

My Father's Cancer

His Daughter's Lessons

by Ginger Hines

I've always been a daddy's girl.

My father and I have had a special, indescribable bond for as long as I can remember. We laugh at jokes that no one else gets and have a joint admiration for power tools. Sure, he taught me the typical "dad" stuff, like how to ride a bike, drive a stick shift, and use

was one of their favorites, and that's a very good thing to be when they are the ones taking care of you.

Laugh often. Dad and I share a quirky sense of humor. But who cares? It just feels good to laugh, especially in the face of adversity and stress. Dad constantly cracked jokes to ease



Ginger Hines, her daughter Gabriela, and her father, a cancer survivor

a wicked tennis forehand. But the bigger, more important life lessons came through cancer.

My father was diagnosed with a rare and aggressive lymphoma in 1999. Each family facing cancer has their own stories of the fear, the analysis of medical advice from all sides, and the seemingly nonstop medical appointments. But over time, these memories have become less important. Now I am realizing that his biggest lessons for me were in the ways that he fought cancer, and in the way he has shown more grace, joy, and wisdom about life and survival.

The Lessons *Flattery will get you everywhere.* Flattery is always a good idea – flattering caregivers is an even better idea. Of course, Dad didn't even realize he was flattering the nurses; it's just part of his nature to build people up. Most of the time, the nurses would leave the room feeling better than when they came in. He

the tension. He was working hard at survival and using humor to help all of us.

Compassion feeds your soul. Because Dad is known for his good attitude and reassuring presence, the nurses asked him to talk with individuals who were just starting down this

During a time that was hard for him, he showed concern for other people.

road. During a time that was hard for him, he showed concern for other people and a willingness to reach out to others on the same path. How comforting it is for someone with first-hand experience to tell you that it's going to be okay.

Show grace under pressure. I watched Dad pray, then trust, then pray some more. He was at peace with whatever came. This seems so hard to me, as someone who is a

doer, always wanting to fix a problem. But by going through this with him, I've learned that many things are out of my control. It is much more peaceful to let the body work on healing, while the spirit works on building relationships and connection with people you love.

It's okay to say no. A beautiful thing happened during my dad's treatment. He learned to say no. It's a lesson that stuck. Now, when he doesn't want to do something, he simply says, "No, I don't want to," or "I don't like that." What a fantastic lesson.

New life brings hope. His first grandchild was born during his treatment. I would bring my newborn, Gabriela, to the oncology floor during his chemotherapy treatments. Seeing this precious new life was powerful and fed his physical healing. One of my favorite memories is of my two baldies – my bald infant daughter and my dad, bald due to the chemo. I have a photo of Dad feeding Gabriela, both grinning at each other, bald heads shining. When I look at this photo, I realize that the torch is being passed. It's not just about my dad and me anymore. This photo of innocence and mutual devotion captures the power of generations.

Today, Gabriela is a vibrant second-grader. My father, given a slim chance to survive, is still cracking jokes, working hard, and enjoying his seven grandchildren. And I'm incorporating Dad's lessons in a way that I could never have foreseen. Together with a business partner, I have

launched a new company that focuses on connecting people when their loved ones are going through health transitions. I hope that through our efforts, Dad's lessons of praise, laughter, compassion, grace, self-care, and hope will reach so many others.

Editor's Note: *Ginger Hines is owner and co-founder of CareGifting, a company whose mission is to help people comfort, connect, and celebrate. Visit www.CareGifting.com for more information. ■*