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Web Exclusive: Eulogy for Dr. Phillip Berman

The following eulogy was given by Robert Brooks, MD, on February 10, 2009, to the Berman family, including his wife, Judy; daughters, Sloane, 22, and Spencer, 18; and son, Skye, 9, at [Phillip Berman's](#) memorial service in San Diego.

I hate cancer, and I loved Phil. So how ironic, Judy, that it was Phil's cancer that reunited our families five years ago.

As most of you know, Phil was a two-time cancer survivor, having had testicular cancer as a young man, followed by a second and more aggressive form of cancer in the prime of his life that most expected would take his life within months.

As was typical of Phil, however, he did not follow the playbook, and his sheer willpower and tenacity allowed him to survive a remarkable five years. Shortly after his diagnosis, Phil and I began a series of one-on-ones that typically involved some form of transportation with wheels.

First, it was our rides around Coronado Island on grown up bikes, usually ending up at the bay sharing a cup of coffee, or, in Phil's case, tea; enjoying the beauty of the San Diego skyline, talking life, and solving the world's problems. A two-wheeler progressed to a grown up tricycle and then on to a Segway, and, finally, a motorized scooter, our last little outing having been 10 days ago on Phil and Judy's anniversary. And it's hard to believe that only two weeks ago, Phil could be seen at the Hotel Del Coronado getting in his morning workout as painful and difficult as that must have been.

One of my most memorable moments with Phil was a month or so after his diagnosis in January 2004 when I asked him how he was feeling and if he was scared. Without missing a beat, I remember him saying he wasn't so much scared as he was "pissed off" and sad. He went on to tell me that he was really not angry that he had cancer for a second time. It was the statistical luck of the draw, according to Phil; but, rather, because he would not likely live to fully enjoy the fruits of his labor and grow old with Judy. He was also sad thinking he would miss the important milestones in the lives of his children.

Skye, one of your dad's greatest fears was not being around long enough to create memories of you two together—and to have a chance to watch you play baseball. And Spence, he wanted to see you Bat Mitzvahed and he wanted to teach you to drive and then see you off to college. And Sloane, he wanted to watch you grow into the remarkable young woman you have become. On the baseball thing—Skye,

it was only days after that conversation that I remember talking to your dad after you hit a ball and the flying bat whacked him in the head. And he said to me: “Remember that thing about Skye and baseball? Well, forget it!”

Phil’s will to live meant he got to see every one of those milestones.

Phil leaves behind a remarkable legacy, most notably his family but also in the field of medicine both as a pioneer in radiology and as a man who twice dealt with cancer.

In December of 2004, Phil and Judy attended a cancer survivorship retreat held each year at Miraval in Tucson for women cancer survivors. Phil had the distinction of being the first man to attend this program and not being a spa kind of guy, some of you may know he hated massages—something I never quite understood. My wife Ellen convinced him to at least get a pedicure. One thing led to another and Phil emerged from the spa an hour later with one toenail painted red.

We made a pledge that day to paint one additional toenail as Phil marked each year of survivorship. In January, Judy, Ellen, and I had the honor of painting all the toes on Phil’s left foot red to celebrate his fifth year anniversary. Some of you may not know that it was Phil’s red toenail that led to the creation of his blog, [RedToeNail.org](#), which has since allowed thousands of cancer survivors, along with their families and loved ones, to stay connected during the scary and difficult times that are a part of the cancer journey.

Judy, Sloane, Spence, and Skye ... it has been our family’s privilege to have been on this ride with you guys over the past five years. Your husband and father was a remarkable man. Never once did I hear him complain or ask “Why me?” Rather, during our many phone calls and visits, he never missed the opportunity to ask how I was doing or how Ellen was doing when she was dealing with some health issues.

In medicine we talk about “teachable moments”—that is situations when we are meant to learn a lesson and carry it with us. Phil’s real legacy has been a lifetime of teachable moments for us all in creativity, drive, passion, commitment, grace, courage, and friendship.

Sleep well with the stars and the angels, my friend.