

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

Keep On Keepin' On

By Collin Brady

My father was first diagnosed with Thyroid cancer in 2008. When my parents sat me down one day, I thought I was in trouble, as would any 8 year old kid. I remember that they said my dad had something called "Cancer." I had no idea what it meant, but the way they spoke about it made it seem horrible. I understood that he was sick, and that they told me that he would get sicker in the months to come.

He started chemotherapy and radiation probably a month later. He would get chemo every Thursday, and Sundays were his "bad days," or the days when he was most sick from the chemo and radiation. Once again, as an 8 year old kid, I really didn't understand what was going on, just that my dad was sick. His Motto, during these days, was simply, "Keep on Keepin' on." It was a modest motto, and it suggested that he was going to get through whatever was put against him, no matter the obstacle.

This was also the year that the wonderful organization "Crossing the Finish Line" or more recently named "For Pete's Sake," sent us three to Disneyworld in Orlando, Florida. Though I didn't know at the time, the doctors apparently had given him less than two years to live. I woke up one weekday and got my school uniform on, donned my backpack, and walked into the living room. I was complaining, as usual for me in the morning, that I was tired. My parents then proceeded to say that I could go lay down for another twenty minutes and that we would leave then. Well, at that point I knew something was up because they would usually kill me if I was late, and I had had perfect attendance for the last 2 years. So, I asked them why they would let me lay back down. My mother replied with, "The limo won't be here for another twenty minutes." I just stared at her and repeated, "What?" "What??" over and over again until they both yelled, "We're Going to Disneyworld!" I started jumping around and yelling for about five minutes. The limo came, we got in, and left for the airport. Later that night, we pulled up to the house "For Pete's Sake" had provided for us, and walked in the door.

That December trip was the best trip and surprise I had ever had. We were the first people in the world to flip the giant switch in the park to turn on the millions of lights and we were first on every ride. This included, much to my dismay, the Mount Everest ride in Animal Kingdom. I hated roller coasters. I also remember the Disney "Dream Team" that followed us around. They would get us first in any line, get us whatever we wanted from any store or restaurant, and they were just all around fantastic. I still remember one woman who stopped one of the Dream Team members and asked him how she and her family could get the treatment we were getting, to which he replied, "You can't."

In 2010, we were in the local newspaper, The Bucks County Courier Times. The story explained that when I was 9, I had lost one of my last baby teeth and was eagerly awaiting the tooth fairy. By this time, I had also realized that treating cancer was expensive. I had written a note addressed to the tooth fairy and put it under my pillow. It read, "Instead of giving me money for my tooth, could you please leave a hundred dollars under my dad's pillow?" I had awoken the next morning and found nothing under my pillow, so I ran through the house to my parent's bedroom and checked under their pillows. My young self couldn't believe it, but there was a one hundred dollar bill under my father's pillow. The Tooth Fairy had listened! I found the news article about two years ago now, and to my surprise, there was more to the hundred dollar bill than I had known. Apparently, the week before I had left the note, my parents received an

envelope in the mail that had no return address other than "Philadelphia". Inside was that same one hundred dollar bill and a note that read, "I hope it helps."

Well, my dad survived the two year mark and was pronounced cured in 2011, and we felt the worst was behind us. However, in that same year, my mom passed away suddenly with no warning. We were making Christmas cookies on December 22 and she said "I'm tired, I'm going to bed." I found her in her bed the following morning. The autopsy found nothing, so they concluded she had passed from a seizure.

Two years later, my dad was diagnosed with cancer again. They once again deemed it cured after more radiation, chemo, and a major surgery. Last year, however, it came back and he had to have a third of his tongue removed. Several months later, they rescanned and his tongue still had cancer cells in it. So, he underwent a 10 hour surgery that removed the rest of his tongue and reconstructed another one out of a piece of his arm. My dad will never eat again and he will never talk properly either. He has a feeding tube in his stomach and cannot swallow anything, not even his own saliva. He was up and around in the hospital only a few days after the surgery. He came home and was still very tired and in pain, but he toughed through it. He was mostly out and doing what he normally did for months, working on the truck, stacking firewood, and just generally being outside.

They rescanned again at the end of 2016 and we got bad news in the early days of January. The scan found five more tumors in his mouth, chin, and neck. The doctors say that he will not survive the year. We hope that they underestimated again, like in 2008, but we both think that it is different this time. He has violent coughing fits and when I am driving, I sometimes have to pull over frequently for him to get out.

These are tough times for both of us, but I worry about him more than I ever did. We remain close, and we want to savor whatever time we have left together. We have made preparations for the worst, but for the time being, we're going to "Keep on Keepin' On."

