

CC Day 15 - Nicola Orthmani Guest Post for AMMF's FB Page

A loving daughter's CC journey from right by her Father's side from beginning to a devastating end...

The best Dad a girl could ever dream of -

Charlie Allum 05.11.55 - 12.06.11

Forever in our hearts - Loved and missed so very much.

I have never been greedy or materialistic in all honesty in my 32 years, I have always felt I have led an incredibly rich life based on the beautiful family and friends I have. I have lost many loved ones before but absolutely nothing can prepare a Daddy's girl for the loss of her amazing Father. It was one of the most special relationships I have ever had in my whole life. I cherished that relationship, adored my Dad, my very special friend and the one person who knew me inside out, how I ticked, what I was thinking before I even said it and just got me. Some people never have a relationship with a parent like that in a lifetime. I will forever hold the memories of our relationship close to my heart. It gives me the strength and courage to live and love every day.

I always knew life was not to be taken for granted and this has been stamped on my heart forever after a devastating and life changing 19 months for myself and my Family. I will share my personal journey of this time to help create an understanding to others of how much of an impact and effect this evil disease has on family members. We all had very different relationships with Dad and this is my personal take on my journey as a daughter...

Nov 2009- Dad's 55th Birthday Party at Mum & Dad's house. My daughter was 6 weeks old, my niece 11 weeks and my nephew 7 months. Me and my lovely brothers became parents all in the same year, a very very special year for us all and Dad and Mum were overjoyed to become Grandparents for the first time, let alone Grandparents to 3 beautiful babies born so close together. There was a lot of warmth and loveliness in the air, a special time for all the family...but...I looked at Dad holding my niece and saw something in his eyes at his party. I vividly remember feeling an intuitive sense of panic and fear and said to Mum "Is Dad ok? He looks poorly especially around his eyes." We put it down to 2 recent jabs for Flu and Pneumonia that had knocked his system but I still had an uncomfortable feeling inside. When my Daughter was born 6 weeks previously during hospital visits I noticed Dad was massively tired but when I asked him he said it was getting used to the physical side of his beloved new job as a Groundsman, but I still had a niggle inside and wished it would leave me.....__

Nov/Dec 2010 - During this time Dad suddenly became jaundiced and looked very poorly and quickly saw his GP who referred him for tests at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford (an amazing Hospital with fantastic staff who we are all forever grateful to. The GP had suspicion of gallstones but again for me, a usually very positive

person in life, I just felt that worrying niggle and panic setting in and was praying hard that this would all result in the removal of Dad's Gall bladder and that he could focus on enjoying his first Xmas with his beautiful Grandchildren....sadly we did not get the news we hoped for prior to Christmas that year...

Xmas 2009 - Our family were aware that Dad needed to undergo the biggest operation a human body could go through the next month. The surgery, called the "Whipple Procedure" is equivalent to heart transplant surgery in it's enormity, was to remove a lump in Dad's bile duct that had been detected in the previous tests. We all knew there was a strong chance this lump was cancerous and held on to hope as this was Dad's only chance of a cure, if anyone could beat this my big strong Dad could.

We all did our very best to make sure Dad and the babies had a beautiful Xmas. I knew deep in my heart this could be Dad's last but I couldn't say it out loud to my fiance or family. You just have to keep believing everything is ok, and that's what gets you through as a daughter watching her Dad go through this nightmare with his life literally flashing before his eyes.

__Jan 2010 - I went with Mum and Dad to the majority of hospital appointments and treatments etc to offer support to them both. I also found it helped me deal with the illness as best I could. If me or my brothers had questions, Dad always encouraged me to ask the consultant for answers, that was Dad selfless as ever making sure we were all ok and not overwrought with worry (worry had without doubt become my new best friend).

Dad went in for the surgery, the operation to the best of our knowledge had been a success, the lump had been removed and now we had to focus on helping Dad recover . A few things that haunt my mind during Dad's hospital stay after the Whipple was my Mum's face realising Dad's bed was not in the bay it was meant to be in following the operation - she went white and was frozen with fear... my youngest brother holding down my Dad's legs during a frightening and violent reaction to Morphine following the operation. I had tears in my eyes in the doorway watching my brother remain strong and calm. I remember him saying to me after everything had calmed down that he didn't know how his legs held him up through it all... and finally all the tubes on Dad's face and body after the operation and seeing the huge scar across his stomach upset me deeply, never more so than when a Nurse said you can bring your baby girl into Dads room to visit him. I couldn't wait I knew this would bring him big smiles but this was a very emotional moment as my little girl didn't recognise her Grandad with all the tubes and she was frightened just like her Mummy was.

