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Peter Crawford a Father Figure

“My father passed away from cancer when I was nine.” I know their next words after this statement: *I am so sorry*. Why? Because the thought of a nine-year-old boy crying himself to sleep for months makes you feel sympathy. Or that you know me now and I just blindsided you with an eight-wheeler of emotional weight. And if I were to ask why you are sorry, how would you respond? I am so sorry is what I hear from friends, family, teachers, consolers, from everyone when they learn enough about me to get to Peter, and his struggle with non-small cell carcinoma. My father was not perfect, no one is, and it would be shameful to uptalk him, so I will be truthful. He poured his love into our family, passion into his work, and imagination into his children. My sister and I replicate him, we are pieces of him. No one is perfect, but he passed on pieces he deemed most pure onto his children.

When I was two, I learned to swim, at three how to care for others through my newborn sister, at four how to bike. By the time I was five, unknown to me or my father, I only had four years left, four years to be molded into a well-rounded human being. Packing up, our family left Spokane and moved to Redding, CA. He always dreamt of this town to peruse his love for cacti, which later scattered our yard in beautiful dessert displays. Our family moved there for him. Unknown to me, he had been struggling with depression his whole life, the move helped him. In this town I met my father, I began to really grasp his personality; both before and after his death. He loved that little Northern Californian town.

I could open wounds of grief, of late nights in uncomfortable hospital chairs, but that is just one side of the story. Pain, a feeling of hurt and anger. Pain truly does deserve a spot in this story. But pain is only as big as seen, it covers up everything else. It is a selfish feeling. Pain from watching my father shrivel away, from seeing my family break down, seeing my grandfather cry. That feeling can be selfish when pointed back at yourself, the pain that you feel, not questioning others at the time. Instead of seeing a father broken down, I saw a man fight something so incomprehensive the doctors couldn’t diagnose it. I saw a single mother of two hold together through the hardest time in her life, making decisions protecting her children, packing up leaving a town her husband loved just for the chance of a better life for her kids. I saw parents of a dying son stay strong for their grandchildren and daughter in-law.

Cancer does not end life; it just expedites the process. Through his struggle my father broke down faster than he would have intended, he didn’t have a lifetime to pass on wisdom, energy, and love to me—he had less

than a year. Parents grow old and watch their children grow up. He did not get to see me grow up; he was five years from me learning to drive, nine years from graduating high school, twelve years from being able to sit down with me to sip a beer and talk about life. So how did he expedite passing on who he was?

To answer my own question; How does a parent with cancer pass on their knowledge before death? They don't: that would be too hard. Seriously, they already have cancer they don't need the stress, they need to live in the moment. And that's how it passes on: through them living in the moment. Being with their families, friends, wife or husband, and their children. The ones who spent time with him while he lived then carried the responsibility of passing his stories on, passing him on. For me hearing a story of my father only builds my admiration for him. Nine years with my dad, nine years without him. I've learned more about him in the last nine than the first. He raised me in the first, he gave me a foundation to start my life, and the last nine has been used to learn who he was. This isn't a happy story, I'm not happy my father had the life sucked from him. I grieve every time I hear his name. But before leaving, he lived. That was his job—to live; to live in the moment so that I could remember him for an eternity.

Why do stories of cancer leave somber tones? They should be celebrated. Stories of survivors, of heroes and heroines. Stories of fighters, of family members, people who could not make it to where we are today because they were paving the way. Not just medically, not just in new break throughs in medicine or cancer treatments, but the people around them. My father not only fought, not only helped further cancer treatments, not only molded me to who I am, he lived. I could say I'm broken, that losing him was like losing a piece of myself. But that's not true, things that are broken stay broken because they are not useful. His death affected me, I'd be lying saying it didn't, I was sad, full of anger, and empty. The main point is that is a past tense verb; *was*. Instead of sadness, I bear joy; joy that a man who was strong, loving, and lively raised me. Instead of anger, I bear peace; peace knowing that my father is not in pain, that my father's death was not in vein and that it was used to further knowledge. Instead of emptiness, I am content; content with where I am in life and how I got here.