

My father was a man of routine. He worked through life's inevitable chaos methodically, with patience, honesty and humor. I took comfort in his order, found stability in his habitual customs. Every Saturday morning he made pancakes, often with wild blueberries frozen from the summer before. Sunday was always oatmeal, spooned on top of toast and eaten all in one bite. Later, when I became curious about caffeine, I came to rely happily on the fresh hot pot of coffee waiting for me every morning before starting my day. Dad walked me to school every morning from 2nd to 5th grade, reciting the first lines of The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock as we stepped out into the dark Alaskan mornings: "Let us go then, you and I, as the evening is spread out against the sky..."

I knew my father growing up as a good father: present. There for me. He coached my soccer team, encouraged me to always do good, brush my teeth every night, eat well, study hard. He would not explode with love (as my mother often did) but would rather expressed it in subtle ways. I would see it in the way his eyes lit up after seeing me perform in some way, giving me a pat on the back and announcing he was "real proud of me." Of course, we butted heads sometimes too. When I was a little kid I enjoyed spending as much time as I could get away with without clothes on. I remember one time specifically, when I was about 7 years old, I sat down at the dinner table after a long day of frolicking, completely topless. My dad told me to put on a shirt. I told him I wouldn't, I was just fine without one, thank you very much. This went back and forth for a while, and eventually he put his foot down and exclaimed, "I will **not** eat dinner with a barebreasted woman!"

Later, amidst the tumultuous drama and self-consciousness of high school, something in our relationship began to change. I began to see my father as a man, as a fellow human, rather than just a parental figure. I started to slowly piece together what I knew about his life (and not just the part of his life that revolved around me). Soon I was old enough to hear *his* stories. I heard about his childhood, learning to sail on the lake with his father. I heard about joining the army reserves rather than escaping to Canada out of respect and love for his parents. I heard about his travels to England, and across America to pursue graduate education in Washington State. I heard about how he met my mother, how they fell in love and escaped to the great northern land of Alaska.

After I moved away for college, my dad and I talked on the phone rarely, but when we did, our conversations were always epic. I remember talking with him when I lived in Fairbanks, standing outside a coffee shop in -30 degrees, in tears because I couldn't decide where I wanted to study abroad, what I wanted to do with the rest of my college education. "I feel like I should do something practical and just finish up my Linguistics degree, but all I really want to do is go to the most exotic place possible, like INDIA!" I bawled. We talked for hours like that and he just kept telling me over and over to do what made me feel alive, seize the day, GO TO INDIA.

He always had such sage advice to give me. An excerpt from an email he sent me, soon after he relapsed in January 2010: "You are such a bright and talented young woman with a bright future that I am proud to be your father at all times--not just once or twice--and no matter what you accomplish or choose to do with your time. Cruising sailors have known for a long time that the destination is far less important than the voyage. How we use the time that we have is more important than having a long time to live our lives. Do what makes you happy, what you find most interesting, intriguing, or fulfilling, and the rest of life will take care of itself."

I took his advice, and went to India.

He took his own advice too. For so many years I had little notion of his job, which he dedicated himself to for so many hours a day and left town several times year for. After doing a research project on a fisheries management topic that was near and dear to his career, I finally got a sense of his passion for fisheries management, saw how he felt found it interesting, intriguing and fulfilling.

On the water, in his sailboat, he was incredible. It was the ultimate practice for him: his love and appreciation for patience, method, and attention to detail met his love of adventure and challenge. I remember how happy he was, the first day he took me out on the sailboat. It was the day after my 18th birthday and I was feeling rather queasy from the festivities the night before. He was so proud to take me out that he didn't seem to notice me throwing up in the head downstairs.

It's easy for me to feel sad, and sometimes angry, about my dad dying. He should have never gotten cancer in the first place. I mourn the fact that he won't see me graduate from college, will never walk me down the aisle, or hold my children in his arms. But then I come home, see the home that he and my mom made for me and Jason, see the pictures, remember all the things my dad was there for. I will always remember him as strong, even when his spirit was dampened by cancer. I will remember him smiling, his crooked tooth winking out of his mouth, his eyes squeezed tight with joy and pride. And I'll remember him as a sailor, as a man who loved the sea, who understood and appreciated the ebb and flow of the tide.

I've chided myself for not spending more time with him, for not talking to him more in the last few months. But then I realize that even if I knew he were about to die, or even if he died 5 years from now, it would never be enough time, there would always be things left unsaid. As my mom is constantly reminding me these days, you don't get to choose how you die. Life is unfair, and it is constantly throwing confusing and unfortunate circumstances in our paths. But you do get to choose how you live, how you cope with life's uncertainty. My father, Jay Ginter, chose to live with grace, humility, and a deep love for both the comfortable routines and unpredictable adventures that life holds. I will always celebrate your life, dad. Always.