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### Tayler's Rainbow

Let's take a look at the concept of "family": how a family works, how the members relate, how the family interacts with each other. In a particular family, there is a nurturing mother, a hard-working father, and an only daughter. The three of them have a loving family dynamic. Now, put yourself in the shoes of the mother. What would life be like if everything you lived for, your daughter, was taken from you.

In the spring of 2008, my little sister, Madison, and her best friend, Tayler, tried out for their high school dance team. To be a Varsity Emerald Belle, as the dance team was called, was always my sister's dream. She and Tayler had been taking dance classes for a few years together, and recently added a Drill Team class to their busy schedules just to prepare for tryouts. As the week started and practice begun, both girls put their hearts out and left everything they had on the dance floor. On the fifth day of tryouts, Tayler began to complain about her knees hurting her; this was common due to all the jump kicks and fast paced dancing, but she she experienced more pain than she normally would from a routine workout. Mrs. Reynolds, Tayler's mother, decided to get some MRI's done to see if maybe Tayler strained a muscle or tore a ligament in her legs.

The next day, while awaiting the results from the MRI scan, Tayler went to tryouts to watch the other girls dance, hoping to not fall too far behind. After the first few "go rounds," Tayler felt she was well enough to try again. By the end of that

day, the lists for Varsity and Junior Varsity were posted on the door outside the locker room. Both Madison and Tayler earned a spot on the Varsity dance team, a prestigious ranking for a freshman. We had a celebration for our little dancers that night with cookie cake and balloons and talked about our pride in all their hard work. The girls had accomplished no small feat. They had danced every day, all day for two weeks and made it on the varsity dance team. This was definitely something to be proud of, and by the brightness in their eyes and the energy they were giving off, we knew they were proud of themselves.

The next day, Mrs. Reynolds received a worrisome phone call from the doctor's office to come in immediately. "I was terrified at first, but I thought, ya' know what? God has a plan. It will all be alright," Mrs. Reynolds said later about her reaction to the phone call. She was a very optimistic woman, someone who believed that everything happened for a reason, and was a strong believer in God and His work. She possessed the strength to get through anything, no matter what. Mrs. Reynolds was always the one saying, "It's going to be okay." Tayler and her mother got in the car and drove to the doctor's office to hear the results of the scans.

When they arrived, the doctor pulled Mrs. Reynolds aside to talk to her privately. "Mrs. Reynolds, I'm sorry that I have to be the one to tell you this. The scans came back. Tayler has Leukemia."

"My heart stopped. I was frozen," said Mrs. Reynolds, "I just kept thinking to myself, 'No, no, no. This cannot be happening. She is only thirteen-years-old. How can *my* daughter have cancer? What am I going to do?'" Mrs. Reynolds was beyond emotions, not believing what she had just heard. In her eyes, the doctor had it easy

telling her the information; but now it was her turn. She would now have to tell her only child, her blessed daughter, that she had Leukemia.

As she stood in the office with the doctor looking over the tests, Mrs. Reynolds fought back tears. In her head, she replayed visions of times in Tayler's life that stuck out most in her memories. She thought about the day Tayler was born, "looking into the face of a beautiful, healthy baby girl. Bringing the seven pound, four ounce baby wrapped in pink home from the hospital and the many nights spent rocking her back to sleep." Mrs. Reynolds thought about Tayler's first encounter with the Santa at the mall and "how much she hated that man; and would not sit long enough to take a picture and after waiting in the line for hours, had to leave without one." She also thought about Tayler's first lost tooth, and Tayler's first day of school. Mrs. Reynolds thought back to all the times she and Tayler had sat on the couch watching *The Bachelor* or *So You Think You Can Dance* and how Tayler dreamed of dancing on television. All the times the two girls had sat on Tayler's bed and talked about her day at school; about the boys Tayler thought were cute and the teachers she really didn't like. They would talk about homecoming and what kind of dress she would wear, or about the cattiness of girls in her class. It was evident how strong the bond was between Tayler and her mother. The doctor explained the family's options and though Mrs. Reynolds wore a strong face and looked as if she was paying attention, her mind wandered back to her helpless little girl sitting just outside the heavy doors.

Of course, the initial shock was more than anybody could imagine. As the night progressed, Mrs. Reynolds continued to tell her family, "God has a plan."

As they were checked in to St. Jude's Medical Research Hospital, the family tried to keep high spirits and go through this with a positive attitude. They sat in the waiting room, Mrs. Reynolds recalled, "watching the clock for what seemed like hours." Finally, they were called in.

The doctor said not to worry. They caught the cancer quickly. This would be an easy fix. After a few Chemo treatments, they would be good to go; the family could return to their normal, everyday lives.

If only everything could be a guarantee. Tayler contracted a staff infection leading to heart failure. On April 19, 2008, only 3 weeks after being diagnosed, Tayler Reynolds passed away.

