

PERSPECTIVE

By CHMM

This is a story about death and recovery. My father's death and my recovery.

Putting things in perspective, the summer after I graduated high school was the best period of my life so far, and yet, it marked the end of my life as I know it...

Funny how starkly contrasted certain things in your life can be, things will seem to be going along perfectly well and all of a sudden... life does a 360. No gradual decline, just a slap in the face. No exceptions. I thought things were great. I was in love for the first time, I had graduated, and I was getting ready to go away to school. I was so happy, life was good, and I didn't even realize how fortunate I was. You never do, I guess.

So things were good. What happened you ask? Well, it all seemed relatively insignificant at the time. My father began to get these pains in his side, pains that didn't go away. So he went to see his doctor. The doctor told him that he had kidney stones, surgery would eliminate the problem. So he went to the hospital to have his kidney stones removed - and to everybody's surprise, they didn't see any stones. But that was the problem, or so the doctor said. Meanwhile, my father was given pain killers while the doctors, over the course of a couple of weeks, tried to fine our what was doing on with him. Then some genius doctor decided to give him a chest x-ray. Fucking genius! My father had been a smoker for 30 years and it took doctors 3 weeks to give him a chest x-ray.

They found something. "Emphysema" the first doctor said and began to treat my dad for that, while still looking for those damn stones. Two weeks later, after still finding no stones, another doctor looked at

the chest x-ray and said "Emphysema? You've got to be kidding!" As it turned out, my dad had the Big C. Cancer; in the advanced stages. And what about those kidney stones? No such problem. Seems the Cancer began in his chest and spread down to his adrenal gland, which explains the pain in his side. This final diagnosis was in October, the pains began in July. It took the doctors that long to correctly diagnose him. Bastards! Two years before, my dad had a chest exam which, in fact, showed the beginnings of the Cancer, but unfortunately, that too, was misread. Bastards!

I didn't go away to school that year; I stayed home to look after my dad. He began chemotherapy and radiation treatments almost immediately after the final diagnosis - enough time had been lost already. In the months that followed, I watched my dad, each day, deteriorate a little more. At first I started looking for the signs of the Cancer in him, eventually I started looking for signs of him in the Cancer. By January, his appearance had changed. He aged 25 years; he was thin, and pale, and oh, so frail. When I hugged him I was afraid I'd break him. But his appearance wasn't the only thing that changed, he, himself, became a completely different man.

Where once he was loud and funny, and always talking, he became quiet and distanced, and only spoke when he had to. And seldom did I see him smile. He had such a great smile, it said everything. Now his eyes

said everything - sunken and tired.

But all through it, I had hope. Hope that chemotherapy would help, hope that one of those infamous "miracles" would happen and the Cancer would just disappear. But it didn't. One day, I was in the kitchen, making myself a cup of coffee, and my mother sat down at the kitchen table. We hadn't been speaking to each other very much, just sort of co-existing in the same place. All of our attention focuses on Dad. But she spoke to me that afternoon, and I hated her for it. She told me that my dad only had a couple of weeks left, and that she just thought I should be prepared. See, my mom's a nurse and she's been dealing with Cancer patients all of her career, so she knew, but still, I hated her for saying that, for forcing me to face what was happening. I turned and screamed at her, "Shut up! I don't want to hear this. You can't take my hope away from me. You can't!" As she tried to calm me down and explain that she wasn't trying to take my hope away, only trying to prepare me, I turned away. I would not hear what she was saying. Obvious to her that I'd stopped listening, she left me there and readied herself for work. And I started to make dinner. Pork chops, rice, and string beans, that was what I cooked for my dad and my brother, Mike. I put the food on the table, and my brother said that Dad wasn't going to eat, he was sick. What else was new?

He really was sick. That morning my mother had found him asleep on the couch, where he spent the last 5 months, with a pool of blood next to him, coughed up during the night. The doctors had been called, but they didn't think it was that bad, it only happened once. But while Mike and I were eating, he saw my dad, on his way to the bathroom, clutch his side and fall to his knees. He

ran downstairs to my dad, and I ran upstairs to get my mom. Dad was writhing in pain. We rushed him to the hospital. Mike ran every red light on the way, and the van, maybe understanding the urgency, seemed to go faster than it ever had before.

By the time we got to the hospital, my dad had gotten so much worse, he was shaking and sweating, and still clutching his side. We were in the emergency room for over 2 hours, and the doctors kept giving my dad morphine to calm him down, but nothing worked. My father's pain was written all over his face. But still, we waited for something to work.

My mother's sister, Maryanne, had been called when we got to the hospital and within an hour, she was there, waiting with us. Somewhere during that time, Maryanne pulled Mike and I into the waiting room and told us that my dad was dying, he wouldn't make it through the night. My sister Meghan had to be called. She lives in Chicago.

As my brother spoke with Meghan, I listened to him cry. He told her what was happening. The wind got knocked out of me, all of the sudden I was crying and couldn't breathe,

and the room began to rush in at me from all sides. I had to leave, get out of that room, get out. So I got up and almost ran out, but my brother grabbed me, and held me. And we cried. We cried because our father was dying

and we weren't ready.

We pulled ourselves together and went back into the emergency room. My father couldn't know what was happening. The doctors came and took him upstairs for x-rays and a couple of minutes later we were told that he had slipped into a coma and would eventually stop breathing.

And that is what happened. I called his sister and she and her husband came down, to say



by Russ Kaback

Continued on page 14