



Dallas Morning News

MAKE DAD LAST FOREVER

It was the video of a lifetime, created by father and his son, says Stephen N. Blaising of Dallas Sunday, June 17, 2007

I think the first time I realized my dad's mortality was the phone call: "What are the test results, Dad?"

"It's cancer," he replied evenly. And then the longest silence I can ever remember. I knew little about prostate cancer at the time. But the "C" word horrified me because the next question was, "How far has it spread? Is it contained?"

That was six years ago and I'm happy to report Dad won that fight. In fact, over the last 10 years, he has fought and beat prostate cancer as well as heart disease (triple bypass). He guided my 84-year-old mother through a knee and hip replacement, while taking care of a 40-acre farm near Waco. During this time he's watched many friends die. But these life changes have not deterred my father's quiet confidence about the present and the future.

I love my father, and quite frankly, want him to last forever. What's more, I think I figured out how to do just that. Whether your dad is still here or not, you can make him last forever.

The idea, of course, came from my dad. He suggested we visit his and my hometown. "Son, let's go to San Antonio. I want two or three days of your time and a video camera. I want to take you to places you've never seen or known, tell you stories you'll never forget and hear about the family members you never met."

What an idea! Of course, we didn't act on it right away. In fact, he proffered the idea for more than a year before we got around to it. During that time my mother had hip-replacement surgery and my father was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Numerous times he said, "Son, I guess we'll never make it to San Antonio." I was despondent and kicked myself for not moving faster. Miraculously, my mother improved and dad was successfully treated and restored to health.

On May 7, we met in downtown San Antonio at the infamous Gunter Hotel, built in 1909. As I zoomed in on Dad's face with the hotel coffee shop in the background, the reminiscing began. I helped Dad keep it short and to the point, but the details seeped out.

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Make Dad last forever

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I think the first time I realized my father's mortality was the phone call: "What are the test results, Dad?" "It's cancer," he replied evenly. And then the longest silence I can ever remember. I knew little about prostate cancer at the time. But the "C" word horrified me because the next question was, "How far has it spread? Is it contained?" That was six years ago and I'm happy to report that Dad won that fight. In fact, over the last 10 years, he has fought and beat prostate cancer as well as heart disease (triple bypass). He guided my 84-year-old mother through a knee and hip replacement, while taking care of a 40-acre farm near Waco. During this time he's watched many friends die. But these life changes have not deterred my father's quiet confidence about the present and the future. I love my father and, quite frankly, want him to last forever. What's more, I think I figured out how to do just that. Whether your dad is still here or not, you can make him last forever.

had hip-replacement surgery and my father was diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Numerous times he said, "Son, I guess we'll never make it to San Antonio." I was despondent and kicked myself for not moving faster. Miraculously, my mother improved and Dad was successfully treated and restored to health. On May 7, we met in downtown San Antonio at the infamous Gunter Hotel, built in 1909. As I zoomed in on Dad's face with the hotel coffee shop in the background, the reminiscing began. I helped Dad keep it short and to the point, but the details seeped out. One February afternoon in 1947, Dad wore his Air Force uniform, and Mom was at the table with girlfriends. "Better looking than Katherine Hepburn," Dad teased. "I asked her for her phone number." Minutes later, we headed down Houston Street and eventually to Woodlawn, where we hopped out of the car and I roomed in on Dad's wrinkled face squinting from the hot afternoon sun, as he told the story of life and Mom's first apartment. "Woodlawn and Waco, you, but the teenage was still in the eye. One spot after another, we tazed and moved on. We stopped at his elementary school steps and the basketball gym. Dad played games on at age 12. We ate lunch at La Fontaine Main Street, a Mexican restaurant where my parents seemed off and lifted long before my brother, sister or I were born. We developed respect from boyhood homes to his parents' and grandparents' graveyards. Some

by some, my father's life story unfolded. Every secret flashed my father's face and many emotions — perhaps hidden for years but not hidden from the camera. For generations to come, my daughters and son, as well as my niece and nephew, will sit with their children and grandchildren, witnessing the family story firsthand. And my dad — with his courage, tenacity, love and steadfast optimism — will live forever in their hearts and minds. But what if your father is gone and you say it is too late. Is it too late? In the film *Gladiator*, as the vesp African slave Juba observes on meeting Maximus in the arena, "Not yet, my friend, not yet." Your father's legacy grows and bud, lives on in you. The videotape of life is rolling. You have time to edit what is playing for the sake of your whole family, your community and the world itself.



Stephen N. Blaising is a Dallas resident, San Antonio native, and founder and president of the Blaising Group. His e-mail address is steveblaising@gmail.com.

One February afternoon in 1947, Dad was in full Air Force uniform, and Mom was at the table with girlfriends, "better-looking than Katherine Hepburn," Dad beamed. "I asked her for her phone number."

Minutes later, we headed down Houston Street and eventually to Woodlawn, where we hopped out of the car and I zoomed in on Dad's wrinkled face squinting from the hot afternoon sun, as he told the story of his and Mom's first apartment. Wrinkled and worn, yes, but the twinkle was still in his eye.

One spot after another, we filmed and moved on. We stopped at his elementary school steps and the barbershop Dad played pranks on at age 12. We ate lunch at La Fonda on Main Street, a Mexican restaurant where my parents sneaked off and flirted long before my brother, sister or I were born. We videotaped everything from boyhood homes to his parents' and grandparents' gravestones. Scene by scene, my father's life story unfolded.

Every scene flashed my father's face and many emotions - perhaps hidden for years but not from the camera. For generations to come, my daughters and son, as well as my niece and nephew, will sit with their children and grandchildren, witnessing the family story first-hand.

And my dad-with his courage, heartaches, love and steadfast optimism - will forever live in their hearts and mine.

But what if your father is gone and you say it is too late? Is it too late? In the film, *Gladiator*, as the wily African slave Juba observes on meeting Maximus in the afterlife, "Not yet, my friend, not yet." It's not too late.

Your father's legacy, good and bad, lives on in you. The videotape of life is rolling. You have time to edit what is playing for the sake of your whole family, your community and the world itself.

Stephen N. Blaising, President of Financial Dynamics, Inc. of Dallas, is a University Park resident.