It is also worth noting here that my family were travelling to and from the hospital in horrific snowy weather conditions with our young children and all brand new parents ourselves. I personally had a very bad birth experience which took me months to recover from, my daughter went into special care for a week after birth and although we were separated for 5 days I managed to exclusively breastfeed her for 6 months. As a first time Mum I had to get into the quickest pattern I could of expressing milk, freezing it etc. My sister in law Fi was amazing, and was on permanent standby to look after my little girl whenever I needed her too, something I will never forget. My Mum still says to me to this day, "I cannot believe all you did for me and Dad when you had just become an new Mum and were going through so much physically and mentally yourself." But this is only what any daughter would do in my position. Friends asked me how I coped, but you do one day, sometimes one hour at a time. Dad and I said for each new chapter of life we all had to discover the "new normal" as we named it. Life was never going to be the same for Dad or any of us but we all adjusted and found the "new normal", it's what gets you through the darkest times. You can find happiness and joy in anything in life and for me having my lovely Dad with me was something I was going to soak up and never take for granted... all too soon that can all be taken away from you...

March 2010 - Dad returned to work just 8 weeks after the Whipple to his physical job as a groundsman. He had lost a lot of weight but was looking good and felt positive, but then he had to make a big decision... the pathology results were back and whilst the surgeon had said he felt confident the cancer had been removed, the results showed a positive margin. From my own personal internet research I knew this was not good news and I also knew the only option was Chemo to try and blast the stray cells away, but I also knew there was about a 20% chance of this being effective. I looked in Dad's eyes on the results day and he looked in mine - and whilst I knew he would never stop fighting, he had a look in his eye that he knew he didn't have many years of life left.

I remember watching a TV advert with a young girl in aged about 6 who looked exactly like what I felt my daughter would at that age, Dad was there too and I told him and he said "I only hope I am around to see her go to school my darling." Me and Dad are always positive people but I knew then that both of us were starting to accept that no matter how hard you fight nothing is bigger than cancer. That doesn't mean anyone stops fighting, you just have to start fighting an awful lot harder on many levels...

Summer 2010 - It was during the summer of this year that I started carrying out the wedding plans for my June wedding in 2011 to my wonderful and supportive fiancé. We were so excited about our big day - he is my absolute soulmate and, having spent nearly a decade alone, I cherish every day that I have found my one.

Our beautiful daughter was to be a flowergirl, all our lovely family and friends had special roles they were playing to make it such a memorable day and my Daddy was giving his little girl away on the special date we chose in his honour - Father's Day, June 19th 2011

I loved every second of planning our big day and it gave Dad and all of us something positive to focus on and smile about...__

Oct/Nov 2010 - Chemo was over! Watching Dad go through this, along with several blood transfusions was so hard. I felt very humbled sat in the Chemo ward watching other families going through such a terrible time. I learnt a lot through my hospital visits, a lot about life in general. I have never taken things for granted and certainly would never begin to after witnessing the gruelling fight for life on this ward. Dad was such a cheerful chap, the nurses adored him. You would never for a second think he was one of the patients, he was like the medicine for so many others staff included!

I remember on one visit I found my stunning wedding jewellery in the shop there that sold wigs etc for Chemo patients. Dad was overjoyed and took delight telling all the staff, even though I wouldn't show him the jewellery, as that along with my dress was to be a big surprise for everyone. No one knew what I was wearing except my beautiful Mum.

Following on from Chemo, Dad had a scan to check how things were - this picked up a mass which we were all naturally very worried about but, when Dad was rescanned weeks later and the mass had not grown, Dad's consultant was confident it was scar tissue from the major surgery. I remember walking out of the consultant's office like yesterday and punching the air shouting "yes" which was unbeknown to Dad - then as he walked out, he doubled punched the air and did the same... a special moment that brought me huge smiles. It was the one time I wholeheartedly believed my dad could beat this...

