

Daughter to Run Marathon in Memory of Dad

Is it possible for an active, healthy endurance athlete to be hit with the devastation of being diagnosed with Chronic Myelomonocytic Leukemia? For Jim Reading, father of Erica Reading, it was. The diagnosis shocked the Reading family as within 36 hours of checking Jim into the hospital, he was placed on life support and continued his battle over the next four weeks.

Prior to Jim's unfortunate diagnosis, he was an endurance athlete and competitive cyclist. He lived a very healthy lifestyle by watching the foods he ate and monitoring his heart rates while cycling. He loved athletics and coached Erica's softball and basketball teams growing up.

Jim retired in 2004 where he spent his winters in Fort Myers, Fla., and summers in Oklahoma City so that he could train year-round. He was a member of the Bicycle League of Norman (Okla.) and the Caloosa Riders (Ft. Myers), where he was praised for his inclusive nature of new riders and safety practices on the road.

In June of 2010 while making the drive back to Oklahoma City for the summer from Florida, Jim became sick. Once he reached Oklahoma, he was given a Z-Pack to fight infection, but the medicine did nothing as he continued to feel ill over the next month. Throughout the sickness Jim remained strong and completed a 90-mile bike ride for a fundraiser for the local firemen, but the following week he felt more ill and was taken to the doctor. By that Saturday Jim was taken to the hospital. Erica immediately drove from Kansas City to be by her father's bedside, where Jim's fate was soon to follow.

"I was completely stunned by the leukemia diagnosis at the hospital," said Erica. "While my initial response was shock, my dad was already on life support, and my sister and I had to make his treatment decisions immediately. We began chemotherapy the following day and had an oncologist at MD Anderson consult with my dad's oncologist to determine the most aggressive form of treatment."

Jim never knew of his diagnosis and was never able to regain his strength to be removed from his ventilator. He fought incredibly hard to fight over the next four weeks. Erica believed her father was so healthy that it hid his symptoms until the Leukemia aggressively attacked his lungs.

"While it's so hard not to have had the opportunity to say goodbye properly, my sister and I consider it such a blessing that he never knew he had Leukemia," said Erica. "He would have been so angry if he couldn't go out and ride his bike due to an illness."

Erica stressed how proud she was of him and the impact he had on her life.

"It's so easy to roll your eyes at the goofy things your parents say in front of your friends or colleagues, but I'm not sure I ever really thanked him for the positive impact he made in my life," said Erica. "My dad had an incredibly strong work ethic – a strive for success and a fantastic inclusive nature that made any person feel welcome around him. For those, and so many other reasons, I continue to be proud he's my dad."

Jim may have lost his battle with Chronic Myelomonocytic Leukemia, but his legacy lives on through his family as Erica and her sister Jessica attempt to do something fun every year on behalf of their father.

“My proudest accomplishment was fundraising for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and completing the Seattle Marathon in June,” said Erica. “My dad was such an accomplished and dedicated athlete, that all I want to do is honor him with setting endurance goals and achieving them.”

The Seattle run was Erica’s first marathon and the upcoming Waddell & Reed Kansas City Marathon with Ivy Funds will be her second. There was no doubt for Erica that she wouldn’t complete her first marathon and expects nothing less when she runs in October.

“I knew it would be emotional to run in my dad’s memory, but I was so pleasantly surprised that the emotion was pride,” said Erica. “Not one tear fell in Seattle and not one tear will fall in sadness in Kansas City because I choose to focus on how proud I continue to be of my dad, and how proud I know he would be of me for accomplishing these goals.”

The Waddell & Reed Kansas City Marathon with Ivy Funds may come and go, but the lessons that Jim Reading left his family will continue to live on.

“First and foremost, my dad always exemplified a strong work ethic,” said Erica. “He worked hard and he expected the same from his team. That work ethic translates to sport as well, and he was always committed to whatever activity he was pursuing at the time.”

If you are like the Reading family and are affected in some way by Lymphoma, remember that there are places where hope can shine through, and for Erica, that’s representing her father, Jim Reading at the Waddell & Reed Kansas City Marathon with Ivy Funds.