

## Jo's Journey

### **The Biscuit - Grace**

I read a book written by Scot Peck called 'The Road Less Travelled and Beyond' during the last week I spent with dad. It helped me tremendously and seemed to open my mind to various ways of accepting what had happened to us and I personally, found great comfort in it. We all have our own way of dealing with grief and difficult times. In the book, the author explains his point so well when he refers to the inevitable 'stripping away' process that we all face in life that ultimately makes us grow and find 'grace'. He points out that we come into this life as a baby, unable to feed ourselves, walk, talk etc and that every person leaves this life the same way but in between, there's been a journey. He points out that for some, this process happens gradually over many years until they reach a grand old age, but for others, who may have been diagnosed with a terminal illness for example, the process, happens much more quickly but the result is the same. As I read this, I recalled my grandad, a very proud man who had served in the war, a brave, strong man as a youngster, struggle to change a light bulb as he could no longer stand on a chair and balance and the acceptance of his own 'stripping away' process. From then, I believed that somehow there were challenges in life that we had to face that would make us grow as individuals and justified dad's misfortune by a belief that somehow, he had 'passed his test' earlier than most. He was truly a stoical man.

We had been told that mesothelioma was a very painful disease, during the earlier stages of dad's nineteen month journey when he was simply taking paracetamol, he described the sensation/ 'discomfort' to be three layered. A 'stretchy' tingly feeling on the skin around the scar that the surgery had left and radiotherapy, a 'soreness' under the skin and a 'dull ache' inside. We always had faith that adequate pain relief would be administered when needed, after all, our rationale was that in this civilised life as we know it, we do not allow animals to suffer in any way and so that was not our main fear.

Dad's fear in the later stages we more philosophical and were centred around doubt. He recalled an incident some thirty years beforehand where he had killed a cockroach and said to me with a look of shame and remorse on his face, 'Come on Jo, if there is such a thing as heaven, after doing that, how could I possibly expect to get in there?' I found this to be one of the sweetest things I'd heard and simply pointed out that if it did exist, I think he would be fine because of his 'repentance'. I guess it is only natural in his position that one finds themselves reflecting and contemplating. We agreed, that whatever the beliefs, if there was 'nothing', then you wouldn't know anything about it, but if there was, then to have the faith that everything would be fine would be the appropriate way to think as there are only two certainties in life, the first of course is birth, the second, death which proves that it is completely natural. We took life one day at a time, and we continued to play cards and he continued to enjoy his audio books which were better when his medication made him sleepy. The ironic thing is that dad outlived two people who had come to offer their condolences on hearing the news of his diagnosis.

During the later stages, the doctor decided to introduce the syringe driver and for the next ten days or so, dad slipped into a deep, deep sleep. As he lay there peacefully, we played tranquil, soothing nature sounds on the CD player and read to him. Inevitably, there were one or two changes and progressions that we were startled by which we have since discovered the obvious clinical reason for, but over all, it was very peaceful.

We had the privilege to see the most beautiful sight which completely put us all at ease, for after lying there, motionless in the deepest of sleeps for what seemed like an eternity, suddenly, he stirred, turned his head and lifted it and gave us all the most amazingly, joyous smile! It was then I saw true grace, then he left us.

You may recall that we had laughed about a certain 'French & Saunders' sketch on the day of his diagnosis? Well, just before this final stage, one of the last things he had said to me when I asked him how he was... 'Well, I'd be okay if that man in the hood at the bottom of the bed would stop asking me if I'd like a biscuit! You know, I think I'm ready to have one off him now.'