

Here is a deeply moving testament of a young father who is told he has only six months to live

the bat. But I began getting tired by mid-afternoon. Sometimes I was even tired after a good night's sleep.

"I've probably got tired blood—as in that TV commercial," I told the doctor. "Probably all I need is a tonic."

Three days later he called and asked me to drop by that afternoon. His voice made me worry a little. Maybe it was ulcers, or even a bad heart. But it couldn't be anything that bad. I was only 40, in midstream.

I had "tired blood" all right. I had leukemia (also known as "cancer of the blood"), a disease I'd always considered as remote as leprosy. Not too much is really known about it, except one thing. It's always fatal.

My main reaction to the news was complete disbelief. This feeling wasn't lessened by the way the doctor dodged questions about how advanced my condition was.

If there's something to fight, I like to know about it. I'm not the type to appreciate being kept in the dark. So I went to a relative of mine who is a doctor.

Consultations and further tests. Then I got the facts. *Very advanced leukemia*. Treatments might help some, but nothing guaranteed. I'd be lucky if I got through another summer.

As a man with a family, I had responsibilities. Certain things had to be prepared for: making sure my wife and children would be all right financially, checking my will and arranging my business affairs.

TO KIDS, it seems heroic not to tell people if you have a fatal illness. But as a grownup, it doesn't work that way. I told my wife I was sick, but I didn't tell her about the "six months" business. And I convinced her I'd live a long time yet, just as I convinced myself.

As for the children, I had always been close to them and wanted them to be prepared—just in case—so it wouldn't be a sudden shock. At the same time I certainly didn't want them to know that I was "scheduled" to die at such-and-such a time.

So we adopted a plan. I acted normally, as if I felt I'd live forever. But each time I went to the hospital for treatments, they were told "Daddy is very sick," and thus it was impressed on them that there was a chance I wouldn't come back. As their mother said, "They know with their heads but not with their hearts."

I began to think more and more of my kids. And one question began gnawing at me:

"Did I leave them enough?"

I don't mean materially. They'd be better off than most in that respect. I mean, well—in my philosophy, my way of life. I began to think particularly of my 15-year-old son Peter. Did he have in him what it takes for a boy to grow into a "solid" man? Did I really know my kids? There was a close relationship between us, but it wasn't as close as I suddenly wished I had made it.

The desire to make up for this has become more important to me than anything else.

The possibility of dying began to bother me less and less. It could happen any time, even without leukemia. Crossing the street during noon hour. Or getting some other sickness. But the fact that the children might never know me as I had hoped they would—this I began to regret very much.

I know now for certain something I'd only vaguely thought about before. There is nothing—no business deal successfully closed, no conquest in love or war, no work of art finally finished—that can compare in satisfaction with a father's feeling when he sees his boy "grown" right in front of his eyes.

You take him fishing for the first time. He puts a fly on the line and casts it out into the stream—as awkward as any amateur doing it the first time. Then you become acutely aware of that sharp, bright mind following exactly how you do it, and trying again, better each time. And in no time he's as good as you—maybe better.

There's a wonder in this and a deep-down glow—the kind that would make you purr if you were a cat. It's a feeling

that comes partly from the strange sensation that this beautifully alive creature is somehow *you*—only a more perfect you. At such a moment you feel that, if there's no other kind of immortality after all, this kind could be enough.

You can live on, in a way, through writings, paintings, buildings you build or legends you create. But it's not the personal feeling of living on through your children.

Giving birth alone is no great accomplishment, to my mind. Even a dog or a tree can do it. Many animals produce offspring and go their way, leaving them to survive or succumb by themselves. Many humans do much the same thing. Unfortunately, even parents who provide their children with a home and the necessities for physical survival often let the child grow up "alone."

THESE PARENTS are missing the greatest thing life has to offer—or so it seems to me now. Unfortunately, I have missed a lot, too. There are so many things, so many valuable experiences and "moments of truth" I wish I had communicated to my children. But I never had time. Now, with practically no time at all (they tell me), I'm going to try.

I've often said to myself, "If only I were starting out again—with the knowledge and experience I have today!" Well, your child is you, starting all over again. He can become, not someone who won't make any mistakes, but someone less likely to make the same ones you did—not someone perfect, but someone less imperfect because he has profited from your imperfections.

As a boy, I spent a lot of time in the Adirondacks, near Lake Placid. I took long walks through the mountains by myself, and I'm sure those were the days that gave me whatever philosophy, purpose or strength of character I might have. I "found myself" in that wonderful scenery and inspiring mountain air.

The dream constantly on my mind lately is to take my son along those same paths. As soon as summer comes we'll spend several weeks there, living with a closeness that's hard to find on concrete pavements or in the midst of people.

He's being brought up a Catholic. In the mountains, however, I'll explain about other ways of thinking and how they aren't necessarily wrong simply because they're different. No belief will take much leaning-on that hasn't had to fight for its existence against other beliefs—and won out on its own merits. In politics, religion or any field, I don't want my son to hold beliefs that were planted full-grown in his mind and settle into a mental rut for not having them pushed around a bit.

This and so many other things I want to talk to him about. If I have the time.

Children are increasingly being turned outward. They get their backbone, their "way of life" from school, from countless magazines and tabloids, from the kids down the street and, so very, very much lately, from TV. We don't have time for them. There are too many things on our minds. Things which don't mean anything at all in the end.

If anything, the farther out an individual reaches from his family circle, the more lost he seems inside himself. The more inventions and discoveries he makes, the fewer reasons he seems to have for living.

A man about to die finds that whether the world is round or square is of mighty small consequence, after all. Leaving a flag on top of Mount Everest or on a star are exciting feats. But leaving behind a continuing part of yourself—this seems to me the greatest thing that can happen to anyone.

It can give reason to your having lived at all.

(Mr. A. did not have a chance to take his son on the trip he mentioned. A week after her interview, Miss Liberte called to ask him to go over this article to be sure it followed what he had said. He had died two days earlier. He had worked in his office until 3 p.m. Feeling very tired, he went home to rest. The following morning he was dead.)

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