

## **Dance of Freedom**

A tribute to a woman

by Jared Lee

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Mom is dying. It seems odd for me to write those words, but I suppose I need to learn to adjust to that fact. All my life she's been there. She was the one that made me feel better with a book and a wet cloth when I had the flu. It was her that brought warm soup to my bed when I didn't feel like I could move. She was the one I knew I could always count on. Even when I got older and didn't want to admit that I needed her help, still she was there. So in light of all those things it's a hard adjustment to make. When you love someone and then you learn that they won't be on earth much longer, well honestly it's just odd. There's no other way to say it. You live day to day as normal, but overarching every thought, act, and emotion is the knowledge that that person is not going to be here for much longer.

It is now spring. The leaves are starting to come out on the trees; there is the smell of honeysuckle that wafts in the windows at night. It is a smell that threatens to carry you away to the land of your dreams and make everything okay once again. We live on a river. I am a grown adult, and I moved back in with my parents after college like so many others of my generation. In light of all that's happening now, I'm glad I did.

I remember it was almost two years ago now. I was in college and had gone overseas for the summer. When I returned my parents picked me up at the airport with my oldest sister. We stopped and ate on the way. I even remember I had the nachos and a coke, Mom ate ribs. She has always loved ribs. We had eaten our meal, mine

incredibly delicious since I hadn't had western food in months. We were driving home and Mom and I were in the back seat. I will never forget it. Mom looked at me, she took my hand. And she said, "Jared, Momma has cancer." Sheez! There's no way to describe the bomb drop you feel when you hear words like those! I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. In a sick sort of way I wanted to open the car door and jump out. I was thinking, "there's no way. I got in the wrong car at the airport. Who are these people?" There were a hundred things going through my head. Most of them I didn't recognize, or else I didn't dwell on the thought long enough to make it stick. My mind and my emotions were literally reeling for days, months, well maybe even years.

That's been almost two years ago, and yet here we are after two long arduous years with nothing having really changed. Mom has had three surgeries since then, several different types of radiation. The doctors have used her as a lab rat on new and different techniques. All of which we felt would heal her. We've had people all over the country praying for her. People of all denominations from Pentecostal to Catholic, and even a few Mormons have lifted her up in their prayers. There's not been a stone left unturned and yet here we are, the saga continues, Mom has cancer and somehow, someway, we must figure out how, but life goes on.

We all deal with the situation in different ways. I'm the eternal realist. I don't ever like to be optimistic about anything. There was the time when I felt like, "well ok, Mom has cancer, but she's going to get surgery, they know what they're doing and they will help treat it and it will go away." There was a time that was easy to believe. It started two years ago as a tumor in the muscles of her back. Now as it's a tumor that has spread into her lungs with no doubt of going further, and the doctors saying there's not

much else they can do. Well it becomes a little bit harder to have faith in them. Then there's God. You know the truth of the matter is that I have absolutely no doubt that God can heal her if he so chooses. I just don't know whether that is what God is going to do. I've heard all the opinions from one side of this to the other. Some people say God wants his children to live a good long healthy life and that if we trust him he will heal us. You know that may be, and I certainly don't want to take issue with that here, but I have a different opinion. My view is that cancer and an early death may be exactly what God wants for some people. I mean in a way, isn't it loving of God to take us sooner? Here we sit on this sinful earth performing our daily duties, all the while longing for home where we will feast at his table. Why would we want to stay? And so I don't see why we have any reason to expect anything from God in this life. Our daily bread and Himself is all that has been promised us, and it should be enough.

Then there is Dad. Dad doesn't necessarily hold the opinion that God promises long life and health, but he does think that God will heal her. I figure there's nothing at all wrong with that. I guess I would just rather be happily surprised than miserably dejected. I fear that might happen. You never know what will happen. Mom might not have another six months or she could be healed tomorrow in a miraculous way. I want to lean towards the worse so I won't be crushed anymore than necessary. They say there are stages that cancer patients and their families go through. I think they are denial, anger, bargaining, grief and acceptance. I feel like I have reached acceptance. I think Dad might still be stuck in denial. You never know, really it's so hard to express how you feel about all of this that I honestly don't know where he is. In fact he could be well into acceptance, but trusting more than me that God's heart is to heal her.

