

# Truth and Triumph

*Balin Hanson*

A loss is something that everyone has to deal with at one point in time. For most, it's during their adulthood when their grandparents or parents pass on. However, I experienced a great loss when I was only 13 years old when my father died from stomach cancer. At the time of his diagnosis, I had no idea how uncommon and deadly the form of cancer was that my father possessed. Stomach cancer is a fairly rare form of cancer, and it was very unusual that it occurred in someone like my dad. Most people who are afflicted with stomach cancer are over seventy years of age, oftentimes overweight, and/or a heavy smoker or drinker. My dad was 44 years old, ran half marathons, and lived a very healthy lifestyle. Both of my parents did a great job of ensuring that my brother and I were not aware that my dad was only given a 30% chance of survival by his doctor. My dad always had a light-hearted attitude and made it seem like everything was always ok. After undergoing surgery to remove his stomach and part of his esophagus he referred to the huge, crescent-shaped scar across his side and abdomen as his 'shark bite', and would always joke about how he had gotten it from a rogue great white. This jovial attitude lasted up until a couple of months after his surgery. My family and I were under the impression that the surgery had "cured" him and that he would be ok. To our dismay, the cancer returned with a vengeance, spreading throughout his lymph nodes and abdomen. After that, he wasn't the same. It was hard for him to keep any weight on, even though he used a feeding tube to augment the calories he would eat normally. He was easily fatigued and wasn't able to muster the energy to appear happy or jovial anymore. Things only got worse as time went on. Eventually, he was confined to a hospital bed positioned in our house because his body was failing and he stopped being able to move. My father ended up passing away in October of 2014. He had become extremely gaunt, and his eye sockets were sunken in so much that he wasn't able to close his eyes completely. He died with his eyes open and his mouth gaping, though I'm not sure if I'm remembering this correctly because I had done everything in my power to block out this image from my memory. This loss took an extreme toll on everyone, especially my little brother, who was in second grade at the time. He would cry himself to sleep every night for the next couple of months. It scared me. I consistently wondered whether or not I should be as devastated as my brother. I felt inhuman. Time passed and I eventually returned to school. I received plenty of 'I'm sorry' and 'Are you ok?' My response was always the same: 'Thank you. Yes, I'm ok.' That couldn't have been further from the truth. Fury was consuming me at an immeasurable rate. Our situation wasn't fair. Why had it happened to us? It finally dawned on me that there was no reason 'why'. Cancer doesn't pick and choose its victims. This became extremely apparent when my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer only a year later. It would be an understatement to say that I was angry. The fact that my mother was diagnosed with cancer directly after my father had died from it was beyond unfair. My mom had done everything she could to support our

family after we had already taken this devastating blow, and yet here was cancer once again. She first had a mastectomy and then began chemotherapy, which started to do its 'thing'. My mom would be very ill or too tired to do much around the house after going to therapy, so it was my job to look out for my brother and take care of things at home. In all honesty, this time in my life is also extremely fuzzy because of the sheer terror that I felt during this period. I had no idea what was going to happen now that my mom had stopped working and had cancer. I was only 14, and yet I had to deal with the fear of losing my mother after already losing my father the year before. Time passed, and my mother was doing much better and things were starting to look up. Before I knew it, I had finished my first year of high school. I took every opportunity to do whatever I could to excel academically. My sophomore year I received all A's in my classes and the highest GPA I had ever achieved: a 3.9. It was obvious that my family would not have the money to support my college education in the future, so I did everything I could to ensure that I would be a good candidate for scholarships. Grades became incredibly important and I treated them as such. I also continued pursuing my two passions: music and debate. Not only did I become the Woodwind Horn Sergeant (captain) of my high school's Marching Showband, but also the captain of the Public Forum debate team as well. I made high school my oyster. Throughout the entirety of my high school career my mom did everything she could to support my brother and I while taking care of things back home. She always showed concern for our well-being and success and still does to this day. Even after losing her husband, being diagnosed with cancer, and finding trouble re-entering the workforce she never let it stop her. I can say without a doubt that my mom is the toughest parent on this planet. She didn't let cancer stop her. She didn't let my dad's death stop her. She continued onward regardless of all the adversity facing our family without batting an eye. I owe my success to her because she's taught me about the value of perseverance and ensured that I work hard. I can't begin to express how thankful I am to have her. Thank you for everything you've done for Harrison and I mom. You are truly my greatest hero and the best possible role-model I could have.