Scott Brooks had a big story to tell, so he decided to publish a book about it. The process would change his life and quite possibly the lives of many others. The story? His niece Larisa had been diagnosed with a rare, terminal cancer in 1997. She was just 19 years old.

This may not sound like such an unusual story, but Larisa was not your usual 19-year-old. The genesis of Continuation began when Larisa selected a Chinese symbol for a group of family and friends to have tattooed on their skin to demonstrate love and support during her challenge with cancer. Between July 1997 and the book’s publication, more than 55 individuals had themselves tattooed. Before the tattoo had become a phenomenon, Scott hired Oregon commercial photographer Kent Peterson to capture Larisa’s form and beauty after she shaved her head prior to undergoing chemotherapy.

Soon after that photograph (ultimately used on book’s cover) was taken of her, Scott approached Larisa with the idea of compiling and publishing an anthology, stating people’s ideas about death and dying and their reasons for getting the tattoo. Larisa enthusiastically agreed, and gave her
permission with one condition: that all of the profits would go towards charities to help promote
and change fearful attitudes towards death and dying and the human condition. "That was typical
of Larisa's remarkable level of grace and courage during her embrace of death and life," says
Brooks.

*Continuation: Honoring and Celebrating the Human Condition* is a provocative, stirring collection
of more than thirty duotone photographs and accompanying essays that express intimate
thoughts about living and dying. *Continuation* represents an original approach to the theme of
death and dying that speaks to each reader's concept of spirituality.

*Continuation* is raw, vulnerable and real--exposing feelings of loss, sadness and grief on the one
hand, and an appreciation for the power of living on the other. Its simplistic nature presents
personal perspectives without prescribing answers. The title refers to a Chinese Tao character
from *365 Tao Daily Meditations* (HarperSanFrancisco 1992) by Deng Ming-Dao, which Larisa and
the fifty-five others had tattooed on their bodies as an expression of the continuum of life and
death.

Scott's sister, Glenda Brooks, a registered nurse at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Eugene, OR,
used the money she had saved for Larisa's university education to help pay for expenses
associated with the development, production, exhibition and promotion of the book. *Continuation*
has won three awards, including the award for one of the *Ten Outstanding Books of the Year -
"Most Life-Changing"* in the Independent Publisher Book Awards sponsored by this magazine. It
was the Grand Prize Winner in the 2001 Writer's Digest Self-Published National Book Awards,
and also received a Silver Award in the 2002 Summit Creative Awards International Design
Competition.

Scott's own dedication to the project was exemplified by a recent visit to New York, when unable
to get booked on the Today Show, he joined the spectators that gather outside the studio with a
sign that said, "Most Life-Changing Book of 2002" and "www.continuationbook.com." He ended
up meeting Katie Couric and gave her a book (he also signed with a literary agent while in the
city). "It pays to wake up at 5am and stand for 4.5 hours in the cold. Our website usually receives
75 hits a day - that day we received close to 4,000 hits!"

As a public health educator and writer, Scott is familiar with unique projects. He served on a
national advisory committee for the Health Resources and Services Administration has been
personally involved with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. "I've recognized how many people are
discovering ways to ritualize and honor those who are challenged with some form of disease or
illness," he says. "In general, our society views death as only a negative experience. I hope this
book inspires others to accept it as part of a powerful and courageous process."

Brooks also served as a United States representative in HRH Prince Charles's expedition
program, Operation Raleigh, from 1984-88, during which he lived with an aboriginal tribe in the
outback of Australia and with the Ogallala Sioux in South Dakota. "These experiences broadened
my perspective about how differently cultures embrace death and dying. In the U.S. we usually
shield our emotions and rush back to our normal living patterns after someone has died. The
tattoos, though, have depth and permanence, and I felt compelled to capture this uncommon
ritualistic phenomenon."
During Larisa's challenge with cancer, Scott was inspired by the love and intimacy being experienced by and around the family. His intention was to capture the most meaningful messages of the story to provoke an awakening and emotional healing in others. Specifically, Scott intended to:

- Illuminate the human spirit in the midst of experiences with death and dying
- Enlighten society that people can create meaningful rituals to honor the death and dying process
- Inspire people to have meaningful conversations about death, dying, illness and the human condition

Visiting bookstores and public libraries soon after Larisa's diagnosis, Glenda had discovered a limited number of books available that speak directly to young adults between 18-25. Therefore, *Continuation* is intended especially to speak to young adults who may be overlooked in the literary world, as well as those in and interested in the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning communities. It uses the popular tattoo culture and diversity to present a "real world" approach to its subject matter.

