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Web Exclusive: Another Son

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Finalist Essay: CURE's 2008 Extraordinary Healer Award for Oncology Nursing

In 1996, we were given three years. That April, my dad was diagnosed with multiple myeloma—an incurable, but often manageable, cancer of the blood that is relatively rare.

We had some great chemo nurses right from the start. Randy was not my dad's first nurse, but he was his favorite from the first time they met. Only a few weeks into our first round of chemotherapy, it was Randy's confidence and comfortable presence that put us all at ease. Randy knew my dad was not the only patient in the chemo room. He provided compassion and care for mom and me as well. His care helped us to be strong and at our best for my dad.

Randy's skill and easy manner gave my dad the chance to settle back and trust that he was being well cared for. The chemo regimen was difficult to manage, and over the years it became increasingly complicated. Randy was there for us—not just to take care of the challenges for us, but to remind us that *we could do it!* He cheered us on and encouraged us. He welcomed us to be partners in my dad's care, not just bystanders. Randy would hope, pray, and cheer us on; and on the darker days, he would always share our pain.

In the midst of our care, Randy lost his own parent to cancer. That experience only seemed to heighten his compassion for us. He graciously accepted our condolences, and let us be a small support for him through a time we knew would be part of our future some day.

Over the years, my dad began to request that only Randy administer his chemotherapy. Dad looked forward to their time together. Even when Randy was assigned to other clinic duties, he always managed to look in on my dad at each visit, just to say, “Hi Bob, how's the farm?” or “Listen, did you hear the one about the”

The thing that makes Randy so special to us isn't just his clinical expertise, which is truly exceptional. We were blessed to have many exceptionally skilled providers. But what set Randy apart was that in the midst of treating my dad for a difficult cancer that would eventually take his life, he encouraged my dad to be a person, not a cancer patient, not a victim, a survivor, or any other label used to describe people who have cancer. He encouraged him to just be a *person* who had interests, responsibilities, a family, and a sense of humor.

Ironically, on those days that my dad came to the clinic for treatment, he was able

to laugh and joke and tell great stories of his youth. He was just a person talking and dreaming about farming, hunting, traveling, grandchildren, and marriage. Randy was there to listen, to share in his life. Randy helped him put the cancer aside each and every time he came in for treatment. He gave my dad chemotherapy for his cancer, and friendship and compassion for his soul.

Dad lived 11 years with multiple myeloma. By the last few years, Randy had become like another son to my dad. He cared. He called. He always seemed to know what we needed. He went above and beyond the call of duty to be sure we all felt cared for. And he protected my dad's dignity at every stage. He was compassionately honest with us.

Randy's willingness to give so much to us, and, at the same time, his openness to receive what we had to offer him, helped us to feel we had something to offer. We were not just the current victims of an awful disease. We still had things to contribute. He understood that for our family, care was not required only for my father; but that my mom and my siblings were the beneficiaries of his concern as well.

Randy's final act of compassion was the day of my dad's funeral; he served as a pall bearer with my other siblings. He walked with us through the entire journey of my dad's cancer. We are grateful for his care.