

Make It Count

Narrative Essay by Kenan Reeh

It happened to be the year before I entered preschool when my family received the bad news. My dad had not felt good for the past few months, and he had spent much time in and out of hospitals, trying to find an explanation for the pain and discomfort he had been feeling. Some doctors told him he just had the flu, one told him he had a severe sinus infection, and others said to talk to another doctor. Finally after many doctors and no answers, we got the bad news. My dad was diagnosed with Non Hodgkin's lymphoma (a kind of cancer) at the age of forty. We all had a very uneasy feeling, and none of us were looking forward to the long, rocky, arduous task ahead of us.

My sister and I didn't grow up like many children. We were often being shuffled from house to house and from hospital to hospital without a good perception of what was really going on. All the hospitals had the same bland walls, and they all had a very distinctive odor and appearance. The summer of my third grade year, we stayed at our home a total of five days. My dad was doctoring in Denver, Colorado, and we stayed at my aunt's house for the whole summer. The hot muggy days in the city were torture, and we all longed to have back the sweet smells and gentle breeze of the country. During the days, we usually tried to get out of the hospitals at least once a day and get some fresh air by going to the park or the zoo. We grew up with this lifestyle, and we never really thought much of it.

I can remember my dad used to tell Naomi and I to "be strong and never give up hope." When we could not be with him, he had a little voice recording of Naomi and I telling him how much we loved him and how we couldn't wait to see him again.

I hated living in the city. One day I asked my mother, “Mother, will you promise me that we will never move to Denver?”

“Yes, son,” she replied, “we will never move to Denver.”

Through our hard times, our family grew stronger, closer, and more appreciative of life. We still tried to do normal things when we weren't in Denver, such as taking family vacations and going to the lake. I can still see the smooth, stony faces at Mt. Rushmore and the cool relaxing waves on the lake at Trenton. My dad tried to do as much farm work as he could when he was feeling well, but this hard work often made him weak, achy, and rundown, which often resulted in him spending more time in the hospitals.

My dad always let us know how much he loved us, and he watched us mature as we started to get farther into school. On my tenth birthday, I received my first shotgun and my first dirt bike.

My mother said, “He's too young, and it's too much for a birthday.”

My dad replied, “I want to be the one who gives him these things, and I won't have many more chances to do it.”

I never had the chance to go hunting with him, and he didn't get to show me how to ride a dirt bike, but he made sure that people were watching out for me and helping me to learn things that he would have liked to have taught me.

Through the years we stayed with the Carmichaels quite a bit; and just like many times before, we left the hospital on a Sunday night to go stay with them. It seemed like the regular routine until that Monday morning came around. Right before lunch time Naomi and I were

called to come to the office at school. Right away I knew that this wasn't going to be good. I reached the office first, and Mrs. Burton gave me the news that my dad had passed away that morning. I immediately broke into tears; and when my sister came into the room, she did the same. My heart sank, and it felt as if a heavy weight had just been placed on top of me. I was in fifth grade when my dad passed away, and my sister was an eighth grader.

The weeks to follow became really difficult, and it made me want to wake up and find out that it was all just a bad dream. For many months I didn't want to hear or talk about anything regarding what had happened, and even today it is difficult. I have learned that talking about it helps to make it easier, and knowing he is in a better place helps to calm my fears. Many times I will be doing something and I wish that my dad could be here with me: to watch me start my first football game, graduate from high school, and begin college. Knowing he is watching me helps me to try my hardest and to do my best in everything that I do. I hope he looks at me and is proud of what I have accomplished. Because of this event in my life, I have turned out much different, and I try to thank God for what I have every day. The biggest lessons I have learned from this event in my life are: Don't live with regrets, and make it count.