

## Patients Story

**Katie Mckay**

In June 2011 I qualified as a reflexologist, I was the happiest I had been in a long time, and very proud of my achievements. At the start of the course I hadn't thought about it as a business but as time went by and I began to get confidence in myself I thought perhaps I could start up professionally it would fit in with my life and I would also be helping others.

Only a matter of weeks went past when at the time I was having some rooms in my home painted. I began to find difficulty with choosing colours, I had a strangeness in my left eye and a light, I constantly rubbed it, making it blurry to see out of. With no change in my eye and not being someone to just leave things I booked an appointment with my optician. Not seeing anything out of the ordinary I was given eye wipes to try and asked to come back in a week if there was no change. The week passed with no change so back I went when again I was tested this time with a stick that had a ball on the end, I couldn't see the ball and for a scary moment I thought I was going blind at that point I cried with fright. My optician then asked me to go to eye casualty at the Royal Hospital with a very concerned look on her face. I arrived and after a 5 hour wait I was seen by an ophthalmologist who was incredibly rude to me saying

“ I don't know why your here “ “this is not an emergency “ you have central serious retinopathy all you got was an answer go home and rest if it's not better in 6 month we will treat it, and home I went to rest.

It was July so I had until February before I would be referred back for treatment if needed. My optician was not convinced with the ophthalmologist's diagnoses and when I later got an appointment in my local eye clinic just out of the blue neither was the ophthalmologist who saw me that day. By now it was October, with no change sight wise and more light in my eye he looked at me with concern and said I think someone's gotten it wrong, can you please come to the Royal Hospital tomorrow where I can test you properly. I then went from this appointment to a next appointment at the Mater Eye Clinic when on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2011 at a few minutes to 12 O'clock and after many tests I was called back into the consulting room and asked to bring my husband. I shiver even as I write this because my life changed at that very moment even before the word tumour was mentioned. Then began my journey and many journeys to Liverpool, I live in the countryside roughly 25 miles from Belfast in N.Ireland, Liverpool was the nearest eye hospital for treatment. I arrived on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October and was diagnosed with Ocular Melanoma. One week later I flew back to Liverpool on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November for a biopsy, I then got my result on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November from my own GP, cancer cells had been found, I was then dismissed from Liverpool and red flagged to have tests carried out all over because they had thought that maybe it was a seed that had travelled from a cancer somewhere else, the next few week were taken up by tests worry and normal life. With clear results apart from a few hotspots I was again sent back to Liverpool when on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of December it was decided the Cancer was in my eye and treatment began.

I have been on this journey now for 5 years. I as yet have not started up my business in reflexology although my son had business cards made up for me as a birthday present in February 2012 this same son was heading off to study in Cork and encouraged me to go do the course, I am considering the possibility now though and looking at February 2017 as a good place to start as I'm now 5 years on, it was too difficult to give fully of myself in such a

quiet space because as it was back then and still is, I have a little shining light in my eye and most days it still frightens me.



**Katie's story featured in a local woman's magazine 2014**

I did find focus in something else, one year to the date when I sat in the chair to be told I had a tumour in my left eye I was booked into a recording studio where I started to record a 13 track album on 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 taking a year to record, I then stood out on stage on 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2013 to sing to an audience for my first time, I needed to turn the negativity of these two dates into a positive for me. During a visit to Liverpool I got chatting to the wife of a man who had been diagnosed she asked how I coped, I said I write it down in a journal to get it out of my head as I can't share my thoughts and fears, there's no group I can go and talk to, Oh she said you should make it into a book, I don't know how to help him. So I went about putting my words together and typing them up sending it to a proof-reader who then helped with the publishing and so began my journey into book writing. My book ( Look! See Through Katie's Eyes ) was published through Amazon and also available on E book in October 2015 with the proceeds from sales going to St Paul Eye Clinic into research by way of thanks for the excellent care I received during my many visits there. It is very much my story, so when I discovered OcuMel Support in August this year I sent my book off to them. I had an immediate response back and was asked to join their facebook page they

