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# Life after death: A GP's cancer diagnosis and the haunting novel she wrote before she died

Dr Kath O'Connor kept writing her debut novel to the very end of ovarian cancer treatment

 [Carmel Sparke](#)

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Dr Kath O'Connor.

Last month a novel about the lives of two women haunted by the BRCA1 gene mutation was published.

Called *Inheritance* it has already received rave reviews for its eloquent fictional account of life, death and dying.

It was written by Dr Kath O'Connor. The tragedy is that the Victorian GP will never [read the glowing reviews](#) herself.

She died of ovarian cancer in late 2019 aged just 45, shortly before completing the final draft.

The year before, she had reached out to Inga Simpson, an author and writing mentor, to help support her in writing the story, a story closely related to her own family's experiences of cancer.

"I found it quite devastating, really, to read the manuscript [after she died]," Inga told ABC's Radio National last month.

"I could see just how good it is, and what a career she would have had as a novelist.

"The strength that must have taken to keep going, the determination to keep writing right up until the end... was very emotional for me, as I'm sure it absolutely is for her family."

Dr O'Connor's family, including her partner, Racheal Findlay, were instrumental in the book's eventual publication.

"She was sitting up in her hospital bed and gave us all jobs to follow up and fact check aspects of the book. She wanted it to be perfect," Racheal said recently.

The novel itself includes passages documenting the brutal cancer treatments women faced back in the 50s.

Inga said: "The thought of Kathy writing that and working on the sentences and massaging them, knowing — and she must have known by the end — that she was going to die of the same disease.

"It must have been very hard to write those sentences."

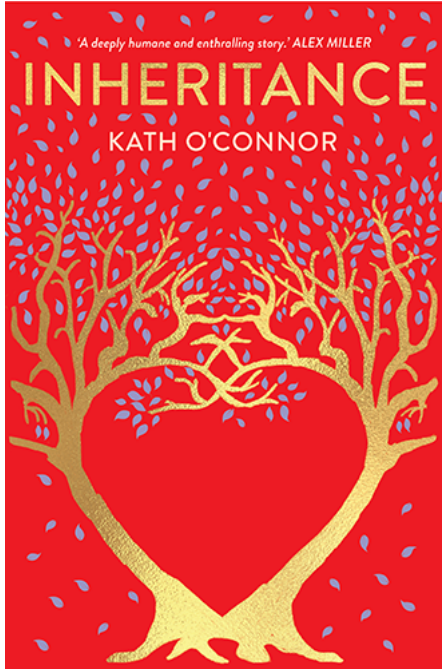
Since its publication, *Inheritance* has been described as a "piercing debut novel" by *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

Inga says the judgment is true.

"It's beautifully written. It's a beautiful story."

"If Kath was alive and there wasn't this kind of backstory to the book and the echoes of the plot, into real life, it still would be very well reviewed and very well received.

"It really is a little parable in living your life every day... being absolutely present every day."



All royalties from the sale of *Inheritance*, RRP \$32.99, will be donated to WomenCan: Funding Gynaecological Cancer Research.

**More information:**

- [ABC Radio National; 13 February 2023](#)
- [Midland Express; 2 February 2023](#)

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