

Time Sped Up the Day I Thought My Dad was Dying

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At one point, time seemed to drag, to crawl in agonizing, ticking seconds. Hours felt like years, minutes like months, second like weeks. Life can feel like that when you have plenty of it left. Eventually time will catch up to you at a speed faster than you could think. For me time sped up the day I thought my dad - the man who shaped who I am today - was dying. I knew he had been sick, but that's all it was; he was just sick. That word *dying* hit me with full force.

On the night of my dad's fortieth birthday - just a week before the diagnosis came - the first signs of something detrimental appeared. I spent the slow, passing time brushing off the small, serious things that signaled death: sunken tired eyes, dry lips, colorless skin and the most unforgettable, more than just the common cold - the cough so loud and harsh it could be heard from any room of the house. As far as ten-year-old me knew, my dad was going to live forever. It had never crossed my mind that there could be something more to it, that something was coming- our lives would change forever.

My father, once so strong and healthy, now bedridden. The same man I had never seen sick, not even once, my whole life was reduced to wretched illness. I can still recall the heavy weight in my stomach - it was 11:13 p.m. - when my Mom had finally arrived home. After a long day of worry and confusion she delivered the news to us, dropping like a bomb and settling into my mind like a heavy fog. I can still see the look on her face and the exact words that clouded my brain: *Your dad is sick. It's cancer, and it's pretty serious.* We all cried; we cried because we

were scared, and we cried because we knew nothing would ever be the same. Later, the term *acute myeloid leukemia* settled into my regular vocabulary faster than I was prepared for.

With that new “catch phrase” came the routine of treatments and the crisp smell of medicine that permeated every corner of our house. Quickly the cabinets were filled to the brim with new medicines. Suddenly my life was complicated, filled with all these new ideas and emotions. Just a week before, my dad was laughing and joking. We had just gone on a family trip together. It was nearly impossible to see past the fact that those could be the last memories I would make with my dad, and the entire time, he was slowly dying without me realizing it.

At home we prepared for dad to return as if it was the only option. Meanwhile, dad suffered through indecipherable conversations of his treatment plan beginning with chemo and ending with a stem cell transplant. As if chemo itself wasn't hard enough the long lasting effects on the body were harder. There were very few times during this part that I can remember seeing just how weak my dad was. In spite of all the mental and physical pain thrown at him he never even flinched in front of us.

At a quick glance you would see my dad hooked up to machines, cracking jokes as if nothing had changed. But our nights had changed from family dinners to walking through wide hospital doors every chance we got. From then on, hours sped by in flashes, minutes passed like seconds faster than the speed of light. I could go into depth of watching my father cling to life and how suffocating it was to not be able to ease his pain the way he had done for me every time I needed it. In reality, it was the forty-eight hours that passed after the initial moment of impact that changed me the most. In the hospital conference room, surrounded by beeping machines and tubes. I lay with my head in my father's lap, holding back tears as his new reality hit me with full force.

At ten years old, I learned that we don't always get what we want in life. The universe doesn't choose favorites. And, most importantly, time doesn't stop for us. The cliché catch phrase tells us to take life's lemons and make them into lemonade. But, none of us take it to heart until it's the only thing that we have for hope. In learning that time doesn't stop for me I have also discovered how to make the best out of even the worst situations. At the time it was through drawing those silly duck bills on the masks and getting excited to spend a night at the hospital with my dad. Now, well I make my happiness by taking after my dad in his perseverance and determination. Just like my father had to I can build myself from the ashes, take the rubble, and use it for more.

It's been seven years since that day in the conference room. After years of no buffets or mowing the grass or really anything with risk of exposure to germs my dad has not only went into remission but has now also hit the five-year mark, meaning he's cured! It's been a struggle and a learning curve in many ways mostly mentally and emotionally. My dad is still here to watch me graduate this year. He's still here to teach me how to drive. He will still be here to walk me down the aisle someday and will be here to help me make many more memories. I am very lucky to still have a chance to roll my eyes at his awful jokes and angrily go to my room when he tells me no. My dad, the hero he is, fought so hard and went through so much to be here and do those things for me and my siblings. If I have learned anything from him and his journey, it's how to persevere because, regardless of how things end, good or bad, this is the life we get. It makes no difference what point I'm at in my life or what situations strike me. Dad's journey taught me that we only get two options in life: to give up when the road gets rocky or to make the best of the rocks and walk straighter on the path.