

The Longest Roller Coaster Ride

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I remember the first time that I ever saw my dad cry. It was the day after our family had heard some of the most earth shattering news that we have ever received. The day before, my dad had a follow-up doctor's appointment to review the results of an MRI. The MRI had been done to check for the spread of his prostate cancer.

He had already undergone a treatment for prostate cancer in which they freeze the cancer cells. During the treatment, the doctor had found another small tumor and told Dad that they needed to do an MRI to see if the cancer had spread. At this point, the doctor was still very optimistic about the whole thing and thought that this tumor could be taken care of with radiation.

The day of the follow-up appointment, we were enjoying our summer vacation at my mom and dad's house in South Carolina. My husband, my kids, and I spent the day doing stereotypical things: being lazy, fishing, taking the kids to the playground, and other such vacationy activities. My mom and dad followed their regular routine, which included things like going to a coffee shop to get their morning coffee and a bagel. Then they headed to the doctor's office. We all met back at the house sometime that afternoon.

We had all been home for about five or ten minutes when I asked Mom how the appointment had been. She immediately broke down. Through tears, she answered, "Not good!" She went on to tell how the MRI had shown some spots in the area of my dad's pelvic bone that could be cancerous. The doctor had explained that once cancer enters the bones there are no current treatments. The only option is hormone therapy which only slows the cancer down for a limited time.

All at once I felt like I was drowning in emotions. We had been told this cancer was treatable, and it wasn't growing very fast. The doctor was very optimistic about treating it. I didn't understand how this cancer, my dad's cancer, could turn into something so large, so devastating. Questions started flooding my mind. *How long will the hormone treatments work... What will Mom do if Dad dies... Will they stay in South Carolina, or will they move home...? Did I make the right decision about taking a new job... What if I need to travel to South Carolina immediately... Will Dad suffer a lot, further down the road... How will my boys take it if they lose their Pawpaw?* And so on, and so on. The questions were just swirling around in my head mixed with the fear, the sadness, and the uncertainty.

Even though the following day started much the same way as the last, my whole world was different. I hadn't been able to get a complete grasp on what was happening yet; it still didn't seem real. My dad is the person that eats a healthy diet, rich in foods that are supposed to help prevent cancer, and he exercises on a regular basis. If anyone was **not** going to get cancer, it would be my dad. So, I moved through the motions of my day, cried when I was alone, and put on a happy face when I was with everyone else. That evening my mom and dad went out to dinner with our family.

I'm sure the food was good that night, but that's not what stands out in my mind when I think back to that evening. I remember eating, I remember sharing small talk, and I remember wrangling with the kids as we normally do when we go out to eat. But

the one moment that will burn in my mind forever is when I glanced across the table at my dad. I saw his eyes watering, and he was just staring at my youngest son. I took a second glance because my dad often suffers from allergy attacks. That could have been why his eyes were watering, but the way he was staring at my son was the real reason I decided to look again. At this point, I noticed a single tear running down his cheek.

It has been roughly a month since that dinner when I saw the tear, and the emotional roller coaster has continued. Just when I think I've found a way to cope with the worst case scenario, one out of the handful of dad's doctors tells us something that gives us a little glimmer of hope. It's strange to say, but this glimmer of hope can be almost scary, too. I am always scared to get my hopes up. What if the doctor is wrong? That would just send my emotions and thoughts into an adult roller coaster ride, you know, the ones with the really big hills and really big dips. If I just try to keep being prepared for the worst, then the emotional roller coaster is more like a roller coaster for small children.

I don't really know what to think right now because of the different information we are receiving from the doctors. We were first told it looked like the worst. Then, we were told it was the worst. The next three doctors said they didn't think it was the worst. One doctor checked my dad's back pain, and said he didn't think it was cancer in the bone. Now, we are waiting to hear the Mayo Clinic's interpretation of his test results. I know that this most current news all sounds good, but again, a children's roller coaster is much easier to stomach than an adult roller coaster.