

The Gift of a Lie

Category: Telling the Truth

written by Ronna L. Edelstein | March 1, 2019

Dad's official death certificate lists "pancreatic cancer" as the cause of his death. His physicians determined this diagnosis after deciding that Dad had insulinoma; they reached this conclusion through a process of elimination after a long series of tests and after examining his symptoms. Specifically, Dad had extremely low blood sugar, causing him to descend into coma-like states where his mind suddenly shut down, his wobbling legs failed to bear his weight and his overall state-of-being deteriorated. The "cure" was to feed him protein and liquids every two-to-three hours, including throughout the night. Dad and I had many deep conversations at 2 a.m. and 4 a.m. as he ate his peanut butter sandwich and drank his milk or orange juice.

In our sixty-seven years together, I had never lied to Dad. But on this particular occasion, I did. At no time did I mention to him the words "pancreas" or "cancer." What would have been the point? At age ninety-seven, when he was first diagnosed, he would have panicked and lived the last year of his life—he died at age 98 $\frac{1}{2}$ —in abject fear.

Instead, by holding back the truth, I gave Dad moments of joy—working together from our living room to solve questions on Jeopardy, going to the nearby yogurt store to enjoy a soft chocolate treat, sitting at the park to people watch. Yes, our days had tension and trauma, but they also had laughter and love. Hearing the words "pancreatic cancer" would have replaced optimism with pessimism, embracing the day with fearing the night.

Throughout my life, Dad inundated me with presents: the doll that could walk; the sweater that was the rage of the ninth grade class; the car I needed to get to my first job; the carpet that gave my new house a comfortable feel. He reserved Sundays for our "walks and talks" through the neighborhood, spent Saturday nights watching television with me while my peers went on dates, and stood by my side during every medical procedure.

Dad spent his life giving to me. I do not regret giving him the present of a lie as he neared the end of his life.

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