

## He's Gone !

"It's not good news. I'm so sorry John. The scans show the cancer has spread. This isn't the news either of us were expecting." Dr. Bailey peered at John through thick, silver rimmed glasses to gauge John's reaction.

A sharp intake from John said it all.

"You're going to need lots of support John, to get through this. You can't do this on your own," continued Dr Bailey.

"How long?" whispered John.

"With chemo, maybe 6 months. It might buy you a bit of time. I can't be more specific. I'm so sorry John!" Dr. Bailey leaned back in his creaky chair and crossed his arms protectively over his chest as if he was protecting himself from such ghastly news.

John was shaking now. He seemed oblivious to anything else Dr. Bailey was saying. The wheels were set in motion for more bloods, a chemo information session and local accommodation arrangements that would be needed during chemo. A stunned John left the doctors surgery. He needed a drink & he needed it now! The numbing effects of alcohol would surely slow down the turmoil in his head.

Two weeks later, John had just had his first lot of chemo. The details of John's illness and initial bout of surgery, had been hidden from all his family. He no longer lived with his wife and child, largely due to his drinking and subsequent aggression. However, today he was meeting his wife and child after chemo. His wife inadvertently became aware of his dire predicament and had explained the situation to their child. There was no way John could tell his child he was dying. Communication was no longer John's strong point.

Their child was on the cusp of becoming a teenager and was amazingly mature, as growing up fast had been a prerequisite, largely due to the turmoil at home, prior to John walking out on them. Despite all this, John's wife had asked John to move back into the family home with them, so he didn't have to battle this devastating journey on his own. She was a nurse, a mother and his wife ... albeit his separated wife. She could still be there for him though, if only John would let her. So far, he had distanced himself from "all things family." He was going to do this "his way!"

All three of them had a lovely lunch together, despite the sadness of the situation. Family photos were taken before the chemo had time to kick in and change John's appearance. This would be important down the track. There was a shopping expedition to a special jewellery shop. An exquisite piece of jewellery was purchased by John for his child. He would not be there for his child's wedding day, but this token reminder of him would be.

Fatigue was setting in for John after this emotional family meeting on top of the chemo. He requested to be left alone to rest. He refused all further offers of support from his family. That night, John and a business acquaintance, thoroughly immersed themselves in alcohol yet again. This was John's only coping mechanism ... now and in the past.

Over the next few months, John repeatedly refused the ongoing offers of support from his wife and child, whilst refusing to move back home with them. He only ever attended that first bout of chemo. He chose not to continue with it. Everyone respected his choice. He had frequent binge drinking episodes with his so called mates, most of which were only out to get whatever they could from John as he started to finalize his affairs. John's wife and child were both devastated by John's terminal illness as they battled it out on their own, as John pushed them even further and further away.

Eventually, John's wife and child received word that they would be seeing John for the last time the following day. He was leaving town. No further information was forthcoming. Everything was veiled in secrecy. The next afternoon, John was delivered to them by a third party. He was clearly in no condition to drive. John spent some time alone with his child, for the final time. Eventually, his wife joined them. They cried! All three of them cried together. They were finally a family again, for one last time.

Throughout all the tears, John was still very guarded when it came down to answering where he was going. His wife asked over and over, "Where are you going? Who will look after you? How can you do this on your own?" Her persistence was finally rewarded with John's one word answer. "Switzerland!" He walked out the door shortly after that, for the very last time. John's wife and child collapsed in a heap in the driveway, as John was driven away. Their howls of grief, echoed around the neighbourhood. He was gone ... forever!

As it turned out, John had spent his final months taking back control over his terminal illness. He was going to die on his own terms, at a time of his choosing, rather than be dictated to by some hideous disease. The courage John displayed whilst co-ordinating his assisted suicide plans that were to take place in Switzerland, was to be congratulated. However, the trail of deceit and disregard he left his wife and child, was unforgivable. Those helping to organize John's assisted suicide, were numerous, but everyone was under a vow of silence, not to tell his wife or child. They were not to know. The ironic thing was, that his wife would have been John's greatest supporter, as it meant he would die with dignity. She had nursed many patients with a terminal illness and wouldn't have wished that sort of death on her worst enemy... let alone John.

Now the wait was on, for John's wife and child. Was he well enough to fly? Had he survived the long plane trip from Australia to Switzerland? Did someone go with him? Was he still alive? Had he changed his mind? Why couldn't he die with dignity in Australia? Why did someone so unwell, have to travel so far away to have a dignified death? Why couldn't they be there with him? Didn't the medical and counselling fraternity that John would have had to jump through hoops for in both Australia and Switzerland, encourage him to talk about his assisted suicide plans with his wife and child beforehand? Did he even tell anyone that he had a wife and child? Weren't birth and marriage certificates checked ... and perhaps other "forged documents"?

One week later, in the middle of the night, a two worded text was sent to John's wife's phone. It read ..."He's gone!"