

A Superhuman Dad's Life & Legacy Live on Through his Son

By: Scott Meller

I'll never forget the day, it was May 5, 2015, the day before my 39th birthday. I was at work at Feldmar Watch Company with my father, as had been the case 6 days a week for the past 22 years of my life. My father had been feeling ill with a stomachache for about a week. He had gone in for a gastroenterologist appointment but there was no reason to believe it was anything serious, it was a stomachache. His doctor called and requested that he come into the office at 3:00pm. When he returned to our store at around 5pm he asked me to join him in our private office.

We sat down and he proceeded to tell me that he had just been told he had pancreatic cancer. I sat there, stunned by the news, while he explained that he didn't know much yet, but that we'd learn more in the coming days as he began his battle with pancreatic cancer. He finished what he was telling me and left for home. I sat alone in our office, holding my head in my hands, tears running down my cheeks and a million thoughts swirling through my mind. Nothing was clear other than the distinct feeling that the lifelong security blanket my dad created by always being there for me was suddenly yanked away. It wasn't the pain that he was gone, or that he had given up hope, it was the overwhelming sadness that nothing would be the same, ever again.

Over the following days, he had procedures to prepare him for his cancer treatments. He began his first round of chemotherapy, and after 8 weeks, we received news that the tumor had shrunk. The doctor tempered our enthusiasm about this news with the fact

that shrinkage, while always good news in reference to tumors, is common during the first round of treatment, but not necessarily a sign of things to come. Sure enough, after completing the second round of chemotherapy, we received news that the tumor was no longer reacting positively to that treatment and that a more aggressive type of chemotherapy would be needed.

Looking back, I can see this was the beginning of the end. My father began his more aggressive treatment and really struggled. After each session he would become exceptionally sick and weak, requiring three to four days just to return to a mere shadow of himself. After a few sessions, he became so sick and weak that the cancer treatments were postponed until his "health" and strength improved. I remember one specific day when he asked me to join him and his wife for a doctor's visit. He needed extra help getting in and out of the car, and a strong hand to hold while walking for balance. During the chat with the doctor, he told my father that he needed to eat in order to build up his strength or he would die. The visit concluded and we returned to their house. I was helping my father out of his car, holding onto him with him holding onto me so he wouldn't fall. We were face to face so I took the opportunity to tell him, "dad, you need to eat." He replied, "I can't." He loved food! It wasn't that he didn't want to eat, it was that eating made him so sick.

Over the next few weeks his condition continued to deteriorate. In just six short months after he was diagnosed, my dad, the superhuman, perfectly healthy and incredibly strong man, had been reduced to a mere shadow of himself by this horrific disease. In the early evening of November 30th, I played his favorite song for him, held my phone on the pillow close to his ear so he could hopefully hear, I held his hand, and I spoke the words, "dad, it's okay, go ahead and go." And he did, he took

his last breath at 6:25pm.

After some time had passed, having spent many months thinking about him, remembering and recalling so many memories, there was one thought that came to mind and has stuck with me ever since. The day he uttered the words, *I can't* to me. It was the only time, in my entire life, that I ever heard him say those two words. Pancreatic cancer had broken the unbreakable, it had taken my superhuman dad.

Scott connected with the Hirshberg's Patient & Family Support Coordinator, sharing a story of heartbreak followed by steady resolve to help find a cure for pancreatic cancer in honor of his dad. Soon after, he gathered a team of employees and loved ones for the [LA Cancer Challenge](#) as Team Sol Meller, in honor of his superhuman father.

To-date, Scott's LACC team has fundraised over \$74,000 thanks to loved ones and employees from the [Feldmar Watch Company](#). Since joining the LACC, Team Sol Meller has consistently been a top fundraising team. Scott refuses to give up and continues to honor his dad's memory, by sharing Sol's story, through his LACC team, and by continuing to raise awareness.

[Read inspiring tributes >](#) [Share Your Story >](#)

Stories from families & friends touched by pancreatic cancer often show the resilience and courage of the human spirit. Loved ones dedicate their time and effort every day to fight for a cancer-free future and every journey helps pave the way to a cure. Share your story, make a dedication and help raise awareness today.