also put my link up and I had lots of interest in my book and also some lovely feedback for which I am so grateful. I was then invited over to Reading to the OcuMel 2016 UK Conference in September with my books and also to be a speaker eek, Not having spoken in public before I was very, very nervous. I finished and to my shock Kathryn asked if anyone had any questions for me, A gentleman at the back put up his hand with my book, now his book in it and said can you sign my book, with relief at the question and laughter throughout the room my first stint at public speaking was over. I then made my way over to the gentleman, he had written a name in the book and asked if I would sign it for his daughter, he then ask If I would hug his wife I turned to her and as we hugged she cried, she said thank you so much for your book it reminds us so much of our daughter she died of Ocular Melanoma. I don't know how I didn't cry, I was so touched by that moment and this couple, I will never forget them or what it brought to my heart that day, this alone made my book worthwhile.

On Wednesday 19th October 2011, Katie McKay was told she had a tumour in her left eye. The news completely changed her life.

*Look! See Through Katie's Eyes* is a personal account of her journey from her local optician's to the specialist eye clinic at The Royal Liverpool Hospital. The book charts her punishing schedule of hospital appointments and treatments that continue to this day, and records the emotional toll her illness has had on her and her family.

But her illness has also brought its blessings. Cancer has energised and inspired her to pursue her lifelong dream. Katie had always wanted to be a singer, but was terrified of singing in public. Since her diagnosis, she has recorded several albums, and she now performs live in public and on her local radio station. 'Cancer scared the life out of me,' she writes, 'but it also scared the life into me.'

*Look! See Through Katie's Eyes* is the remarkable account of one woman's strength and determination to focus on what she has, not on what she might lose.



**Katie McKay** lives in Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland, with her husband Danny. They have four children. Katie has recorded three albums and sings regularly on Downtown Radio. You can find out more about Katie on her website: [www.katiemckay.co.uk](http://www.katiemckay.co.uk).

LOOK! SEE THROUGH KATIE'S EYES

# LOOK! SEE THROUGH KATIE'S EYES

Katie McKay

*Katie McKay*

**Katie's book, check it out on Amazon! For some insight into a journey with Ocular Melanoma..**

As I finish off my piece of writing I would like to share with you my speech from the conference. I feel it is a good reflexion in short of me and my journey living as I do with this rare and little known about orphan Cancer. The tumour in my eye has now been Cancer free since my last appointment in Liverpool on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December 2015... I have 6 monthly appointments at oncology and with my Ophthalmologists and for the foreseeable future since my tumour became active for the second time in 2013. Apart from my one bad

experience as mentioned at the start I have been treated so,so well, I am very grateful for such wonderful care.

Firstly I would like to thank OcuMel UK for inviting me..

I was asked last week if I would consider being a speaker at this year's conference, never having spoken in public before, I am a little nervous.

I woke the next morning to a post on my daughter's yoga page – The pose for today! Seated boat poses... Nav meaning boat refers to the word pranava, known as the cosmic vibration, OM... Spelt OM.

In the upanishands, OM is described as a boat that carries us safely across life's stormy seas.

My daughter is in Canada training to be a yoga teacher, she also describes her first yoga class sitting in a candle lit room, as OM echoed throughout, it was a small group of people, all struggling and desperately fighting to make it to the shore still breathing, much like sitting in this room today, in my case anyhow because I don't want to rush my speech and make it seem too short.. Plus there are no candles, perhaps a dimmer room would make me less nervous!

Thankfully because I have written this little book it's ok for me to make reference to my story and hopefully put it across better with some quotes from the book in my talk.

Laurens post reminded me of my first visit to Liverpool eye clinic in 2011, where a note on the notice board said that 1 in 3 people with an appointment would be diagnosed with an eye tumour!

I looked around; everyone was in the same boat as me. Here we were people from all over the country with our little suitcases in this one room and we all had something in common – FEAR – I felt horrible, don't let it be me, I thought and instantly felt guilty that it had to be any of us.