Finally, the book also is intended to inspire older adults--adults traditionally shielded from discussing death growing up. For example, *Continuation* has been sold and/or donated to hospices and hospitals in which it is shared with patients. Sacred Heart Hospital organized volunteers to make *Continuation* quilts to comfort those who are challenged with cancer. It has been a popular library purchase, and librarians have repeatedly commented that there are few books that speak directly to youth and young adults dealing with death and dying, and that this book was ideal for those groups particularly in light of the September 11th tragedies. A women's cancer survivor support group in Seattle used *Continuation* in their book reading discussions.

When asked why he chose to self-publish rather than seek a royalty publisher, Brooks answered: "Even though I had no prior publishing experience, no attempts were made to seek a royalty publisher. I did not want to face any type of rejection process -- grieving the loss of Larisa was difficult enough. Also, I wanted to create a body of work that I had complete creative control over. This was too special and sacred to my family and me and I did not want to risk commercializing it to the extent of losing the message."

What other challenges did he face?
"The most difficult challenge of this experience is the fiercely competitive nature of the publishing industry. Initially, I depended on organizations like Independent Publisher to provide guidance and help me navigate my way through the mazes of the publishing world. I took my time in researching and trying to gain a sense of the rhythm I would have to join into. I knew it was important to pace myself and not become overwhelmed with the decision-making process while remaining true to the creative process."

"I also learned to commit to simplicity - and that to achieve simplicity takes a great deal of effort. We did not want to create a lot of visual noise with the graphics - which is one of the reasons why our designer won a Creative Silver Summit Award for graphic design."
On winning the "IPPY" and other awards:
"While I have never felt motivated to compete with any other books, I was intrigued with the idea of entering the Independent Publisher Book Awards to get a sense of how others would respond to this type of genre. I was deeply honored to win, and I believe people are responding to the message that we can actively share ideas, thoughts and feelings about our mortality and bring about a social change--death and dying is a sacred part of life that can inspire us to recognize the beauty of our existence."

On accomplishing his goals?
"As soon as I committed to the idea of creating and publishing Continuation, I immediately felt accomplished. In 1994, I climbed to the summit of Mt. Rainier (14,411 feet) in Washington State. After spending a year training and focused on reaching the summit, my guide calmly said to me at the top of the mountain, 'Now remember, you are only halfway there.' When we received Continuation back from the printers, I remember telling myself 'Now remember, you are only half way there.' Although I am currently working on other book projects, my sense of goal setting has evolved into intention setting. I used to make many lists of goals, now I simply focus on using my life to create human connections and illuminate the human spirit."

On what the process taught him about life?
"Publishing this book has strengthened my leadership abilities and decision-making confidence. I learned that just living life and surviving in the world is not enough. It is important for me to strive to create a legacy of human hope and understanding - to engender positive social change in the world. Not only is this important for our generation, but I believe it is important to consider future generations when developing a book. This is how we learn, evolve and create a powerful human experience."

**************************

Continuation: Honoring and Celebrating the Human Condition
By R. Scott Brooks
Photographs by Kent Peterson and book design by Annie Vrijmoet
Self-published by Continuation Publishing Group
1,000 limited-edition books printed by IP/Koke, Eugene, Oregon
8"x8" hardcover, 84 pages, $40 retail, ISBN 0-9705587-0-8
Hand-stitched and bound, linen-wrapped, soy-based ink
www.continuationbook.com

100% of the profits from the sale of this book go towards the following five charities that Larisa selected before she passed away: the American Cancer Society; Children's Starlight Foundation; HIV Alliance of Eugene; Larisa Caldwell Scholarship Fund, University of Oregon; and the South Eugene High School Teenage Grief Healing Fund.