

You Can Make All the Difference

by Teresa D. Smith, R.N., M.S.N.

As I pondered the topic of my final President's Message (my term in office ends in March), a recent personal tragedy has motivated me to talk about the human spirit.

My dad died very suddenly in December.

One morning Mom went to wake him, only to find that he had passed away in his sleep. The grief that my family and I have felt over his death has been overwhelming, but the support that we have received from those around us has also been remarkable.

Dad was a very social person who made friends with everyone. It didn't matter who you were—the town mayor or the town bum—Dad would talk to you and probably give you a hard time about something. He had been a salesman his entire life and came in contact with a variety of people, as all of us do in cancer care. He had the same challenges we have in trying to please everyone with the service and care we provide.

Dad's passing has affected me deeply and reminded me of life's simple lessons, which I would like to share. Sometimes we become so involved in our busy lives that we forget these simple truths. First, life is fragile and there is no guarantee of being alive tomorrow. The patients we serve also realize this. I have often heard patients say that their diagnosis of cancer was a blessing because it was a wake-up call to what was important in their life. What kind of wake-up call will it take for you to realize that life is fragile and could be snuffed out anytime?

I have also learned that the human spirit is alive and well. The outpouring of love and support showered on our family during this time of grief was amazing. I have experienced small acts of kindness that have made



all the difference in my life. As we deal with our patients, families, and each other, we, too, can make a big difference in someone's life.

If you feel that the work you do doesn't make a difference, then re-examine what you do. If each of us would live with the philosophy, "you're the one that makes

all the difference," just think of how much better the world would be.

In addition, I have learned that one individual can touch the lives of many others. Dad had 400 people at his funeral. Many of them I knew; some I did not, but each of them had a story to tell about Dad and how he had touched their life. One particular woman, who I had never met before, told me this story.

Many years ago, she and her husband had opened a gas station in the community where my parents live. Dad had started to fill up his gas tank at this station and grew to know the couple. Their business was slow to become financially successful, but Dad had remained a loyal customer and had encouraged them to keep the business going. "Without his words of encouragement," she said, "we would not have continued." I thought to myself...I wonder if Dad had known the impact he had on this couple. Knowing Dad, he probably thought his actions were just daily routine business. How we handle ourselves in life's situations *does* impact the lives of others. In our work in cancer care, we come into contact with all kinds of people. Many of us don't realize the impact we can have on their life.

My message to you is to remember: "You are the one that makes all the difference!" 🍀

Teresa D. Smith

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