Turning Pain Into Purpose

In 2022, Whitney Goldin's mom, Karen, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, a disease Whitney has become too familiar with but never imagined would touch the life one parent, let alone two. The diagnosis came after the family's devastating losses of Whitney's father, grandfather, and great-grandfather to the same disease. "My dad passed away in 2021 and then it was a shock for my mom to be diagnosed in 2022. I decided I'm just going to turn my sadness into action." Today, Whitney is ready to end the cycle of pancreatic cancer in her family. She's already turning that sadness into action by raising awareness and rallying her entire community in the Chicago area with her Purple Ribbon Event, [Pushing Back Against Pancreatic Cancer](#).

Whitney, a loving mother, dedicated daughter, and attorney has generously shared her family's remarkable story to help raise awareness since her mom's diagnosis. "Getting to this path has been riddled with pain, seeing both of my parents go through what they've gone through," said Goldin. "This devastating disease is impacting too many of my loved ones. Enough is enough, I'm done." Whitney wouldn't sit idly by without taking their own action. By February of 2023, her mom was scheduled to have the Whipple surgery and Whitney was hosting a [Purple Ribbon Event](#) to benefit the Hirshberg Foundation. "I have never planned an event before other than my kids birthday parties so I have zero event planning experience but I started doing some research. I called the Hirshberg Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research and I said, 'Listen, I'm going to plan an event and it's going to be in three months and I have no idea if anyone will even come, any money will be raised, but anything I raise I'm going to send to you.'"

Hosted at Temple Sholom of Chicago, [Pushing Back Against](#)

Pancreatic Cancer featured yoga, brunch provided by a variety of Chicago eateries, tequila mimosas, and a silent auction with items from top Chicago businesses. Whether you live in Chicago or any other city or town across the country, Whitney has demonstrated the importance of sometimes going outside your comfort zone when it comes to helping raise funds for pancreatic cancer research and patient programs, “I went into the event planning process trying to be as open minded as possible with what I thought would attract the most people and raise the most awareness. The event evolved as more and more people registered and as more and more businesses donated. I took a deep breath of gratitude at every turn, and tried to remain as flexible as possible.” By the end of the day on February 2nd, her community had helped raise over \$42,000! “The day of the event was more perfect than I could have ever imagined. The two-hour event passed by in the blink of an eye. But at the very end, I reminded myself to take a step back and to witness everything come to fruition. It was so touching to be surrounded by so many people- all with the communal goal of raising awareness.” Whitney shared.

Throughout the planning process, Whitney continued raising awareness in her Chicago community through a televised segment with [Fox32 Chicago News](#), and an interview with [Chicago's Very Own WGN9](#). She has shown unwavering support throughout her mom's journey and continues to connect with other families by sharing her family's story, including a recent [podcast interview](#) on *Living Hope: Your Journey with Pancreatic Cancer*. Today, with the help of a committed medical team her mom is thriving. She continues her journey back to health one day at a time. Whitney is ready to create a new cancer-free path for her mother and family, “One day, there will be a cure, and I want to do everything I can to help us get there,” she shares. She has found a new purpose in her life – to eradicate pancreatic

cancer. “We’re going to get closer and closer to a cure and I will do everything I can throughout my life and devote myself to getting closer to that,” she said. “I can tell you that that is my new goal. Forever.”

Marathon Goddess, Julie Weiss Raises One Million Dollars for Pancreatic Cancer Research

Ten years ago, Julie Weiss finished her journey of 52 marathons in 52 weeks, in a quest to raise one million dollars for pancreatic cancer research and became known as the *Marathon Goddess*. On Sunday, March 19th, Weiss will be celebrated by pancreatic cancer survivors and supporters everywhere as she crosses the Los Angeles Marathon finish line yet again, and at the Hirshberg Foundation’s Purple People Party Cheer Station near Mile 21. The celebration will commemorate Weiss raising more than one million dollars for pancreatic cancer research over the past decade, and helping raise awareness about the disease that has the highest mortality rate of all major cancers.

MY BIGGEST FAN & INSPIRATION...

In 2010, following the death of her father to pancreatic cancer, Julie remained determined to make a difference, and running gave her a purpose. Just one week after he passed, she fulfilled their dream for her to qualify and run the Boston Marathon. He was, after all, her biggest fan. “I know he was there with me.

