

Family Restoration

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Ed Sheeran once said, "So before I save someone else, I've got to save myself." This phrase has been implemented into my father's cerebrum for the past 2 and ½ years. February 26th, 2016 is a day that will stay in my mind forever. This being the day I was rushed to the emergency room in my grandmother's chocolate brown Kia Optima. This being the day that would affect the rest of my life.

Fridays were the days I dreaded most. I would spend the entire day at school, and then go play my clarinet at jazz band practice for another hour. At the time, nothing was worse than seventh grade! One Friday, the 26th of February, was different. Before school, my father went to get breakfast for my brother and me. It was my favorite, Chick-Fil-A. The school day carried on as normal until 2:20 hit. I made my way to the band room and assembled the woodwind instrument. As the group was halfway through "The Pink Panther", I watched the door swing open. The intruder was my brother, Lance. His face was stained with tears. The band continued to jam out to the classic, but I gathered my things and crossed to him. He mouthed, "We need to go." My mother was on her way with my second oldest brother, Reese, to Tuscaloosa, Alabama, for a scholarship interview. Therefore, my father was supposed to pick me up at 3:30. I was confused when Lance and I exited the school to see my grandma's car. I got in the back seat and we quickly drove away.

The drive to the hospital was silent. It felt like we were in the car for hours, even though it was truly only four minutes. When we arrived, we raced into the ER. At that point, I had no

idea what was happening. We made our way to a space surrounded by a curtain. I pulled the thin piece of cloth back, and my father appeared. He whispered, "I love you." I felt the salty droplets of water stream down my cheeks. As I pulled the curtain further, more people appeared. My other grandmother and my father's office staff were gathered around his bed. We joined them for a prayer, and the employees left. The next two hours went by too quickly. Doctors were constantly checking in on us, until one came to tell us there was an ambulance that could take my dad to Vanderbilt Hospital. My brother and I walked alongside my dad through the sliding door exit. They loaded him into the ambulance and we said our goodbyes for "who knew" how long. One of the last things we discussed was a special event. An annual tradition my father and I have is attending the father-daughter dance. This dance was on February 27th that year, and it was the very next day. He informed that he would not be able to attend this night with me. The dance had not yet crossed my mind. I told him to not worry about it. At that moment, his health was my only focus. The ambulance driver closed the back door, and they were gone.

Over the next two years, my parents lived in Nashville, TN, off and on. I stayed home in Paducah, always longing to be with my mom and dad in Music City. My father had been diagnosed with Mantle Cell Lymphoma. He was receiving in-patient chemotherapy at Vanderbilt. Throughout this timespan, I never had the opportunity to go to Nashville to visit them as he was always in the hospital and I was too young to go in. However, I can assume how my father progressed during these treatments. To start, he was probably anxious. He is an internal medicine doctor, so it had to feel different to be the patient for once. He told me he wanted immediate results and that he wanted to do everything himself. My dad learned he had to give full control to the doctors and he had to have patience. At one point, he was in remission.

We thought this journey was finished. Nevertheless, we were far from the pot of gold. At a checkup appointment, the doctors told my mother and father that the cancer had returned. He became a guinea pig for a treatment known as CAR-T therapy. This treatment had barely been used, so they were unsure of what the results would be, which is scary.

The uncertainty of these results added stress into each member of the family's lives. We all had to learn to be concerned for my dad, but to focus on ourselves as well. If we took care of our own responsibilities, it gave my parents less to worry about. At that point in time for my father, all we could do was provide uplifting words and pray. I believe our prayers worked, for he is now cancer-free. His decision to participate in a study saved his life.

The rollercoaster our emotions have been riding has slowed to a smooth straight-away. We have learned to live each day to its fullest potential and to appreciate each and every single thing that we get to do individually and as a family. This is an experience that I would never wish upon anyone nor would I want to experience it again. I have, however, learned so many life lessons that I will never forget, and for that I am grateful. My family unit has been restored; we are back under one roof and we are happily living one day at a time and conquering the craziness of each day together.