In the face of their heartbreaking reality, Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds felt like they had nothing else to live for. Their only daughter was taken from them far too early. "A child should never pass away before his or her parent. Its just not natural" Mrs. Reynolds could not believe what had just happened. Of course, it took her a little while to come around to the fact that she would never get to do her daughter's hair for prom, or help her pick out clothes for the first day of school. She would never get to watch her little girl dance at the football games, or walk down the aisle. All of the things moms look forward to most would never happen. "It took me a long time before I would go back into Tayler's room. Just knowing that I tucked her in every night and woke her up every morning broke my heart thinking about going in to an empty bedroom." Mrs. Reynolds told me about her daughter. "Tayler just had this lust for life. She never let a moment pass; she lived every day to the absolute fullest.

Tayler was the most outgoing, charismatic little girl I had ever known. And she had a heart of gold. She will make one beautiful angel.”

Not long after Tayler’s passing, Mrs. Reynolds got involved in Relay for Life, an organization that The American Cancer Society does as a “life-changing event that gives everyone in communities across the globe a chance to celebrate the lives of people who have battled cancer, remember loved ones lost, and fight back against the disease” (“What is Relay for Life?”). Mrs. Reynolds told me that she “would never want anyone to go through what [she] went through in losing her child, [she has] to make a difference and help others to cope with the loss of loved ones.” If nothing else, she just wanted to hear others’ inspirational stories and laugh and share in the joy of other people’s families. “Relay for Life is more than just an organization, it’s a community of people just like you who can share in your pain and help you grow and learn to experience life again,” Mrs. Reynolds told me.

Through being a part of this organization, Mrs. Reynolds realized that she needed to do more than just participate. Locally, in our small town of Southlake, TX, Mrs. Reynolds decided to host her own Relay for Life in honor of her daughter as well as those in the local community who also have suffered a loss in the family. Each year since Tayler’s passing, Mrs. Reynolds has organized the event and gets the whole town involved. Each “team,” or group of people who walk for a person, sets up a tent and decorates it in honor of their loved one who either won or lost the battle against cancer. Each team has their t-shirts made by a company whose proceeds go to Relay for Life. Local caterers, balloon makers, sponsors, and all others involved with Relay for Life donate their proceeds directly to St. Jude’s

Children's Research Hospital. In the weeks leading up to the event, Mrs. Reynolds also goes to local restaurants, school boards, and small movie theatres and asks that a small portion of their proceeds for the week of Relay for Life go to St. Jude's. It is a community effort, and everybody is more than willing to pitch in.

Mrs. Reynolds says that she has gotten so much closure on her daughter's death through the local Relay for Life community. When the event comes around, she looks forward to meeting the children who survived yet another year battling cancer. She gets so much joy out of seeing the smiles of other children. Mrs. Reynolds is the most uplifting person I have ever known. She does not feel sorry for herself, but seeks to help others. She has stayed so positive throughout the last few years and lives a full life, as she knows Tayler would have wanted. That's not to say she doesn't have days where she would give anything to have her daughter back, but she remains a strong, inspiring woman. "I have come a long way. I can actually go into Tayler's room and be okay. I know she is in there and is with me every day," says Mrs. Reynolds.

My sister still goes to Taylers' house. I asked my sister about life at Tayler's house when she goes over since Tayler's passing. Mrs. Reynolds still has all the girls who were friends of Tayler over for pool parties, sleepovers, Tayler's birthday, and the anniversary of Tayler's death. My sister says "it used to be sad going over there and not seeing Tayler's face at the door. But Mrs. Reynolds has done such a good job of making it a happy experience when we go over that it has really helped all of us cope as well". When I asked my sister what it is like in Tayler's room, she says, "you can see on a framed picture of Tayler's school portrait, the faint remnants of lips on

her face, where Mrs. Reynolds kisses her daughter before bed and whenever she goes up to her room”.

Through Relay for Life, Mrs. Reynolds has been able to raise massive amounts of money for cancer research. The community of survivors and current fighters that come out for Relay for Life have impacted Mrs. Reynolds in a positive way. They help her grow and move on, but never forget that the spirit of Tayler remains at her side. Mrs. Reynolds always says that “when [she] sees a rainbow or a butterfly, [she] knows that it is Tayler.” Mrs. Reynolds said that when Tayler was alive her favorite joys in life came from family, friends, rainbows, and butterflies. In fact, the high school’s first football game was on Tayler’s birthday. The game was dedicated to Tayler and all ticket proceeds also went to cancer research. Right before the game started, on a perfect, beautiful day, the biggest, brightest rainbow imaginable arched over the stadium. Mrs. Reynolds teared up, knowing that it would have been her daughter’s first time dancing at the high school football game. Although Tayler couldn’t be dancing physically, she was there to support her team.

### Works Cited

"What is Relay for Life?" Relay for Life. *Relay for Life*. American Cancer Society Relay for Life. Web. 9 Feb. 2011.