

REMEMBERING MY DAD

BY JAMIE VALVANO

James Thomas Anthony Valvano was the mischievous middle son born to Rocco and Angela. His brothers Nick and Bob endured the constant chatter and crazy antics of their spirited sibling. Jim once said, “to fully understand how close-knit a family I grew up in – we hugged, kissed, touched and said “I love you” so often that we should have been X-rated.” A 25-year marriage to his high school sweetheart, Pamela Levine, produced three daughters: Nicole, Jamie and Lee Ann. Although his demanding schedule often kept him away from those he loved most, his deep commitment to family was the foundation that allowed him to live out his dreams.

When Jim was 17 years old, he took out a white index card and wrote down all of his professional aspirations. He would play basketball in high school and college, become an assistant basketball coach, then a head coach, achieve a victory in Madison Square Garden and cut down the nets after winning a National Championship. Jim’s ability to see his place in the world with such clarity was truly a gift. This simple index card, coupled with a strong belief that he could control his fate, would guide the next 10 years of his life.

At 36, Jim could take out his tattered index card and cross off every single dream; he’d accomplished them all. He was indeed the master of his destiny. Along the way, he adopted a personal philosophy for living that enabled an ordinary man to accomplish the extraordinary. Jim believed that an enthusiasm for life, big dreams and hard work were the elements that allowed him to be successful. There is no doubt that Jim’s tenacity, passion and vision played key roles in his rise to the top. However, if you listen to any individual recount a personal memory of Jim, nothing from the above list of accomplishments would be mentioned. Instead, you would hear of the qualities that made Jim unforgettable.

A Man of Action

Jim Valvano once commented, “There are 86,400 seconds in a day. It’s up to you to decide what to do with them.” Jim decided that he would do it all.

He reached the highest level of success as a basketball coach and then as an award-winning commentator at ABC and ESPN. He authored three books, gave hundreds of motivational speeches to corporations across the country, hosted weekly television and radio broadcasts, created his own corporation, JTV Enterprises, to oversee his many entrepreneurial endeavors and showcased his fabulous sense of humor during guest spots on “The Tonight Show,” “Late Show

with David Letterman” and “The Cosby Show.” Reporters constantly questioned Coach V about his “outside interests” that took time away from his coaching responsibilities. During a press conference, he tried to let others gain insight into his personal pursuits by stating, “I want to do other things, learn about other professions. I refuse to limit myself to whatever boundaries you may think surround a coach’s position. Very simply, I enjoy diversity.”

Each new challenge allowed him to prove once again that his talents were limitless. He was a man possessed by life and all of the opportunities that it had to offer. When he witnessed another person doing something he admired, he said to himself, “I can do that.” In a world where millions of people are content to simply watch their lives unfold, Jim participated in every second. He certainly made mistakes along his journey, but he can never be accused of failing to live each moment to the fullest.

A Man of the People

Jim Valvano had a walk, but it was more than a vehicle to get from one place to another. He sauntered as if he was in no hurry and at the same time exuded such energy that you felt you could never catch up to him. Jim had a smile, but it was more than just a way to show that he was happy. It was a toothy, silly grin that should have belonged to a young boy but somehow fit Coach V’s face perfectly. Jim had a sense of humor, but his magic went much deeper than telling a joke. A brilliant wit caught you off guard and tickled your funny bone until you gave into the laughter that followed this man. Jim had a love of people, but it was more than an outgoing nature. He made you believe you mattered to him even if you only shared a brief encounter.

The Jim Valvano we knew could not have existed without people. He worked to motivate, stimulate, entertain and inspire any person that entered his life. The world was his team, and his game plan would allow us all to be winners. He publicly shared the joys of his victories and the agony of his defeats. He certainly loved the limelight, but he also hoped others would learn from the way in which he lived life. He wanted to matter to someone and to everyone. Perhaps it was his deep love of humanity that allowed him to share the details of his darkest hour with millions of strangers that would become his closest confidants.

A Man of Courage

Jim Valvano uncomfortably sat on a small stool in the corner of a doctor’s office. A stranger in a white lab coat entered the room and informed him that he had a year to live. He was sweating profusely, and he wiped his brow before shaking the doctor’s hand and walking quietly to the parking lot. Metastatic Adenocarcinoma would prove the toughest opponent this coach had ever faced.

During one of Jim’s final interviews he stated, “I want to help every cancer patient I can now. I don’t know if I can handle that, but it’s the only conceivable good that

can come out of this.” Jim proved that he could more than handle his final role as cancer advocate. He spent the final 10 months of his life giving the world personal insights into the life of a cancer patient in the hope that he could bring some attention to the disease that affects millions. He was not afraid to let others witness his weakening body or the tears that he shed when he spoke of his certain death during interviews and public appearances. He knew his body would lose the battle against cancer, but his vibrant spirit was the gift that he would leave behind.

The V Foundation for Cancer Research continues to be guided by the legacy of one man that refused to give up. The V Foundation embraces Jim’s call for action, his love of people and the courage that enabled him to find hope even in despair. Jim Valvano remains an enduring example of the timeless influence that one individual can have in this world.