

Update

Losing Spencer and Rick

The summer of 2015 was horrendous on most family standards. We lost both of my brothers within 69 days of each other. Hard to imagine but Mom had problems of her own which braced the shock of losing two wonderful children. She suffered a fall which changed her active life forever.

I am not sure if this is good or bad but focusing on her own injuries and rehabilitation shielded her from the grief and emotional trauma of losing Spencer and Rick in one summer. She was unable to attend both funerals.

Spencer's death was a shock while Rick's was inevitable. None of us knew Spencer had Cancer. It is still unclear if he knew about it. If he did, he did a great job keeping it a secret from Kim and Alexis, as well as the rest of the family and friends who loved and adored him. We all knew he was in the hospital in June of 2015, but we never could imagine his sudden death. Nor could we imagine the mystery and unanswered questions related to his departure.

I started calling Mom every day since her accident. I talked to her one afternoon from work and wished her well for the rest of the day. I was at work and proceeded to do just that in the Production Department. When I returned to the cell phone at my desk there was an urgent message from her to call. I immediately grew concerned because I had just hung up with her 10 minutes prior. What could be so urgent?

I called with my usual "hi Mom," when she answered. She immediately responded with the most unbelievable and shocking news. "Spencer is dying. "

Obviously, I was shocked beyond believe. "How can that be, Mom?"

“He has Cancer and he is dying.”

I cannot remember how the rest of our phone call went after she broke the news. All I knew is I had to go to New Jersey and fast.

If one of my brothers was dying it was supposed to be Rick. He had ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease). If you were to tell me one of my brothers was dying 10 minutes prior I would have guessed Rick. But it was Spencer. How could this be? But it was to be. He died the next day on June 18, 2015. I flew to New Jersey as fast as I could.

I lost one brother and was about to lose another. After spending several days with Rick and everyone at the funeral, I was confident Rick would last at least a year. After all, it would be too much for all of us to lose both in such a short time.

Knowing my time with my last remaining brother was short, I planned a trip the following month to visit and spend time with Rick. I knew his condition and did not want to waste time as precious as time had become. I scheduled a trip with Debbie for August 27.

We had a connection through St. Louis. When we arrived, there was a phone message from Raina to call her as soon as I could. Upon hearing her words, Debbie gasped. She already knew what I was too naïve to comprehend. I called Raina, while Debbie moved to the seat next to me at a restaurant. She did not need to listen to Raina explain to me that Rick had passed away that morning.

Spencer died suddenly and surprisingly because he did not take care of himself. Both of them, along with their close friend Mark Feldman, had Hepatitis-C. Mark died first also from liver cancer. Why didn’t Spencer take care of himself? Why didn’t he learn the consequences when Mark died? Why didn’t he seek medical attention? Why didn’t he know he had Cancer? Or did he know?

Rick was a different story. He took his Hepatitis very seriously and did seek medical attention for it. Then he became diabetic, which he originally thought was going cause his demise. Then came ALS.

Rick started losing his speech suddenly. The first diagnosis was a minor stroke. For six months he treated the wrong disease. How much better could his life had been if we

started fighting ALS from the beginning? Perhaps it would not have made a difference but it was frustrating knowing how much time was wasted.

Unlike Spencer, Rick worked hard to combat all of his issues. But there were too many. His disease progressed as expected. Some people have been able to live 15 or more years before succumbing to ALS. Rick went a bit faster and perhaps that was a good thing. He sometimes talked about not sticking around when the going got tough. He had no intention of becoming a vegetable and he didn't. We all believe he left on his terms and good for him. I just wish I had that one last visit with him before he died. I had so much I wanted to say to him, knowing he could not respond other than a nod or a wink. I had it all rehearsed and scheduled. I made it part of his eulogy.

I eulogized both of my brothers that summer. Shortly after that, I spoke at a memorial service for an old girlfriend who I lived with for two years and considered her to be my number two wife. It was a summer I just assume forget.

Mom is still fighting for some resemblance of her life. She suffered her fourth Stroke in early September of 2018. The first three were mild but the fourth was monumental. It has taken much of her away from us which hurts. She has always been such an inspiration and positive resource for so many people. It is difficult to see her struggle just to hold on to what little she has left. She is such a trooper! And not to mention, a fighter!

Her accident did not have to happen if it were not for two very uncompassionate gas station employees. Just this morning I witnessed a woman trying to unload a large television out of her car to return to Best Buy. She was struggling with it and hurt her hand in the process. I asked her if she needed help. She was so happy to hear from me and I did help her with the equipment and brought it into the store for her. She was very grateful.

I am happy she appreciated my assistant but really...It is, or should be, our responsibility to help, or at least offer. That is how I was raised. That is how honorable people behave.

Given that, Mom needed to add some air to her tires. She drove to a nearby gas station and asked both attendants to help. They both said, "No."

She did not expect this lack of concern from two young and able-bodied men. She was very upset. She stormed out of the station toward her car and did not look where she was going. She did not see the curb and tripped over it. She landed on her right side, breaking parts of her shoulder, arm, hips, and leg. She was in rehab for a very long time and could not attend either funeral. But let's give credit to one of these gas station employees from the low end of the gene pool...One of them called an ambulance.

She never fully recovered from that fall. She never played golf (her passion) again. Her life is now a mere shell of its former self. She used to be very social, physically active, and fun loving. She now devotes most of her time to making the best of her situation in as much as she can. She worked very hard to get back to a point where she could move with a walker and live as much as she can.

She lost her energy. She lost her shopping. She lost most of what made Charlotte the wonderful kindred spirit she was prior to the accident. She also lost two of her sons. Too much for one person. However, she keeps moving forward, making the best of her situation.

This last Stroke was a big one. She is unable to swallow which means she can no longer eat, one of the few joys she had left. She gets nourishment from a feeding tube going directly into her stomach. She has been in the Rehab section of Sinai Residence for several months with very little chance of her ever living independently again.

All this because of two schmucks at a gas station who would not help an old lady put air in her tires.





Rick’s adopted children (Matt and Lee) and all of his grandchildren, two of which are named for him.

On the previous page Mom is lighting a candle with Alexis at her Bat Mitzvah.

Mom is working very hard to regain her swallow. She set herself a very high goal to return to her apartment in the Independent Living section of Sinai Residence in Boca Raton. All of the medical experts do not give her much of a chance. They arrive at this from a medical perspective and based on human reality. However, they don’t know my Mother, and they don’t know her heart, and what she can accomplish if, at first, to dream. She is determined to go back to her apartment and I believe in her as she believes in me.

She always had faith and me and kept telling me, “My money is on you.”

Mom, you have had great success throughout your life. You have turned friendship into an art form. You have taken a positive mental attitude to the highest of levels. You have made each day of your life “a masterpiece.”

This time, my money is on you, Mom!



Four generations of the Kass family.