Mom is a rock. I have never known anyone who I admire as much. She has faith like I can't believe. Here she is, dying of cancer, hurting, suffering sleepless nights and the fear of many more to come. Yet through all this she has the faith of Abraham. She was telling me that she was praying and asking God what she could do for him. This has been a big deal to Mom, she has felt unproductive and useless, and so she was asking what she could do for God in this time of her life. My eyes are starting to water up at the memory of what she said His answer was. She said God told her, "die for me." And Mom being the woman of faith she is has opened up her arms to accept this commission. No arguments, no doubts, not even any real fears. She's just willingly and joyfully going into the next phase of her existence. Her father died from cancer about eight years ago now. She saw what it did to him. She saw his skin turn yellow when the tumor hit his liver. She saw him lose 80 pounds because he couldn't eat. She saw him forget everything that was happening around him as the pain increased and the morphine doses got higher. Mom witnessed all this happen to her own father, and yet here she sits welcoming her cup in life, what she feels God has called her to. I told you she was amazing.

My sisters are honestly too far away and I talk to them too little to truly be able to feel comfortable reporting how they feel about this. Tammy is the oldest. She is nine years older than I am. She is married to a conservative radio talk show host. They live near the beach in North Carolina. Doug is my brother in law; he is this Rush Limbaugh type figure in his local community. He gets on the radio and starts bashing politicians and liberals in general. Then, I swear it's out of spite, he has begun this huge gun collection. He goes in to the pawnshop every couple of weeks and buys guns that are so

old they aren't worth anything, but I know he is only doing it because he wants to rebel against the gun laws. He's a great guy, he would never shoot anybody, but he has this thing about the government getting involved in our lives too much and he wants to stop it. At the very least he wants to get on the radio and talk about it. Don't get me wrong, I love him. He's a great guy. I just think his political persuasions and attitudes are hilarious.

My Mom is actually very much like her son in law when it comes to politics. She is the type that can watch c-span for hours and never get bored. I've seen her watch a vote in the senate and be practically on the edge of her seat, like it was a football game or something. I suppose that's good. My generation is just so complacent, we don't care about any of it. I think Mom's most shining Moment was the day Doug was broadcasting live from Washington DC. He was talking to JC Watts, who is an African American republican congressman. I would like to say what state he's from but my complacency gets the best of me. Doug told JC that his mother in law was a huge fan and they talked about her on the air, then Mr. Watts gave Doug an autographed picture for her. She still has it in a frame somewhere around here I'm sure.

Tammy is a schoolteacher and the one that always has to do things like organize the prom. In fact she is busy doing that right now. Her school isn't the richest school. You know how there can be two schools in a county, and one of them is the rich kids and one is the poor kids? Well Tammy teaches the poor kids. These are the kids whose family have been commercial fishermen for generations and there is little doubt that they will follow their parents into the same profession. It's neat to hear the stories of life on those islands that I hear from Tammy. There is a whole little subculture out there among

the people there that is really intriguing. Some of her kids have to drive as much as 45 minutes to get to school, so you can imagine how separated from the world these people are. Very few people ever actually leave and never come back. In a way it's kind of refreshing to see people who are committed to their roots in a culture like ours. Most Americans have no roots, we move around from one place to the next, never committing to a place or a people, only to ourselves and to what is in our own best interest. Many cultures have us beat in that area. The Islamic cultures place such value on their elders that it makes me feel bad as an American. We just push forward with our lives as our grandparents are dying off. Those who are older than us are wiser, more educated, and deserve more than we can ever even give them, the least we could do is try. Well ok I'm done with that soapbox.

Robin is 10 months younger than Tammy, so she's eight years older than I am. Robin is married to a great guy, a youth pastor in the North Carolina Mountains. They have three children Ginny, Tara, and Michael. Ginny has Angelmans syndrome. That is basically a defect on the fifteenth chromosome that results in severe mental retardation. She is such a sweet girl. You would rarely see a happier child. She laughs and smiles all the time. She loves life to the fullest. Unless she has hurt herself on something she rarely is upset by anything. Give that some thought. Why do you suppose that a five-year old with severe mental retardation would be happier and enjoy life more than the rest of us?

Mike is Robin's husband. He is a great husband and father. When he married my sister I told him if he ever hurt her I'd kill him. I suppose I was an overprotective younger brother. I've told him since that I'm glad he married her, because I certainly could not have picked a better husband for her. He'll come home from a long day and

tell her to sit down, and then he will rub her back, clean her house, play with his kids. So many men that I know come home and they want peace and quiet. Well who can blame them? Mike's not like that. Well I'm sure he is like that, but he sacrifices that desire to please Robin, and that's awesome to me.