did not have a tube in his nose.

He wrote down what he wanted to say and always asked Jessie how Pickle was getting on.

She told him Pickle was enjoying the ball games but missing Funny Grandad.

The big day arrived and Funny Grandad came home from the Hospital. Jessie's Mum told her to make sure Pickle didn't jump up when Funny Grandad came through the door.

Pickle was so excited she made lots of noise and Jessie held her tight until Funny Grandad sat down in a comfy chair.

Jessie put Pickle on Funny Grandad's knee and Funny Grandad grinned and stroked her.

Jessie knew Funny Grandad would need a lot of rest but she felt so happy now that he was home.





Every day Jessie helped her Mum and Dad to take care of Funny Grandad.

Some days he was very tired. At first he could only eat soup but Jessie's Dad made wonderful vegetable soup which Funny Grandad enjoyed.

Slowly Funny Grandad started to feel better.

He loved to have Pickle on his knee.

He could see Jessie and Pickle playing ball outside through the kitchen window.

After a little while Funny Grandad was well enough to sit outside and Pickle brought the ball to Funny Grandad so he could throw it.

Jessie was really looking forward to the day they could go for a walk together again.

When Funny Grandad had his operation the doctors put something into the hole they had made in his neck.

Jessie's Mum said it was called a valve and would help Funny Grandad to talk again.

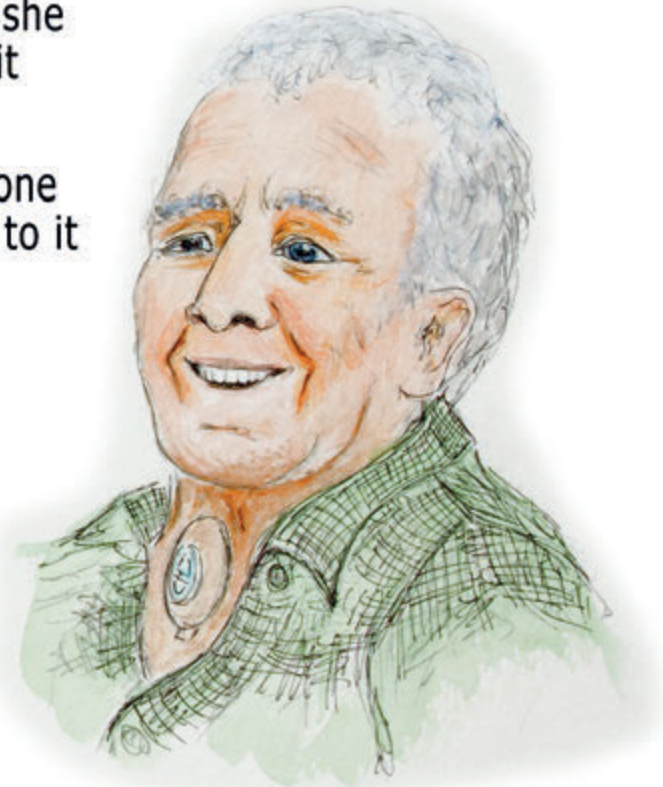
Funny Grandad had to practice talking in a new way. His voice sounded different and always would.

Jessie was a little unsure when she first heard it. Pickle thought it sounded funny too.

She kept putting her head on one side to listen, but she got used to it after a few days.

The dog treats helped!

When Grandad said his first silly joke Jessie knew straight away it was her Funny Grandad speaking, just with a different voice!



After a few weeks, it was time for Funny Grandad's first walk beyond the garden. Jessie's Mum had a letter to post and asked Jessie if she, Pickle and Funny Grandad could take it to the post-box at the bottom of the road.

Jessie made sure Funny Grandad had his scarf to keep his neck warm. She put Pickle's lead on and off they went. It felt so good to be able to go out together again.



Jessie knew things were different but Funny Grandad was still Funny Grandad and she was sure they would be able to have lots of walks together. Pickle was very pleased as well!

Slowly Funny Grandad's voice got stronger and the walks were longer. There were still days when Funny Grandad was very tired, or his voice was weaker.

Jessie realised that it was good to be patient and to enjoy the fun they could have together. Funny Grandad could still tell jokes, play with Pickle and Jessie and go for walks with them.

He was still her Funny Grandad.



New Edition

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A selection of books on cancer for children:

Mummy's Lump, Gillian Forrest

Grandma Kathy Has Cancer, Colleen Buckley

Cancer Hates Kisses, Jessica Sliwerski

Cancer Party, Sara Olsher

What Happens When Someone I Love Has Cancer? Sara Olsher

When Jessie's Grandad gets throat cancer it is difficult for her to understand what is happening. The story of Funny Grandad is a reassuring story, told in a familiar way for young people and is suitable for any family who needs to talk about a difficult subject like throat cancer. It covers diagnosis, going into hospital, having a laryngectomy and life afterwards.



Sydney Norgate, author of Laryngectomy is not a tragedy, to whom this book is dedicated.

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