

## Trails

By Mercedes Danekas-Lohse

No one ever said life is easy. Every day is hard, no matter how good you have it. Everyone's life is so different; different challenges, different restrictions and just plum different occurrences that can make one person Ok and the other not. Personally, I have been very fortunate. I have achieved much success in my life, experienced great happiness, and I have conquered numerous challenges; so far my 33 years of existence has been great, except for one challenge that I have no control on. This challenge has haunted both me and my family for a number of years now, it makes everyday tasks at times seem unmeasurable, it makes it hard to plan life and it makes life in general seem so cruel and vicious. The only good that comes from this test is that it has made me appreciate my family more than anything and has helped increase the already abundant respect I have for my father, James Danekas.

My family is a tight knit team, we always have been. A number of years ago however, we became even closer; we had to, we had no choice in the matter because if we hadn't, we wouldn't be where we are today. As mentioned, some of us face challenges that we have no control of. My father is one of them. Some of you may know this but for others, this may help explain some things as the rumors have been soaring for years. Being born with a faulty heart valve, my father underwent open heart surgery to correct the problem back in 1998. Due to complications from a surgeon's error, he was right back in the same position six months later; another open heart surgery. I always wonder if that surgeon performed his task better, how much better would my dad be today. In the six months between surgeries, his heart went from bad to worse. Too much damage had been done and his heart suffered. This type of damage to the heart was unrepairable and has only gotten worse through the years.

Over the last 10 plus years, my father has fought an uphill battle to stay alive. If it had been someone else, I don't think that they would be here today. I am just thankful for my dad's drive and tenacity; his fuel to keep on going. He has never been one to allow any force to slow him down or stop him. He is still one of the strongest people I know, just not physically anymore. After the heart surgeries, multiple devices to help support his heart, numerous pills to take daily, and multiple trips to doctors' offices over the years we have finally reached a point of no return; my dad's heart is slowly failing. Saying these words is hard but, writing them is even harder. I guess seeing these words and knowing other people will read them makes it worse. It is hard enough to always have this weight on your shoulders, let alone talk about it.

Some people ask me why we haven't been open about this situation, but I think that if most of you think about it long and hard; you'll understand. The reason I am opening up about it now is due to the fact my dad is going to get even worse before he gets better. This is good in the long run but very hard to watch and live with at the moment and the months to come. My father is now on the heart transplant list. He is due for a new heart and the day that this happens will be the best day of my life. Honestly, my dad shouldn't even be with us today, but he has surprised everyone, especially his doctors that told us years ago that he wouldn't make it to now. Well, he is still here and isn't going anywhere. A lot of folks have rumored his retirement since we've added onto the JDA team in recent months, but I would like to correct this belief. We are just making his team even stronger so all he's created continues with him at the reins.

My dad doesn't like talking about personal hard comings or things in life that just don't go his way; he never complains. He has never wanted to talk about this situation outside of close friends and family because he has a job to do and believes that sympathy is pathetic. In many people's eyes looking in, all they see is successes and triumph. Just because he never relished in the bad to people doesn't mean he and his family haven't faced it over the years. As a family, we keep things quiet no matter how much sympathy is deserved; there's always someone facing something worse. At this point in time, we are just thankful that he is still here and full of piss and vinegar. I want to assure everyone that we aren't going anywhere. We are stronger than ever which will only help when my dad gets his new ticker. Once that happens, watch out because he'll be stronger than ever. Hell, he might even have more go power than me at that point and if that's the case, we may need to get him involved with some kind of hobby to slow him down; maybe golf.

At this time, I ask for your thoughts and prayers that this happens sooner than later. I love my father and want someday for him wake up and not feel tired, be able to be in the cold without him freezing, be able to enjoy more than one Pina Colada and maybe even hold a grandchild (no announcements here). All in all, I just want my dad to be better. I hope that you all wish for the same and we thank you for your understanding.

