

A FATHER'S LOVING GOODBYE

“I wasn’t around much to help when Richard was young, so when Richard became paralyzed from the waist down, I was honoured to help him in anyway. That was my way to show my love for my son Richard and allow him to have dignity and respect for himself.”

A strong, friendly man walked into my office yesterday with a unique ring on his finger and a special bracelet on his wrist. When I asked him what the bracelet meant he said with a firm quiet voice:

“Just a few weeks ago my son returned this ring to me that I had made for him when he was 16 and now I am never taking it off.” And the bracelet? ***“That reminds me of the cancer that took my son’s life at age 39.”***

Only 10% of parents deal with the death of an adult child. Usually not very well. The sharpness of the pain, the depth of the grief, and the sense that this is not how it should be, can be quite immobilizing.

“Richard was not supposed to die,” said this father.

Richard was a fun-loving storyteller to all and a committed partner to his girlfriend. With a vast network of friends, he lived life large. Work and play filled his life in Toronto and those in his sphere enjoyed him immensely. As happens with adult children, distance, and age meant living a somewhat separate life from his parents.

Until a few months ago.

Richard moved home to Mississauga upon being told of an advanced cancer diagnosis that was terminal. During those last few months of life he knew he could count on the care of two wonderful parents. I was fortunate enough to meet his dad and he began our conversation by describing the differences in their relationship when Richard was a healthy child and then a dying son:

- ***Growing up, “I was always busy working two jobs and not home too much. Now we would stay up to 3AM watching movies together and then I would take off for work at 6AM.”***
- ***Growing up, “I tried to ensure healthy eating occurred. Now you would see me frequently pushing my 39-year-old son in a wheelchair to the corner store to load up on favorite candies and chocolate.***
- ***Growing up, “I would fine my son 25 cents if he woke up in a bad mood. Now I would move my son’s incredibly painful legs first thing in the morning and see a smile of gratitude light up Richard’s face through the pain. It meant living another day!***

Those days of his son living back at home were priceless. ***“We would start laughing and couldn’t stop. We would deal with some messy accidents with dignity. And with that***

wheel chair we would be like little boys together doing wheelies and racing down ramps, not that he wanted to! I was a very lucky dad to have those wonderful weeks together with my son.”

There was one thing Richard was adamant about. Though the hospital would phone and say they had a bed waiting, he did not want those special last days to be spent away from friends – and his mom and dad.

For that wish to come true dad turned to Heart House Hospice. They were the specialists that helped make dying with dignity at home with compassionate care possible. You see, the mission of Heart House Hospice is to make a meaningful difference to people’s end-of-life journey. Practically speaking here are some of the things we were able to do:

- **Heart House Hospice** came into their home and discussed these new experiences. They supported the family and taught them how to provide the intimate care that Richard required.
- His girlfriend bought Richard a big winter coat and **Heart House Hospice** arranged for a “Transhelp” vehicle so he could go out and test drive it just once!
- With the generous help of The Keg, **Heart House Hospice** arranged for the manager to hand-deliver Richard’s favorite steak to his bedroom for a candle lit meal with his girlfriend on Valentine’s Day.
- **Heart House Hospice** played a significant part in advocating very hard-to-obtain proper pain and symptom management for Richard.

When you help a dad out with his child, at whatever age, you do something very special. Heart House Hospice was there to help for the whole journey. *“We thought Richard would die slowly. It happened so suddenly. So every minute I was able to stay beside him is now a memory I will treasure forever. We got connected again. I’d like to thank Trish (Hospice Care Coordinator) for her warm visits during Richard’s illness and after he passed away.”* Richard’s mom said: *“I will never lose my son. I will always see the world through his eyes.”*

I don’t need to tell you that these stories of end-of-life companioning are reported to me a 1000 times per year and we can keep responding to provide this free service because you respond to them one at a time. One at a time a gift comes in...**\$25, \$50, \$100 or even \$300!** One at a time we can then help fathers and sons. I checked and well over \$10 billion is given in gifts on Father’s Day. Surveys show that 7 out of 10 children don’t know what to get their Dads!

Let me give you three gift suggestions:

- **\$300** to Heart House Hospice in memory of your Dad this Father’s Day in honor of his giving to you. (Send his name in with the donation and we will include it on our electronic memory wall).
- **\$100** toward funding the much needed work that the Care Coordinators do to advocate for all the ways Dying at Home is possible in Mississauga and Brampton.
- **\$50** as a gift to the work that Heart House Hospice does in providing and coordinating much needed end-of-life transportation.



**Fathers seldom say, "I love you"
Though the feeling's always there,
Perhaps they have to speak their love
In a fashion all their own
Because the love that Father's feel
Is too big for words alone!**

I will never forget the hero father I met yesterday and the way he spoke about Richard's endearing ways. He for sure would not call himself a hero. Just a man of a certain age who had the privilege of loving his son in a very special way. The journey ahead will be difficult, but this family will always remember Heart House Hospice.

Please give to this Father's Day appeal! We need \$10,000 from people like you reading this letter to respond this month.

Check off the appropriate amount and place your donation in the enclosed envelope today. All of our clients need your gift now. Tomorrow is too late.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Walker". The signature is fluid and cursive.

David Walker
Director of Resource Development
Heart House Hospice

P.S. Please send the enclosed envelope today. Write the cheque, print your Visa number or go to www.hearthousehospice.com and click on Donate Now to invest in this wonderful compassionate care. Please give now!