He was the wind at my back and had the best seat in the house my heart after I ran the Boston Marathon in 2011," Julie shared. From there, she decided to turn her passion into a purpose and embarked on an incredible endeavor to raise hope, money and awareness for pancreatic cancer. In time, Julie chose the name Marathon Goddess, but is quick to point out its true meaning that it is not about her, it's a name that allows her to encourage others to embrace their passion and let it shine.

A \$1 MILLION DOLLAR GOAL...

Since 2010, Julie has made many ties in the pancreatic cancer community. She has witnessed the ups and downs of statistics and gotten to know the faces and journeys of countless survivors whom she has run in honor of. Through the ups and downs, her focus hasn't waivered: "When I began this journey, my objective was to raise a million dollars to find a cure for pancreatic cancer, the disease that took my father away from me, and to help others affected by this insidious disease," said Weiss. "Julie set out to achieve a lofty goal, at the grass roots level, and never wavered in her commitment to see it through," said Lisa Manheim, Executive Director of the Hirshberg Foundation. "In addition to being our partner in helping spotlight pancreatic cancer, the awareness and money she raised has helped fund much-needed research bringing us one step closer to finding a cure." Throughout the years, Weiss has received support and donations from corporate sponsors and running organizations, however, the majority of her fundraising has come from individuals and families that have been impacted by the disease and those she has inspired through her running.

PHILANTHROPIST & AMBASSADOR...

As a marathon runner, author, philanthropist, ambassador and advocate, Weiss keeps busy by sharing enduring stories of hope, empowerment, loss and resilience from patients and families fighting for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. She has remained a fervent supporter of the Hirshberg Foundation throughout her journey, motivating fellow runners on the Hirshberg Training Team each year, running the LA Cancer Challenge 5K and receiving the Never Give Up Award, leading a team at Tour de Pier, and inspiring communities across the country to Never Give Up hope. She has been a spokesperson for the Hirshberg Foundation's successful fundraising campaign, *52 Races for 52 Faces*, a year-long, philanthropic crusade in which she competitively ran in marathons, half marathons, 10Ks and 5Ks in 52 cities throughout the U.S., and across the Pacific Ocean to shine a light on pancreatic cancer. The campaign started and ended with Weiss running the Los Angeles Marathon which also included the foundation's signature Halloween fundraiser, the L.A. Cancer Challenge.

Through running, Weiss hopes to show the world that pancreatic cancer is much more than devastating [statistics](#). There is a name and a face behind every survivor, and she is running for them. "Over a decade later, my mission to fight the good fight against pancreatic cancer has evolved to not only fundraise, but to be a voice for patients and to create awareness about the risks." She added, "Although we have seen progress, more needs to be done, and together, we can find a cure. We got this!"

AN EXTRAORDINARY FINISH...

Throughout this extraordinary journey, Julie has shared enduring stories of hope, empowerment, loss and resilience from patients

and families fighting for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. She has crossed over 1,000 finish lines, whether she was completing her 52 Races for 52 Faces campaign or her most recent 12 races in 12 months to raise awareness about the 5-year survival rate that has increased two years in a row. The stories she has helped share will never be forgotten and thanks to the one and only Marathon Goddess, we are \$1 million dollars closer to a cure through research funding and patient programs. *“Running with a purpose to fight the good fight against pancreatic cancer has become my mission; I will not stop until we have found a cure.”* We look forward to cheering her on as she leaps across her 116th marathon finish line!

A Wedding to Celebrate Love and a Chance to Give Back

The Oksayans have been part of the Hirshberg Foundation family since Purmine “Mine” Oksayan was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2016. From attending our Symposium, sharing [their stories](#) and [being honored](#) at the LA Cancer Challenge, Mine and her daughter, Ani, have been fierce advocates and loyal supporters. We are happy to share another chapter in the Oksayans’ story, from newlywed Ani.

My husband Greg and I were married on September 1, 2022 in a smallish ceremony in San Marcos, CA. We’d met three years prior and had been living together for a year before our wedding. Our little family was complete with my contribution of a 14 year old son and his of a 10 year old Chihuahua; my first pet ever, if you can believe it. As we started planning our wedding, we kept

emphasizing to one another that we merely wanted a celebration; simply an opportunity for our friends and family to come together and share in our joy of finding love in one another.

