# Pastry chef Graham Hornigold falls victim to mother's cancer scam



Graham Hornigold, known for his appearance on the cooking competition MasterChef, experienced a profound emotional upheaval following a reunion with his estranged mother, Dionne Marie Hanna. After decades without contact, the 50-year-old pastry chef from London felt compelled to embrace his mother upon reconnecting. However, the emotional high of their reunion was soon overshadowed by devastating news: he was informed that Dionne was suffering from both a brain tumour and bone marrow cancer, and that she had mere months left to live.

In a bid to make amends for the lost time between them, Dionne revealed to Graham that he would inherit her substantial fortune, reportedly amassed through her ventures as an international entrepreneur and her claim of being the illegitimate daughter of the former Sultan of Brunei. A lifestyle characterised by lavish expenses, which included stays in upscale hotels, vintage champagne, and luxury automobiles, added to the affluence surrounding her character.

To facilitate this inheritance, Dionne required Graham to accompany her to Switzerland to establish a bank account in his name. During this process, Graham began transferring large sums of money to cover her legal fees under the premise that he would later be reimbursed. However, as time unfolded, it became apparent that Dionne was not terminally ill as she had claimed. This revelation was highlighted in the Netflix documentary "Con Mum".

The extent of Graham's financial loss was substantial, amounting to £300,000, which critically impacted his personal life, straining his relationship with his partner, Heather Kaniuk, and their newborn son. This week, Dionne, who is currently residing in Singapore, faced legal repercussions with charges of fraud being placed against her concerning three other alleged victims.

This unfolding scenario raises significant questions regarding Dionne’s motives, particularly the reasons behind her fabrication of a terminal illness. Graham isn't alone in witnessing similar deceit; a pattern of individuals faking cancer has come to light in recent years, leading to numerous emotional and financial repercussions for those affected.

Among these notable cases is that of Belle Gibson, famously known as a health guru who falsely claimed to have cured her own brain cancer through dietary choices. This deception gained traction with the launch of her wellness app and associated cookbook, which ultimately led to her downfall when the authenticity of her claims was challenged.

Another prominent case is that of Elisabeth Finch, a writer for the television series "Grey's Anatomy", who convincingly posed as a cancer patient for nearly a decade while contributing storylines about illnesses. Lastly, Amanda Riley, also referred to as “Scamanda”, misled numerous well-wishers into believing she had Hodgkin’s lymphoma, rallying support that reportedly amassed around £84,000 for her alleged treatments.

Experts suggest that some individuals displaying this behaviour may be suffering from what is termed 'factitious disorder', previously recognised as Munchausen syndrome. Dr Belynder Walia, a London-based psychotherapist, elaborated on this condition, stating that those affected often seek attention or a sense of control by fabricating health issues. This disorder can lead individuals to learn about their supposed ailments to maintain a façade, causing emotional distress.

Dr Walia explains that such patterns could stem from a variety of underlying issues, including childhood trauma or a deep-seated desire for validation. She posits that individuals might begin with minor falsehoods, which can escalate as they seek affirmation from those around them. Such behaviour can lead to further fabrications in an effort to sustain their deceptive narrative.

The psychological motivations behind these scams undoubtedly complicate the landscape. While some individuals may predominantly seek financial gain, others might be driven by emotional needs, making their behaviours less comprehensible to the public.

The ramifications of such deceit extend beyond financial loss, affecting the mental well-being of individuals like Graham Hornigold, who now finds himself facing significant personal and financial consequences. Additionally, the cases discussed have had serious implications for the individuals who were misled, some of whom were vulnerable patients seeking hope and guidance.

This rise in health-related deception, particularly in the age of social media, highlights the critical need for individuals to approach claims of illness with scepticism and to verify the authenticity of such narratives. As Dr Walia notes, the human desire for connection, especially in the face of fear or illness, can make people susceptible to false hopeful stories.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.marieclaire.com/culture/movies/where-is-graham-hornigold-now-con-mum/> - This article details Graham Hornigold's emotional and financial struggles following his reunion with his estranged mother, Dionne, who was later revealed to be a scammer. It highlights the financial impact on Graham and the relationship strain with his partner, Heather Kaniuk, as featured in the Netflix documentary 'Con Mum'.
2. <https://www.greatbritishchefs.com/chefs/graham-hornigold> - This website provides background information on Graham Hornigold, a renowned pastry chef who has worked at several high-profile establishments like Hakkasan and The Lanesborough Hotel. It mentions his professional achievements, including his role as executive pastry chef and his founding of the Longboys doughnut brand.
3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belle_Gibson> - This Wikipedia page discusses Belle Gibson, a health guru who falsely claimed to have cured her brain cancer through dietary choices. Her deception led to the launch of a wellness app and a cookbook, which were later discredited when her claims were exposed.
4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elisabeth_Finch> - This Wikipedia page covers Elisabeth Finch, a writer who pretended to be a cancer patient for nearly a decade while working on the TV series 'Grey's Anatomy'. Her deception was eventually exposed, revealing a pattern of fabricating illnesses for personal gain.
5. <https://www.esquire.com/news-a-politics/a35050296/psychology-of-cancer-fakes/> - This article explores the psychology behind individuals who fabricate illnesses, often linked to conditions like factitious disorder. It explains how such behavior can stem from a desire for attention or control, often rooted in deep-seated emotional needs or childhood trauma.
6. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oax8XFBzzLw> - This YouTube video features Graham Hornigold discussing his gourmet doughnut shop, Longboys, and how he combines fine-dining expertise with accessible pricing. The video provides insight into Graham's professional life and business ventures beyond the documentary 'Con Mum'.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14465025/Con-mums-cancer-fakers-Expert-reveals-people-like-mother-MasterChef-star-lie-terminal-illness-taken-deceit.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data