

Dedicated student awarded degree with distinction after extraordinary journey

Dedicated student and dad-of-two James Homan has been awarded a degree with distinction after an extraordinary journey which saw him twice made redundant and his wife diagnosed with cancer.

He refused to give up on his Master of Business Administration dream despite having to juggle his academic work and family challenges with living in Edinburgh and having demanding jobs in Dubai and London.





James collected his MBA this week – one of hundreds of Edinburgh Napier students to graduate after completing their final year during a global pandemic. He is still searching for work and his wife is undergoing chemotherapy, but he spoke today of his pride in securing an impressive degree in difficult circumstances.

Sales and marketing executive James, 44, of Currie, Edinburgh, had no idea of the obstacles which lay in wait when he set out on his online MBA in January 2018. Even though he lived in Edinburgh, he opted for distance learning due to work and family commitments.

However, just one month later, James – who is married to Lindsey, 48, and has two daughters, Olivia, 14, and Ruby, 11 – had to rethink his plans after losing his job in the capital.

He found new employment within weeks in the shape of a contract role in Dubai. Leaving his family in Edinburgh, he jetted out to the Emirate, landing in Dubai at 7.30am and starting his new job two hours later.

It was an extremely demanding job – long hours, big budgets, more than 120 staff and on call seven days a week – and his MBA work and visits home had to be crammed into any spare time he could find.

James said: “The job also involved plenty of travel around the Middle East and over to Africa. I remember sitting in Lagos airport completing one of my module assessments.”

The contract ended in August last year and he was able to return to Edinburgh to family life and some study at Edinburgh Napier’s Craiglockhart campus, but by December he was on his travels again after being offered a job based in central London.

James settled into a life of London during the week and Edinburgh at weekends, the carriages of the Edinburgh-King’s Cross service becoming his new study area. Then came Covid-19 and lockdown, followed three months later by James being placed on furlough.

The anxiety didn’t end there though. James said: “In June this year, my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer, which knocked us all sideways. It was time to take stock and focus on what was important in life, which perhaps meant putting the final part of my MBA – the research project – on hold.

“After liaising with my wife, my tutor and even my kids, and after very careful deliberation, we decided I should continue the project, push through and hit the August deadline. As long as I could provide my wife and family with the necessary emotional support and be able to focus there was no reason to put the project on hold.”

James did push on and hit his deadline – but not without the added stressful complication of again being made redundant.

He said: “The decision had been made though, and with continued academic support from my tutor and emotional

reinforcement from my wife, despite her condition and regular visits to the hospital to begin chemotherapy, I completed the project in August.”

James concluded: “My 32-month MBA journey has had its twists and turns, but despite being placed on furlough, made redundant twice, moving abroad and moving back and my wife being diagnosed with cancer and starting her treatment, I managed to obtain a distinction as my final mark.

“I guess undertaking a tough academic programme such as an MBA and expecting a smooth passage throughout would be naïve. Maybe the elements of adversity that popped up throughout the course actually helped me focus more. Whatever the case, I feel proud to have achieved my final mark which I could not have done without my family’s love, tolerance and support throughout.”

His wife Lindsey added: “He always made me smile because mid-way through each module he would complain that it was the hardest unit he had done yet – no matter what the subject was – yet every time he would pull it out of the bag and he managed to achieve an overall distinction. Through sheer determination and hard work he did it, and we’re so proud of him.”

Anna MacVicar, James’s MBA dissertation supervisor at the University, said: “James was always a highly motivated, focussed dissertation student. I would have completely understood if he had wanted to pause his efforts and told him so, but I also reassured him that I was sure he could pass. I was absolutely delighted when his work achieved distinction level.”