The question of what we "wanted" as gifts kept coming up and it didn't take much consideration to realize that we only wanted our loved ones' presence without the expectation of any gift. We clearly communicated to our guests in the invitation to feel no obligation to gift us anything other than their support and love. However, we knew that there would be some level of insistence or discomfort with this request on the part of our close loved ones, so we decided to create a donation fund for a cause that was dear to us. Once this was decided, there was no doubt that our cause would be the Hirshberg Foundation.

For the last 6 years, the Foundation has been a constant source of information, support, camaraderie, and inspiration to my family. They were there for us during the horrors of the first days and weeks of my beautiful mother's pancreatic cancer diagnosis to the traumatic days of constant hospital visits, chemo and eventual Whipple surgery. And they are here for us today and every day, whether to give a huge hug at an event or to share tears of relief and congratulations as we celebrate year after year of her cancer being behind us.

We weren't sure whether anyone would actually act on the opportunity to donate but we quickly found that, indeed, many people were drawn to the idea of contributing to a cause that we held close to our hearts. This option allowed our guests to honor Greg and I while learning that someone dear to us had experienced a deadly disease and been supported by an organization that made tremendous strides in research, care and support of those affected. The ability to use our event, our celebration, as a call to action towards a cause that is both emotionally special and globally relevant felt incredibly

rewarding and added an additional sense of meaning to our union.

In all honesty, my mom was not surprised that we would have chosen to forgo gifts and request donations to the Hirshberg Foundation. As a family, we have always felt completely supported by them, so it felt natural and right that we would take every opportunity to offer that support in return. This was a small gesture towards championing a selfless and benevolent organization dedicated to advancing research and providing resources and support to patients and their families at a time when they need that light the most. The opportunity to advocate and exhibit support through the vehicle of a special personal event is a privilege that Greg and I are honored to have had.

[Wedding Program](#)

Learn more about our Wedding Program and how you can dedicate your special day to a loved one

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Julie Shares Her Journey and Hopes to Inspire Others

I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer by chance by my local internist. I had a “tummy ache” which was very unusual for me, so I had to check it out. I minimized it, but my internist said, “I know your body, I’m going to run a few tests.” I was 67 and had just finished my first sprint triathlon only 6 weeks prior. Throughout my life I had been around 10 to 30 pounds overweight but at that time I was in the best shape of my life.

My doctor called me the same day to come to his office and I was given THE News: "You have pancreatic cancer. I'll try to get you into surgery as soon as I can." By chance the surgery schedule was filled and I had about a week to worry and call everyone I knew who might be able to help, support and inform me about what to do. The same name came up several times: Dr. Isacoff at UCLA. I made an appointment and trusted him and what at that time was a unique protocol: a low-dose, long-term unique chemo cocktail. Since I lived in Santa Barbara, I had friends drive me to UCLA where I had a chemo infusion for at least an hour, then an appointment with Dr. Isacoff, then met my friend for lunch and was driven back to Santa Barbara. Sometimes I took the train. I had 3 weeks of varied chemo with one week off for 8 months.

People ask, "How bad was it?" It was 18 years ago and life since then has been so good that my memory fades about many of the challenges. The first few days of chemo were insignificant, then it took hold and I felt "yucky" for about two days, came out of it for about a day, then spent two days feeling pretty good, then back for another infusion week. The fourth week without chemo seemed somewhat normal.

During the 8 months of chemo I lost my hair and I lost my appetite –that was a surprise for someone who often over-loved food. I didn't have a taste for anything raw which surprised my salad loving self. I had a couple of serious dips when I was taken to the hospital oozing from every orifice. There were nights when I was so wired I couldn't sleep and wrote love letters to family and friends. AND, I also went on ski trips with my family, continued to work from home, drove where I needed to go, went out to dinner, went to church and temple, celebrated holidays and just ***lived life***. I even had an *actual* witch doctor who was a Harvard & Stanford trained MD. Mostly I did ***everything***. I desperately wanted to **live** and knew that I ***had to do everything*** in MY power to support the work the doctors

were doing.

