

## Jo's Journey

### 3. 'Daddy's' Sauce - Acceptance

There are so many things that we grow accustomed to that we never really give much thought to. When I was a little girl, I used to watch dad sit down to his dinner and cover his chips with pepper and Daddies Brown Sauce. I remember taking a chip from his plate and my four year old pallet was offended by the sour, spicy flavour of the brown sauce...that's why it was 'daddy's'! The years flew by as they do and I remember as a teenager, seeing dad with his head in his books, researching prostate cancer....he was paranoid about this, convinced he would get it. Through his research, he discovered that apparently, soya milk and concentrated, heat treated tomatoes could potentially help to reduce the risks. From then on, it was red sauce- tomato ketchup. It didn't seem particularly strange at the time, but it's funny how a fear can influence you and the assumptions one can make.

We continued with our 'list' of things to do and see as much as we could. He got to stay in his lighthouse which was extremely lucky and we managed to stay in the old caravan park in mid wales, where we'd had most of our family holidays as I grew up. Bad weather was always a frustration as we knew we could not take next summer for granted. We were coming to terms with the diagnosis and what it meant...every day we cried, but every day we laughed. I knew that I was preparing when I asked my work colleague to show me how to use 'this' 'Google'! I'd heard of it, but I never needed it, because whenever I wanted some information previously, I'd simply call dad! He was my 'Google' whatever he didn't know, he had a book that would! Now, those calls to dad with random questions had stopped...I had to not only let him get his rest but learn to find out for myself. I know my mum was trying to bury bigger fears.

Dad had good days, and bad. He suffered side effects for a while from the various medications, as we all do when we take new tablets. My sister's organisational skills helped as she kept a diary of eating habits and how he responded to certain 'meds'. This proved invaluable later on as we could see patterns and how his dependancy on us was affected. If he was going through a 'bad period'...feeling sleepy and nauseous, we would always worry that this was his 'decline'. We've since discovered that it is quite common with this illness to have 'peaks and troughs' and the diary helped us to identify his reactions and so with the help from a particularly caring GP, we were able to combat this. It was all a learning curve, tablets for this and that, so we had our own way of identifying them. Dad used to refer to his Oramorph as his 'stop hurting me juice' At first, we found it a little daunting, there was a day when we were mortified as we thought we'd overdosed him owing to the conversions of ml and mg s, we did not tell him but we were able to get immediate advice by going online from Cancer Backup who reassured us as we observed dad reaching for the scrabble, wanting to challenge us as he felt great and was asking us to get off the phone unless we 'feared the challenge'!

The atmosphere in the home was tranquil, serene, light hearted. Petty arguments now seemed futile. We all adjusted to our new routines although mum still seemed to be in denial and wanted to block it out. That was fine as we knew that everyone has their own way of dealing with grief and difficult situations. Even though dad's mobility was now restricted and occasionally had to use his nebuliser as I had seen my asthmatic friend use in the past, he seemed quite serene. I think this period was reached when he knew that he was free to stay at home, which was his personal preference. I recall the conversation, dad had said that he felt he should go to hospital because he 'didn't want his kids to see him go downhill'. I laughed and said, 'So, you don't think we're gonna see you or visit you

in hospital then? Besides, to be at home would be more convenient and comfortable for us, without the restricted times and travelling.' I also pointed out to him his old saying describing love... 'warts n all'. There had been an underlying anxiety previously as to when and how he would 'go to hospital' or into a hospice which would have also provided a relaxed and homely atmosphere. It was decided...he would stay at home! However, we had not been told of the specialist hands on nursing services that would have been available to us free of charge in the home and this was always an underlying concern. However, for now, although we had rearranged the dining room and had a profiling bed delivered, and myself, mum and my sister were 'on rota' to sleep in the room on the spare bed we'd moved in there with him (just in case he found himself short of breath, needing the 'neb' in the night), we were fine playing cards, (even though dad still cheated!) reading, watching movies and chatting. To be truthful, dad really didn't want nurses in the home, reminding him of his illness as he put it. However, on reflection, it would have been reassuring to know that the service was there, had we needed it. This was a period of tranquility, serenity and love. A period of lovely memories despite the circumstances.

There was one particular afternoon that was extremely frightening. At the time, I had made it a personal rule not to travel more than twenty minutes away from the house. My brothers were out and we were desperate for a 'big shop', the cupboards were bare and we needed soap powder etc, so my sister and I nipped to the supermarket leaving mum with dad. Whilst we were out, we received a call from mum, screaming down the 'phone. Dad had collapsed and she said he'd stopped breathing. Within minutes we were back and the sight, I have to admit was distressing as he couldn't breathe and his eyes were rolled back. We called the emergency doctor, but knew they could take three to four hours to arrive and the clinical nurse specialist was not contactable at weekends. Dad had specifically stated that he did not want to go to hospital but we called the ambulance nevertheless. Months prior, dad and I had discussed a form of non verbal communication just in case he found himself unable to catch his breath and couldn't get his words out. (He also had a slight stammer which could worsen things) As I'd been with my friend during an asthma attack and recalled the difference this could have made, we agreed on a 'thumbs up or down' signal or a 'one blink for yes, two for no' system. When the ambulance drivers arrived, I got dad's attention and he indicated that he did NOT want to go to hospital. We thought that this was the end and for three very long, painful hours sat round his bed holding his hand. Suddenly, he stirred and slowly began to 'come round'. It was amazing, because just as the doctor arrived, he was sitting up, asking for a cup of tea and doing his crossword! I joked telling him to 'look ill' because the doctor was certainly visiting a different situation than had been reported! That night, I told him how scary the episode had looked and how much discomfort he appeared to be in and asked him how he was feeling at the time. He turned to me and said, 'I'm not scared anymore Jo. I just felt calm.' Maybe, the body does have a way of protecting us? It is only now that I know that this episode was caused by anxiety. A panic attack...worsened by his symptoms. I guess it stands to reason that someone who has never had a breathing disorder, would at times become very anxious. If I could go back in time, I would have looked into physiotherapy and complementary therapies which could have offered breathing exercises and relaxation techniques...as well as massage, and other stress relieving treatments for dad and the family...free of charge. Again, we live and learn!

And so, as I presented dad with his favourite steak and chips one night, I noticed that he covered them in brown sauce. 'Hey? Brown sauce?' I asked with a confused tone, it just looked so strange.'Yes, don't have to worry about the prostate anymore...I know what I've got, red sauce won't help me, but I plan to make the most of it and enjoy as much as I can!', he replied.

