

# When illness strikes Dad, everyone's life changes

The dreaded call came to me at work one Friday afternoon last year. "Don't be scared," my sister said.

Too late. I knew something terrible had happened.

"It's Daddy."

A sinking feeling settled in my stomach.

My mom got on the phone and explained that my dad had been kneeling on the bathroom floor of their house, unable to get up.

He'd just returned from the grocery store, barely making it into the house.

My first thought: Why was he still home?

"Did you call 911?" I asked. "Call 911!"

She hadn't, and neither had my sister. My father, then 81, was often very stubborn. He didn't want them to call anyone. He told them he was fine.

I was hysterical.

"Mami, tienes que llamar [You have to call]," I pleaded.

Frustrated, I hung up and dialed 911.

I was working in Collin County at the time, so I asked the operator to transfer me to a dispatcher in Waxahachie. I got through and within minutes an ambulance arrived at my parents' door.

I rushed home to meet my husband so he could drive me to the hospital. I remember calling everyone I could: my brothers, a sister-in-law, a cousin, my parents' priest.

The 40-minute drive down from North Dallas to Waxahachie felt like an eternity.

I'd seen my dad on a hospital bed once before, when he had a skin graft nearly 20 years ago. Seeing him in a hospital gown again



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seemed surreal.

This time, I was old enough to help fill out paperwork and serve as an English translator. My mom sat quietly nearby.

We learned from the ER doctor that my dad had suffered a stroke. His blood sugar level had climbed to a dangerous level.

He was diabetic, and we didn't even know it. We also learned he previously had a minor stroke.

My dad seemed to take the news in stride, as is his nature. My mom and I were sick to our stomachs. My angst and sadness turned to anger.

I didn't want to be mad at him, but I couldn't help thinking, "I told you so." My mom didn't have to say it. You could read her expression.

Our worst fears had been realized.

In recent years, my dad had shown symptoms of diabetes, namely frequent trips to the bathroom and excessive thirst.

He seemed to always have a craving for anything sweet. He was overweight, smoked and refused to exercise.

I'd been on his case countless times, urging him to see the doctor.

I'd even told him about my worst fear: that he wouldn't be at my wedding to walk me down the aisle. I'd prayed often that he would make it.

He did eat all his vegetables and loved fruit. He'd even park his

car a good distance from a store entrance so he could walk. But that was the extent of his healthy habits.

Somehow I just knew he wasn't well. Still, nothing I did or said could convince him of that.

And now he lay in a hospital bed. He could barely move his left side.

Walking, much less driving,

would be a problem.

His paralysis would to some extent immobilize us all.

My mom, who does not drive, would come to rely on me and my siblings to do the tasks my dad once did: taking her to the store and to the doctor, paying the bills. Tasks we all took for granted.

That night, the role of parent and child reversed. And a long

journey with more uncertainties than any of us ever imagined began.

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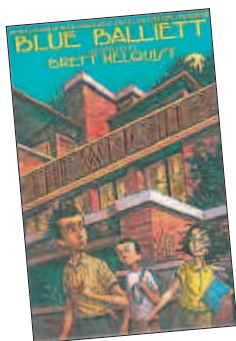


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