We had a fantastic Christmas that year at my younger brother's with all the family. The kids were at a great age, and in July Dad had become a Grandad of 4 when my little niece Molly entered the world. A lovely special heart warming family Christmas during which I snapped my favourite photo ever of Mum and Dad - they looked so happy and in love, their strength as a couple was just incredible. I love looking at this picture seeing Dad's huge smile and the twinkle in his eye silently saying, "I think I have beaten this". As we turned into the New Year our thoughts were as always on Dad's health but also on the final countdown to our wedding... However the excitement we felt was about to take a huge blow and I don't think I could ever be ready to know how to deal with what was about to happen before our wedding day.

March 2011 - Following achy back pains shortly after Christmas Dad returned for further tests to check what was happening. On hearing the outcome from Dad as to what the consultant had said, I felt like my heart had been smashed to bits. I couldn't attend this appointment as I normally did and when over 7 hours had passed since the appointment time and I had not heard from Dad as I always would, I knew it was bad news. Calling Dad that day was one of the hardest times of my life, I just didn't know how to prepare myself for what I was about to hear. My wedding day was 3 and a half months away and my Dad had been told he had 3-6 months to live, the cancer was back and it was terminal...

April/May 2011- It was during this time that my head was spinning constantly with thoughts of changing the wedding date. This was something Dad never wanted to happen. In the end, after a long chat with Mum and Dad, Dad said it was his wish for everything to remain as planned and should the worst happen he wanted Mum to give me away. A little girl always has dreams in her mind of how magical the run up to her wedding day will be and this news crushed me to the core, but I knew I had to remain strong for my Dad, husband, little girl and all my family and friends that were doing everything they could to love and support all of us in the run up to our big day.

My hen do in April was fantastic - my amazing best friend Shell made it so so special for me. Dad loved seeing my smiley face when I was all glammed up and off to London with Mum and the girls and was so happy hearing all about it on our return, if not amazed that I did not get really drunk! _My husband to be's stag do was in May and Dad was so looking forward to it but due to being in hospital Dad couldn't go. I felt so upset seeing Dad's face when he said he couldn't go, but he still texted my fiance to say have a great time - that's my Dad, always but always thinking of others before himself. This meant a great deal to my fiancé, he thought the world of Dad and loved him so very much. Fou's family are in Tunisia so his own Dad and family were not there for his stag or wedding day.

I felt truly overwhelmed by the love Dad gave to me and Fou on the run up to our wedding, he was fighting for life and all that he spoke to us about was our wedding, how we were and how things were going, he was just so happy for us. Dad sadly spent most of April and early May in hospital with infections following a procedure to fit a stent which we hoped would give Dad more time. This sadly made Dad so sick and frail, perhaps his body could have withstood one infection, but he picked up several and there was no reserve to fight this anymore.

I looked at Dad in hospital in May and I knew in my heart of hearts that if our wedding date remained the same Dad was not going to make it. I went to a private room after seeing the consultant with Mum and Dad and cried and trembled like a small child. I just felt so lost and utterly helpless. I always love to look after people

and make them feel better, but nothing absolutely nothing I could do would make my lovely Daddy better again. His health was so weak now and he was so sick regularly throughout the day, I just knew he was not going to get his wish to give his little girl away. A very private thought that I did not share with a soul. __

June 12th 2011 - The most upsetting and devastating day of mine and my family's lives. After a weekend of Dad's health deteriorating in front of our eyes, we knew the end was not far away. On the Saturday I decided to give Dad his wedding pocket watch I had brought as a surprise for him and had got engraved. He loved it but it was such a difficult decision to make to give it to him. My wedding day was 7 days away and Dad had fought so hard for so long I felt by giving him the present he would think I had given up on him. Dad said to me that day that his biggest fear over recent months had been dying on my wedding day and that he had been fighting hard to be here to give me away. I said to Mum today when I realised that Dad didn't have long, please Mummy can you put in my wedding dress and veil so Dad can see what his little girl is going to look like on her big day. I felt so lovely in my dress that day and even though Dad hadn't talked for several hours he managed to say the word "beautiful" to me. The boys took very personal and special photos of me in my dress with Dad right by my side, he was still trying to smile hours before he left us...

