

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.

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

[continue →](#)

Remembering a Beloved Father at the Sean R. Sanner 5K

Across the country, [Purple Ribbon Events](#) have helped raised thousands of dollars for pancreatic cancer research and patient programs each year. From game days to a walk/run, chili cook-off or golf tournament, [ideas and themes](#) are explored to best honor a loved one and to raise awareness in the community. In March of this year, the first-ever [Sean R. Sanner 5K](#) was hosted by a daughter paying tribute to her dad on what would have been his 50th birthday. These are the Purple Ribbon Events that make the biggest impact for a family, loved ones and the larger community. Let by her love for her father, Madison Sanner raised nearly \$15,000 for pancreatic cancer research and patient support services!

In March of 2020, Sean Sanner was diagnosed with a rare form of pancreatic cancer. After a devastating loss, his daughter set her heart on celebrating his life and legacy. “I wanted to do something that would bring honor to him because his 50th birthday was the first one without him, and the idea popped into my head and ran with it.” Shared Madison. She shared the message #SannerStrong on social media as she invited loved ones to participate. After 7 long and brutal months of watching her

father fight pancreatic cancer, “I wanted to do something that would bring honor to him because his 50th birthday was the first one without him.

On March 19th, Madison’s family and friends gathered in Lafayette, California, wearing purple and ready to walk for her dad. Proving that we can all take the time to honor a loved one and celebrate them here and now, Madison shared, “The whole thing almost didn’t happen. There was a lot going on in my family, and it became overwhelming, but I pushed through and am so happy I did. It ended up all working out and the day of was incredible!” As she saw everyone in their matching shirts, she was moved to know it was all for him. Some favorite event day moments included seeing people from different areas of her life. “My dad was all about giving back, and it doesn’t always need to be in ways that people see, but to just know you can make an impact in someone’s life.” Joined by loved ones, Madison hosted an event her community will never forget.

[Make a Donation to the Sean R. Sanner 5K >](#)

HOST A PURPLE RIBBON EVENT IN 2022!

Before the seasons grow warm, begin planning an outdoor event to bring your family and friends together and make an impact in someone else’s life. Try an activity you enjoy or honor a loved one with one of their favorite pass times. Options are limitless with opportunities to host an in-person event, online activity or a [Facebook fundraiser](#) benefiting pancreatic cancer research! We’ll provide a [checklist](#), [tools and tips](#) to support you.

Advocating for Women Facing Pancreatic Cancer

This Mother's Day, as you celebrate, honor or remember the special women in your life, join us in taking action on behalf of the countless moms who have fought pancreatic cancer. Each year, too many women and mothers across the country face a pancreatic cancer diagnosis and must begin their treatment journey. The courage and resilience of these women inspires us to move mountains to save lives.

In celebration of Mother's Day, the Hirshberg Foundation is sharing the story of Purmine "Mine" Oksayan, a beautiful and vibrant representation of all the strong moms and survivors we're honoring. Diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2016, Mine is a mother and a wife, a friend and a hero. In [Mine's story](#), her children Ani and Parsegh share a dedication.

"This strong, beautiful woman lived each day focused on taking care of her family, offering unwavering support and strength and functioning as the glue that held everything together. She's rolled up her sleeves, dove into her battle and the only option is recovery. And yes, that truly is her mindset – the only option is conquering the beast in her pancreas and getting on with her life. My brother and I hit the jackpot when we were chosen to be her children."

Mine is more than a pancreatic cancer survivor. A dedicated supporter, Mine and her family make the long drive from San Diego to attend our LA area events and are ambassadors to the pancreatic cancer community. Her devoted husband and family encourage her light to shine, while her story, her smile and positivity inspire other survivors, patients, and families.

She has joined the Hirshberg Foundation year after year at the LA Cancer Challenge Walk/Run with her family and in 2020 she was our [Honorary Starter](#). Attending Symposiums and Patient & Family Webinars, Mine understands how important it is for patients to have access to resources, support and research. She and her husband, children and grandchildren represent all of the families who deserve a better, brighter and healthier future together.

As we celebrate Mother's Day, help us get closer to discovering a cure so that more families can have a story like Mine's.

Honoring a Beloved Husband, Veteran and Community Leader

My beloved husband Allen was a Tallahassee High School football star, Retired Army Paratrooper, Ranger, Veteran and community volunteer.

A Mom with a Heart of Gold

My mother, Marcia Phillips, had a heart of gold. She loved her kids and grandchildren more than anything on this earth.