



At left, Stuart Scott with daughters Sydni (l) and Taelor (r); below, Sydni and her dad onstage at the 2014 ESPY Awards

Eternal Love

As Told to NAJJA PARKER

When Stuart Scott, one of ESPN's most renowned and charismatic sports anchors, was diagnosed with cancer of the appendix in 2007, his daughters Taelor and Sydni had their world turned upside down. After a seven-year battle with the rare disease, Scott passed away earlier this year. He was 49. Still mourning the loss of her father, Taelor shares her favorite memories and reflects on continuing his legacy.

I awakened to the sounds of people crying and knew, without anyone uttering a word, my dad had died. It was Jan. 4, 2015. My mother; my sister, Sydni, and I had just celebrated Christmas with him in Connecticut before heading to North Carolina to visit my grandparents. Although my father was too ill to travel with us, we planned to return in a few days to help prepare him for palliative care.

We didn't make it back in time.

Despite the tremendous loss, our last holiday season together was the best. It reminded me of the earlier years before my parents divorced. Back then we always gathered for special occasions or announcements, including the day my dad told us about his diagnosis. Sydni, then 8 years old, and I, 12, immediately started sobbing. It was one of the scariest moments that I'd ever experienced. In my mind, the "I have cancer" statement translated to "I'm going die." But my father never thought of it that way; for him, it meant he needed to live more.

One of the best things my dad did was move forward with life after his diagnosis. It was empowering for him, and our family. We would still watch him exercise at home, play chess and sing along to some of his favorite songs. Seeing him on TV talking about sports, people wouldn't guess how much he loved Broadway musicals, such as *The Wiz* and *Wicked*.

My father shared so many valuable lessons. One that really sticks with me is that your character is defined by your behavior when no one is looking. We used to go to an ice cream shop, and while waiting in line one day, he said, "Here's what we're going to do: I'm going to give the

cashier extra money to pay for the people behind us." Bringing joy to others without their knowing was so exciting. It became something fun we kept doing, like we had a secret.

Still, we knew his health remained an issue. When my dad's cancer went into remission, we were so relieved. But it came back—twice. We'd go through this whole emotional process: He'd get cleared and be fine, then the cancer would return. Each time, he kept fighting. Sydni and I were amazed by his strength and courage—and we weren't the only ones. His colleagues honored him with the Jimmy V Perseverance Award at the 2014 ESPYs last July. I couldn't attend because I was beginning the summer session at Barnard College in New York, but Sydni went with him. Unfortunately, that would be his final TV appearance.

Since my dad died, my family and friends have been extremely supportive and encouraging, but I am still grieving. I'm taking it one day at a time. When I miss him, I go to places that remind me of his presence. I celebrated my 20th birthday without him this year, but for Father's Day, I will stop by the same pasture we trekked to when I was a little girl. And to observe his birthday in July, I want to take a trip to Nantucket, an island off the coast of Massachusetts, because he really liked it there. Also, I plan to continue to raise money with The V Foundation for Cancer Research, an organization that he cherished for years.

These commemorative efforts are reminders of the lessons my father shared with us. In his memoir, *Every Day I Fight*, he stressed the importance of working hard and never giving up. When I feel apprehensive about taking certain chances, I'll think of his teachings, and I am hopeful they will serve me well.



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