

Tribute to my father, Sumril Robert Funches.....

Many loved him and many depended on him, but everyone benefited from having him around. To me, my father— Sumril Robert Funches—was like a matured oak tree, strong and a prosperous producer of a variety of seeds. He loved his cowboy boots, hat, and a nice standardbred horse to ride. Although he did not have a formal "higher education," my father was smarter and more successful than society could have ever predicted. From the cost of a project to a down payment of a new car in the dealership, he could find the solution to any math problem with his head. No pen or paper was needed. He founded, developed, and managed his own concrete and general contracting business. As a young girl, I had total confidence in my father. I often made reference to him as "Bob the Builder," believing that he could fix anything. Unfortunately, in October 2003, he was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer after more than two years of progressively worsening pain and misdiagnosis. His condition was something that he could not fix. In fact, neither could the doctors, who believed that a surgical procedure could remove the cancerous cells. At this point, chemo was his only option because the cancer had spread to his liver.

Since I understand everyone cannot personally relate to pancreatic cancer's effect on my family, I would like to provide you with a little perspective on the topic. Pancreatic cancer has the #1 fatality rate of all cancers, and is two times more common in the African American race than any other racial group in the United States. It was difficult to watch my father fight for his life. Although I was only 8 years old and too young to fully understand what I was actually witnessing, I did see the effects of my father's battle with this disease—hair and weight loss, pain he constantly suffered, and extreme weakness and fatigue. Clearly, his life changed before my eyes, and so did mine.

I did not, however, let this personal adversity shadow my future. Today, when I think about my father, it encourages me to strive for my own life and motivate others to become proactive regarding their own health. One day, I hope to establish a foundation in his name with two purposes: (1) to support families who face the challenges of a cancer diagnosis, and (2) to raise funds to find an early detection test and treatment for pancreatic cancer. There is a 5% chance that patients battling this cancer will survive for 5 years, however, the National Cancer Institute only allots 2% of federal research funding to this disease. That is why I need your help. I have become an advocate for pancreatic cancer awareness to continue the fight in my dad's memory. It is my hope that one day there will be an early detection test so that the next family won't be negatively impacted by pancreatic cancer.

Together we can make a difference!

Thank you for your support,

Asia Funches