My motto was "leave no stone unturned." I thought, if there is a possibility it could help, if it has helped someone else, I'll do it! There was a monthly support group for pancreatic cancer patients and their families at the **Cancer Support Center in LA**. I didn't miss a meeting and my family also went to the meetings. There was a **Cancer Support week long** workshop I attended with my family who called it "Cancer Camp." I worked with a nutritionist who taught me to juice and make smoothies. I bought cancer cookbooks. I hired a weekly cook. I had a friend bring me flowers every week. I had weekly massage and acupuncture. I did daily meditation and listened to meditation and cancer healing tapes. I especially listened to healing tapes while getting chemo. Then, I joined a gym that had a Cancer Program with both information and physical exercise. I was faithful in working out as best I could three times a week. I saw a Chinese doctor and used Chinese herbs daily. I exercised and walked daily and ate healthy as much as I could. I did everything the doctor told me to do, and everything meditative and spiritual my heart and hospice* counselor suggested. Hospice was especially supportive on an emotional level.

After the 8 months of chemo, Dr. Isacoff suggested Dr. Charles Yeo as my surgeon. At that time he was at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. He is currently at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia. I had a Whipple surgery in 2005 and no further treatment. As usual with the Whipple surgery there were complications that were handled appropriately by the doctor and hospital. I was there for 4 weeks. I walked the halls every day holding my pole of medicine bottles with tubes and needles going into my body.

In the lobby of the hospital there was a piano. My then-spouse said that the minute he knew I was going to be ok was when he

began to play the piano and while he was playing I began to dance with the pole and dangling bottles.

A few years later, there was concern about breast cancer. I had a lumpectomy in 2007 which showed DCIS but no cancer and all subsequent exams show no cancer.

I continue to reach out and tell my story to anyone who is willing to listen. And I can only hope that my story inspires and brings hope to others. It is crucial that we raise awareness, spread information and stories. We need to provide support and more stories about survivors, to give hope to those dealing with this diagnosis. I tell everyone who is interested about my story because there IS hope and there ARE angels. I have lived to see both of my children married, and seen 3 grandchildren born and being raised. I have travelled and lived to enjoy the life and love of my family and many friends. I continue to work out either swimming, walking, or playing Pickleball nearly every day and am engaged in many civic, entertainment, cultural and religious organizations. As of now, 2022, I have been cancer-free for 18 glorious years, I can only thank heaven and all the Angels along the way.

*“Hospice” and “palliative care” have be used interchangeably. Palliative care is now the norm for symptom management when diagnosed with cancer. Learn more about [palliative care](#)

Judith Celebrates her Cancer

Recovery at the LA Cancer Challenge

A celebration of my first-place gold medal win at the LA Cancer Challenge on October 23, 2022. For those who have been sharing my 2-year Pancreatic cancer recovery, I wanted to share this exciting news.

I was invited to enter the 5K Run/Walk at UCLA, but my first inclination was to say, "I'm not sure. I'm not much of a large crowd person and I have run/walked alone these last 3 years of COVID and my cancer recovery."

In reality, I was a little afraid of the unknown. I had never entered a 5K in my life.

The next day, *my spirit* nudged me to change my mind. "Why not accept this opportunity for a *new adventure, a chance to grow?* And this would give you the opportunity to *honor your own body* – which endured a distal pancreatectomy (removing 40% of your pancreas, all of your spleen, and 8 lymph nodes) at UCLA on October 23, 2020, 2 years to the date of the LA Cancer Challenge."

So, I entered the race and thoroughly enjoyed mixing with all the other people supporting the pancreatic cancer community – survivors, family members, teams dedicated to someone who died of pancreatic cancer, babies in strollers, young children, teen, adults of every age and ethnicity – donating their time and money to support the Hirshberg Foundation for Pancreatic Cancer Research's mission to **find a cure for pancreatic cancer!**

The event raised over \$520,000!!!! And over \$10 million has been raised since the inception of the Annual LA Cancer Challenge 25

years ago by Jon Hirshberg, who lost his father Ron to pancreatic cancer.

One of the highlights of the day was a 5-minute hug with a fellow survivor, 8-years cancer-free, who had bravely undergone multiple surgeries and multiple rounds of chemotherapy. He was trembling at first, but his body was finally able to relax and we both cried and breathed deeply together. It was very moving!

The fact that I won a First-Place Gold Medal for the fastest time in my age category was a total surprise to me and "icing on the cake."

I am grateful that I said "Yes" to the invitation and the challenge. I was blessed beyond measure. I send blessings to cancer patients and their families all over the world and encourage you to ***have faith, fight like a warrior, and know that you are loved and valuable!***

"Your individual spirit is your most powerful weapon in the battle with cancer." ~ Judith Anne

[Connect with Judith](#)