We said goodbye to Dad at 1700hrs with Mum, myself and my brothers. He died peacefully and at home which was his wish. __

Father's Day June 19th one week later - Today we had our gorgeous wedding day, the sun shone, My beautiful Mum gave me away, my brother Chris read my Dad's Father of the Bride speech that he wrote a few weeks before with my youngest brother Andy right by his side (a memory I hold close to my heart, thank you boys).

I missed my Dad more than words can say that day, but I did what he wanted and married the man of my dreams and had a truly special day. Whilst there wasn't a second of the day I didn't miss him, I allowed myself to enjoy and soak up every moment. I was so utterly proud of the strength shown by my Mum and family that day.

In the wedding car on our way to the venue three white doves flew off the ground on a bridge over the car....it was the exact spot where two weeks before I had taken Dad to pick up a wheelchair and he saw three male ramblers at the very spot where the birds were. Dad said that day I would give anything to have a walk in the fresh air by the river like those chaps.

Dad gave not just me, but all of us the strength to enjoy that day. There are so many precious memories that I have that confirm what I firmly believe... Dad was there with us all day. The sun shone and all of us let off a balloon release with

messages on for Dad. Just a week before I said to Dad this is something I wanted to do for him and he promised to read them.....I hope he enjoyed each and every heartfelt message from all who loved and knew him. I also hope he enjoyed watching me dance to his favourite father daughter song "Dance with my Father". When dad chose this I ended up persuading him to make a second choice as this song is for a little girl who doesn't have her father any more.....how upsetting to know that, in fact, perhaps Dad already knew that this would be the song I danced to on my wedding day with him in spirit right by my side. Love you my special Daddy. __

Dad's funeral was 2 days later, myself, my husband and the boys carried Dad into the Church for us all to say our goodbyes, and me and the boys read a Eulogy we put together about our wonderful Dad. I don't think I saw a dry eye as I looked through the congregation.....during this we promised to always look after our beautiful Mum who Dad always described as his total rock throughout this devastating time...

We left the night of Dad's funeral to go on Honeymoon to Tunisia where our daughter would meet our Tunisian family for the first time. I would give myself time to grieve, but I had to put my grief on hold for just a while longer to get through the next few weeks, which is what Dad would have wanted. All he ever wanted was for his little girl to meet a good man, get married and have a beautiful family. Whilst it wasn't easy seeing other Granddads around the pool with their Grandkids, I held my head high, hid my tears and had fun with my new husband and daughter and enjoyed catching up with the family.....As Dad always used to say and as the tattoo means that I got done at 18 years old, "Live for today", no one honestly knows what tomorrow will bring.

I am so blessed to love life, this is something that has been passed to me all my life from Dad. Always remember the little things and take happiness from them, the smell of fresh cut grass and the sounds of the bird's in the trees. If I know anything, if you have your health you have absolutely everything.,,

__As many of you know, I have been doing a Slimathon for AMMF and have raised over £2000 (Please see my link for my challenge and story). I am so grateful for all the love and support. I will be returning to my challenge following the birth of our second daughter who is due to enter the world on May 26th. I am devastated my Dad won't get to meet our new baby girl, but I see him in my daughter's eyes every day. She has the same cheeky, fun loving character and she also NEVER stops smiling, just like my Dad.

If my girls live their lives with only half of the fantastic relationship I had with my Daddy, then I know they will both be truly blessed as will my husband. I will always remind them how special the bond is between a Dad and a daughter and to cherish and enjoy their life with him.

I would also like to add how proud I am of my younger brother, Chris Allum who is raising money for AMMF by running the London Marathon this year for the first time. Chris is training hard in all weather conditions to achieve his life long dream and is also battling a chronic knee injury. I know he will cross that line and I can't wait for the big day! Albeit from my Mum's sofa as I will be heavily pregnant at the time. __

Make special memories everyday, from a Daddy's girl who is so very glad she did from a young age through to becoming a Mum myself..

With lots of love to all the families affected by and those suffering from this terrible disease and to Helen from AMMF, an amazing person for all she does and continues to do... To my Mum and family who I love so much and all those who have lost loved ones -you are in my heart and I am always here for you - and to my beautiful Dad you are in my heart and thoughts every single day and whilst my life will never ever be the same without you in it I am doing my very best to make you proud and live the happy life you wanted me to each and everyday...

Sleep peacefully Dad....