

Strongest Parents

Kaeli Fisher

Life in the Fisher household was just like any other family. My mom Liz was a stay home mom, and my dad Bill worked as a pharmacist. We were a normal family, fighting, laughing and enjoying life together. Everything changed in 2012 when I was in 5th grade. 'Kaeli I have cancer,' Those four words changed my life. I heard them twice that year. The first was when my mom had been diagnosed with neuroendocrine cancer, the second was when my dad was diagnosed with glioblastoma. I was 10 years old. I knew what cancer was but did not know that it would change my life very quickly.

My mom was my best friend, my role model. She was the mom who would volunteer at my school library or bring in homemade cookies for the class party. It was after Christmas when I knew something was not right. My mom was asleep a lot, she was tired, felt weak. One day she was going to her doctor to hear her results from a test. I was dreading that day. I had no idea what my mom was going to hear, and on top of that I had ballet class which I hated. My parents picked me up from school and drove to Gas Works Park in Seattle. I was excited now, we passed my dance studio so maybe they had forgotten I had class today. I was proven wrong when my mom led me to a grassy field grabbed my hand and told me she had cancer. I was so mad and scared and confused. I remember asking her that night at home 'How long will you live? 20 years?' She shook her head, so I tried again. '10 years? 5 years?' She smiled softly and said, 'I just don't know Kaeli.' She had surgery and then was receiving chemotherapy. Things looked a bit better, so we decided to take a family trip. Maybe Disneyland would distract us from cancer.

After a week of beach, cousin, Disneyland, and sun time, we returned to Seattle happy, more relaxed and looking forward to spring. One thing was different though, my dad wasn't feeling good. He went to the doctor and I was not worried. Nothing else could happen since my mom already had cancer. I was once again proven wrong. My dad was diagnosed with glioblastoma multiforme stage 4 in May 2012. While my mom was receiving chemotherapy, my dad began surgery. This was one of the lowest points in my life. I was scared, thought I was alone, and entering depression. During this time, I moved in with my aunt, uncle, and cousins as my dad, who had just finished surgery, could no longer care for me. It was like a long sleepover at first. I was very close with my cousins, so this seemed like a fun vacation. It was only until my mom joined me to live with my aunt and uncle that I noticed something was not right. My dad was weaker when I saw him. He was partially bald and had staples in his head from the surgery. He did not look like the dad I knew. My mom was going through a completely different transformation. She was using a wheelchair, lost all of her hair and had a care taker. All of this foreign to newly 11-year-old me.

Summer 2012 started off hopeful. My mom was using her walker and my dad went on a bike ride just like he used to. I was going to summer camps just like every other summer. One day, my mom, (still living with my aunt, uncle) and I decided to walk to the nearby village to get frozen yogurt. It was a 15-minute walk. This was a huge step for my mom. The whole family was so proud of her and thought that maybe she could beat this cancer. Not a month later I was finishing my rock-climbing camp. It was family day meaning I got to show off my climbing and belaying skills to my family. What I hadn't realized, was that my mom was not at my aunt's house. She was in the hospital fighting for her life. Oblivious, I climbed my heart out happy as could be.

My dad picked me up from my aunt's that night. He told me he wanted to go on a walk. It was a gorgeous day, sun shining. We went to Magnolia Boulevard and he stopped. 'Kaeli mom passed away.' No, I thought, this was not happening. I learned later that her last words, were 'I love Kaeli.' My dad lived on for six more years. We had many adventures, San Diego, Disneyland, teaching me how to drive and more. He became my best friend and stayed that way until December 3rd 2017 when he was passed away after seven years of fighting.

One thing my family has always said is cancer sucks. It scares, kills, and leaves behind people who are grieving. It also makes people stronger. My parents are my biggest inspiration. I will always be proud of them and always look up to them. Both sides of my family talk about them often. It is important to remember the people who died from cancer, remember how hard they fought. Now I know that cancer is not the end. They live in me, in our house, in my dad's bike and my mom's pasta salad that we make all the time. I remember them as the strongest people I knew.