In the past month I joined a group of people for whom OM has a different meaning Ocular Melanoma, at first when I saw the initials OM on a post I wasn't sure what it meant but then it clicked..

In the past 5 years since being diagnosed, I have felt very much like I am in a boat alone sailing across life's stormy seas.

I was first treated in 2011 with PDT which is Photo Dynamic Therapy...

In 2014 after activity had returned for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, I was told the PDT treatment was not working for me and I would have to have surgery and radiation (Proton Beam Therapy)

It was December 2014, and after my appointment it was too late to make it to the airport for our flight home, so we were booked into a hotel for the night.

The tables were all set for Christmas, we ordered two Christmas dinners and pulled our crackers, Danny got playing cards, ME? I got an eye patch, Danny and I both looked at each other and laughed for the first time in weeks, then he looked up to the heavens and said "what are you trying to do to us!"

Excuse me for making reference to Christmas so early in September.

I am forever amazed by the angst of life – What drives us, how we keep going. The incredible recovery of the body and of the mind-of my precious eye. Although I have fought with this constantly recurring disease, the story has come full circle for me now. How do the pieces of our lives stay together? How many times do I get to fall apart? It has brought me back to a place of fear too many times and yet in the depths of it all I still feel blessed – blessed that it's now almost 20 months on since my surgery in Jan 2015 and I still have vision in both eyes!

We all face different outcomes as we walk through the doors in our hospital eye clinics for the first time. It's where patient's common thoughts and fears meet, although very often we don't speak to one another.

I am glad to have found fellow travellers with whom I can relate my concerns with. I find it a very lonely journey, and having my marker on our map makes me look quite isolated but I am sure there are others who just haven't found the OcuMel UK support group.

My reason for writing about my experiences, was so that I could get them out of my head, stop them from going round and round, it was very therapeutic for me, it also gave me a sense of pride to have accomplished and come so far..

In the beginning I cried so much I thought I would never stop but it is surprising how everyday life kicks in and you find yourself just getting on with life, perhaps in a different way. I did find readjusting difficult at the start and in many ways I am constantly readjusting, all the resting trying all the time to take such good care of my eye, or should I say eyes.

Sight is part of our energy, and the retina is the only place in the body where the arteries and veins can be seen, everywhere else is covered with skin making our eyes our greatest asset and worthy of our constant care and protection.

In my eye a seed was planted, that seed made me grow, in my loneliness I grew to sing, I needed something to focus on, my love for music pulled me in and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2012 one year to the day of my initial diagnosis I was in a recording studio and one year later standing out in front of an audience singing for the first time, I don't know what I was thinking, I get so nervous, but I love it so much. I have also written music, I've written a book I am facing my fears and living my life.

The best part of my life was in 2012 during the time I was clear for a year. I found the best part of me through new friends, I learned to trust in myself to stand alone and make my way no matter what tried to hold me back. It is sometimes in your loneliness you discover a better version of yourself.

Holding on to that is sometimes or some days a struggle, but each day brings new hope.

Cancer scared the life out of me, but surprisingly it also scared the life into me.  
Cancer can sometimes give you back your life...

Practice mindfulness and a little OM in your day ... I wish you all well.  
Thanks for listening to a little of my story.



**My daughter and I in Liverpool handing over a cheque for £1455.00 to Dr Angi, and Mrs Laura Edmonds back in 2012 after my daughter organised her blue eyes event for our 25<sup>th</sup> Wedding anniversary with money instead of presents making up the total money donated.**

When I was diagnosed back in 2011 there was no help, not even on the World Wide Web. The support of OcuMel UK is a very valuable resource to all of us, especially anyone just diagnosed, finding themselves fighting for hope in the face of such fear, but also for the wealth of knowledge of the OcuMelters and the support of one another.

**You can check Katie out and purchase music on [www.katiemckay.co.uk](http://www.katiemckay.co.uk)  
Where you can also see her on You Tube!**