



Me

After my life was saved, I found a way to pay tribute to my heroes.

By Chris Goddard, 72



Thank you from my ART!

Sitting patiently in the hospital waiting room, I flicked through a magazine until my name was called. I was there for a mammogram.

I'd been having them routinely every three years, ever since I'd turned 50, and as I made my way out afterwards, I said to the mammographer, 'See you in another three years!'

However, a week later, I received a letter. I needed to go back to the hospital for further tests.

I'm sure it's nothing, I thought.

But after further investigation, there was shocking news.

'I'm afraid you have early-stage breast cancer,' I was told.

I was devastated.

I had no signs or symptoms, and regularly checked my breasts.

The next few weeks moved very quickly.

I had scans and biopsies, and a lumpectomy to remove the cancer was arranged for the following month.

Unfortunately, I tested positive for Covid so my

operation was pushed back.

Afterwards, Covid lockdown restrictions meant I couldn't have visitors or see anyone.

My daughter-in-law dropped some meals off for me, however, and we were allowed to chat on the driveway keeping a safe distance.

Those little interactions really helped lift my spirits but I knew I needed something else to give me a boost. That's when it hit me.

As a younger woman I'd really enjoyed painting and had even taken a class.

'I might tackle a portrait,' I said to my husband Howard.

As I thought more about who I wanted to paint first, I had a brainwave.

'I'm going to paint people in the NHS,' I said. 'As a thank you for their service.' 'That's a brilliant idea!' Howard said.

I had a friend who was a paramedic and I asked if I could have a photo of him.

Over the following few days, I used it to create

a portrait of him.

'Not bad for a first go!' I said as I admired my work.

I found myself buzzing to paint another and I knew who I wanted as my muse.

'Dr Kumar,' I said to my breast surgeon, 'can I take your photo as I would love to paint you?'

He had done so much for me, and it was the least I could do.

'Of course you can,' he said.

I was scheduled to go in for surgery again as a test showed that they hadn't taken sufficient margins around the cancer, so I planned to paint him in time for my second operation.

As I picked up my brushes and set to work, I felt my worries melt away.

Painting quickly became my form of therapy and helped distract me from my breast cancer and lockdown.

When I presented Dr Kumar with his portrait, he was over the moon.

'This is amazing,' he said. 'You're incredibly talented.'

Over the next months, I

asked lots of staff around the hospital in West Suffolk if they would let me paint them and ended up doing portraits of them all.

Then I moved on to other key workers including posties, pharmacy staff, teachers, and firemen.

In total I painted 101 people and it was a much-needed morale boost during a very difficult time.

News spread, and a friend suggested I showcase my portraits in a gallery so more people could appreciate them.

The show was so popular I decided to publish the portraits in a book. That way, those who helped me through my cancer, and helped others through lockdown, can be immortalised forever.

I'm delighted to say, I'm now cancer-free and enjoying life. I'm so thankful to everyone who helped me.

● To see more of Chris's art, search Chris Goddard Art on Facebook. Her book *Hope* is available on Amazon. All proceeds from *Hope* go to St Nicholas Hospice.

'That's a brilliant idea!'