

Thoughts on Nagypapa

Debbie Heller, 24 April, 2013

I have known George for 29 years. It may sound strange, but it is in the last 6 weeks that I have truly learned what kind of man he was. I spent nearly every day at his bedside. Everyone kept thanking me for being there, but I am the one who is so very thankful. I didn't view it as a choice. I just did what needed to be done. At first I just wanted to be with Iby so she didn't have to be alone. That continued to be my primary motivation.

But something unexpected happened along the way. I was given a precious gift, the privilege and honor to spend the last weeks with a man we all know was remarkable. During this time, I did some caring for him. I held his hand, fixed his pillows and, most importantly, bought and fed him ice cream. But mostly I just got to be with him

I became so close to both George and Iby during this time. I have and will continue to tell Iby how I feel about her. But today I want to share what I learned about and from George. Like most of you, I have heard his stories of courage and determination in the face of the Holocaust. Of course I always believed he must have been incredibly strong and brave to survive all he endured and to have come through it with such a positive message. However, it wasn't until these last 6 weeks that I really understood how he was able to survive, and ultimately thrive, in the face of such extreme hardship so long ago.

As he lay in his hospital bed, I witnessed George fight through unthinkable challenges with courage, determination, kindness and sometimes even a sense of humor. Throughout it all he was always concerned about others, complementing his nurses and other caregivers, handing out finger monsters, and expressing his gratitude to us all. Although I think he believed his decision to stop fighting was somehow a failure, I see it as the most heroic decision of his life. He chose to react to circumstances over which he had no control. This was his motto, but for him it wasn't just a saying. His life was an ongoing example of how to face the moments that we cannot control. He lived his life with strength, compassion and wisdom and I will admire, respect, and love him forever.