

Ken with his fiancée Rosemarie, who has supported him throughout his cancer battle. The star believes in surrounding himself with 'doers with good energy'.

YOUNG HEART-THROB



Ken won hearts of *Skippy* viewers from 1966 (left) and continued to impress Aussies in roles such as Simon Young in *Skyways* (above).

Despite a battle with cancer, Ken James – and his sunny smile – live on

Ken James, the star of *Skippy*, is so upbeat you'd never guess he was battling cancer – because he's a firm believer in the power of positive thinking.

As the acting legend celebrates 50 years in showbiz, he tells *New Idea* he's been quietly battling non-Hodgkin's lymphoma since late 2009.

'It's the same kind of cancer that struck singer Delta Goodrem, cricketer great Simon O'Donnell and musical theatre star Anthony Warlow, so I figure I'm in good company,' says Ken, 62, who is taking time out to recharge with his fiancée Rosemarie Stuhleiner, 60, at a friend's beautiful villa in Bali.

'The great TV producer Hector Crawford told me years ago the secret to success in anything is to surround yourself with positive

people, and always keep smiling. It's become my mantra and, fortunately, I'm blessed to have such a loving family [children Adrian, 37, and Becky, 33, from a previous marriage] and my gorgeous fiancée with me all the way,' he smiles.

Ken says the first clue to his health crisis came when he noticed several small lumps on his neck during a shave.

'The lumps seemed to come out of nowhere, so I had them immediately checked. A biopsy was performed and, to my horror, I was diagnosed with stage three cancer, which has now escalated to stage four and spread to the bones.'

Ken explains that until recently, his doctor had him undergoing regular scans in a 'wait and see' holding pattern.

'But I got the news through that I needed to undergo light chemo, and so that began in early April. I'm on a four-week program,' he says.

'So far I'm holding up nicely. I'm very strong-willed, I'm a ▶

SKIPPY STAR KEN JAMES

HOW LOVE IS HELPING ME CONQUER CANCER



'Looking back over 50 fabulous years in showbiz... I have no misgivings and have had a very fortunate life,' Ken says.

survivor and I'm just surrounding myself with positivism and love. People who know my situation say I look remarkably well, save for a bit of 62-year-old wear and tear!

'And Rosemarie has been so devoted. She accompanies me to every medical appointment and is a wonderful support. I don't know what I'd do without her,' says Ken as he squeezes Rosemarie's hand.

The star says he and Rosemarie met 10 years ago and have been engaged for the past eight.

since. When he was 16 he landed a plum role on the legendary 1960s series *Skippy*, playing the eldest son Mark Hammond.

'I loved that show, and all these years on I still get mountains of fan letters from around the world. The enduring popularity of *Skippy* is incredible.'

Sadly, Ken reveals several of his *Skippy* co-stars also battled cancer. 'Ed Devereaux, who played Matt Hammond, died of cancer in 2003, Liza Goddard,

for 10 years on Bert Newton's morning show.

Retirement doesn't register with the energetic star. Just when most people Ken's age might be putting their feet up, he's off on tour next year, performing in a stage show called *Ladies Night*, which is based on *The Full Monty* – but he's quick to add that he won't be getting his gear off!

As well as juggling a busy showbiz career, Ken works tirelessly for charities such as Life Education and Variety. Proceeds from Villa Senja, where Ken and Rosemarie stayed, support Bali causes including the Jodie O'Shea Orphanage.

'Bali holds a very special place in my heart. During *The Box*, the huge slabs of dialogue I had nearly killed me. I remember being a total wreck, so I flew to Bali to unwind. When I stepped off that plane, seeing the smiles of the Balinese, magically the

worries of the world just melted from my shoulders,' says Ken, who was touched when a group of the orphans dropped by Villa Senja to say thanks.

'When the doctor gave me that dreaded cancer diagnosis I thought to myself: "If I die tomorrow I've had a wonderful life." Happily, my doctor is convinced there's at least another 20 good years in me yet, so for that I'm hugely grateful,' he says with his trademark smile. **NI**

By Craig Bennett
Photos: Dewandra



Ken still juggles a showbiz career while also working with charities such as Bali's Jodie O'Shea Orphanage.

'I loved that show and still get mountains of fan letters...'

'I know it seems like the world's longest engagement, but we both get so busy we keep forgetting to marry! We sort of set a date, then we get so caught up in everything that the date comes and goes,' he laughs.

'But we love each other so much, we keep talking about marriage, and so one of these days the confetti will flutter!'

Ken's showbiz career began when he was 12. He was featured in a meat pie TV commercial and he's rarely been out of work

who played Clancy, won her fight with breast cancer in 2007 and Tony Bonner, who played Jerry King, recently suffered a prostate cancer scare. Tony and I often talk and we've been a great support for each other,' Ken says.

After *Skippy*, Ken starred in raunchy 1970s series *The Box*, followed by roles in popular shows *Skyways* and *Sons and Daughters*. After taking a break from TV drama, Ken reinvented himself as a TV chef in the 1990s, whipping up culinary creations

Styling: Sarah Dougherty. For more information about Villa Senja and the Jodie O'Shea Orphanage, visit www.villasenja.net and www.careforkidsbali.com