

DI MORRISSEY WHAT I LEARNED FROM MY CANCER SCARE!

How the bestselling author found out,
and her new mission to spread awareness

Di was more
than thankful
she found out
in time to have
the melanoma
removed.

Treating herself to a facial saved bestselling author Di Morrissey's life, when a small mark on her right cheekbone turned out to be a deadly melanoma.

Glamorous Di had disguised the small "stain" with makeup for years before she noticed a pinhead-sized speck last year.

The popular novelist, newspaper publisher, environmental activist and former *Good Morning Australia* presenter might never have noticed the sinister change, but for a keen-eyed beauty therapist.

"She asked if I had ever had the mark checked," explains powerhouse Di, founder of the crusading *Manning Community News*. "I told her, 'Oh yes, it's been there for years. I had it lasered off 10 years ago but it's slowly come back. I was told it's fine.'"

SECOND THOUGHTS

The beautician frowned, but let the matter rest.

The next morning, however, at home in rural mid-north NSW, Di took more notice while washing her face and



saw a small black pore. Two weeks later, the black pinhead speck was still there.

Slightly concerned, the evergreen personality visited her GP and was referred to a dermatologist, who did a biopsy. Shockingly, that little black spot turned out to be a dangerous lentigo maligna-type melanoma.

SURGERY

Di's snap decision to get a facial in Port Macquarie, while waiting for a COVID-delayed dental check-up, had almost certainly saved her life.

"I was lucky that I caught that pinhead early," she says.

Only weeks later, the dynamic 72-year-old underwent extensive surgery in Sydney – first to scan and cut out the skin cancer, then to close up the resulting hole. It was "scary news" to discover that in a worst case scenario, scarring from the facial reconstruction could damage her sight.

But the much-awarded author came through virtually unscathed, thanks to the expertise of Dr Niamh

O'Sullivan, who removed the melanoma with a staged serial excision, known as "slow Mohs" – and skilled plastic surgeon Dr Leo Kim.

When the bandages were removed, even upbeat Di thought she looked like "a stitched together scarecrow, or something from a horror movie". Yet just three weeks later, nobody noticed a blemish when the grandmother-of-four

appeared via Zoom at a local writers' festival.

Soon afterwards, her family came for Christmas at the peaceful river view home Di shares with her partner, cinematographer Boris Janjic in the Manning Valley, NSW.

"No one mentioned or seemed to notice my face," smiles the former US diplomat's wife, *Hawaii Five-O* actress and TV journalist. "When I asked, the kids said, 'Well, it's all fixed, isn't it?' Such is life!"

BESTSELLERS

With the medical emergency behind her, Di is now completing her latest page-turner novel, to be published by Pan Macmillan in October. It will be her 29th novel – plus five children's books – she has written since quitting her presenter role on TV's groundbreaking, original *Good Morning Australia* in 1989.

"It was time to take the plunge and do something I'd dreamed of since I was

a girl," recalls Di, who has sold around 4 million books in Australia, has an AM for services to "literature, conservation and the environment" and a place in the Australian Book Industry Awards Hall of Fame, being awarded the Lloyd O'Neill Award for her contribution to Australian publishing.

'Trust your instinct. If you see a spot... see your doctor'

Thanks to early detection, Di is speaking out in support of the government's National Skin Cancer Awareness Campaign – to be SunSmart – and to get suspicious-looking spots checked out by a doctor.

"That pinhead was probably 'born' when I was a teenager lying on Sydney's Mona Vale Beach covered in coconut oil and forever after thinking I was a good 'tanner' who never burned and never had an issue with my skin."

Today, she echoes her doctors' warnings.

"Trust your instinct. If you see a spot you don't like, see your doctor and get it checked out – it may just save your life."



Di with her partner Boris.



Fellow writer and friend Jackie Collins with Di in LA in 1984.