

I died'. That's what we say as comedians when we don't do well on stage. A lot of the language around our performance has a life/death metaphor.

For example, when we do really well we say 'I killed' or a colleague might say 'you slayed them'. It's extreme language, and I guess as a life-calling comedy is an extreme sport. To survive in the industry you have to develop a certain resilience. An ability to die and live again. Well at least metaphorically.

When it actually happens it's not a joke.

My friend and colleague Jonathan Atherton has just been diagnosed with advanced cancer that the specialists have defined as 'inoperable' or 'incurable'.

That's not a heckle you ever want to hear.

I can't imagine what its like to hear those words.

To hear the medical profession say they can't help you.

You don't live as a comic for more than 30 years though without defying the odds, without pushing through adversity and making it when other people thought you wouldn't. You can't survive without fostering a deep resilience, without developing and maintaining too your human frailty; that crazy vulnerable heart that you need to keep going.

I remember when I first saw Jonathan perform. It was in his first few gigs – here in Byron at the Rails. His energy was electric. His brain ticked faster than I could understand what he was saying. He was riding a wave of energy – the zeitgeist, the commentary, the culture – it was crashing all around him but he was staying on. It was wonderful. I was so jealous. I wished I could do that.

Jonathan is not a conformist. He's always done things his way.

From starting the first comedy club in Kuala Lumpur, actually the first ever dedicated comedy club in Malaysia, in fact, the first ever club in all of SE Asia; including Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Singapore. He mentored over 100 comedians from India to China; where they call him the Laugh Guru. Two of his protégés have gone on to make their own Netflix series!

And then there are the humble, down-to-earth comedy projects – taking comedy to ‘the people’ with some of the best gigs I’ve ever been to held here, at the Corndale Hall. Unpretentious, in your face, sometimes shocking or unexpected. Jonathan always delivers.

He once turned up and performed for me with broken ribs after falling down stairs while on a ship in a rolling sea. He could barely speak, he was ashen faced, but when his name was called he stepped into the spotlight and he performed. You would never have known he was in pain. Being on stage transformed him. It’s definitely one of his happy places. That and being with his kids and his fabulous wife, Beatrice. In a way, being with family is a spotlight on a very different stage; one where we don’t often have a clue what to perform.

So, is Jonathan’s cancer inoperable? Incurable? To western medicine, yes. But maybe, like his life, the answers lie elsewhere. They lie in the countries that have given him so much inspiration and learning. Perhaps they also hold his healing. Jonathan has discovered an Ayurvedic clinic in India that has had success treating cancers like his, but to go he needs some \$. It would be amazing for him to go there, because you can be assured that this experience, navigating one of life’s deepest, hardest ravines, will be narrated by his comedic self.

I have him booked for a gig this week. In his usual offhand style he said ‘I should still be alive and kicking for Kingy’. I love that. When it comes to spirit I think he is incurable. But cancer? Not if he can help it. And if anyone can take this trip – he can.

Please help a friend, a father, a husband, a well-loved comic,
on the journey of his life.

For his life.

Because I want to see him walk off that stage and say 'You
killed it Jon'.

**Please donate whatever you can: [https://gofund.me/
89b9c43e](https://gofund.me/89b9c43e)**

(PS he's performing at Kingscliff Bowlo on 26 Jan.)