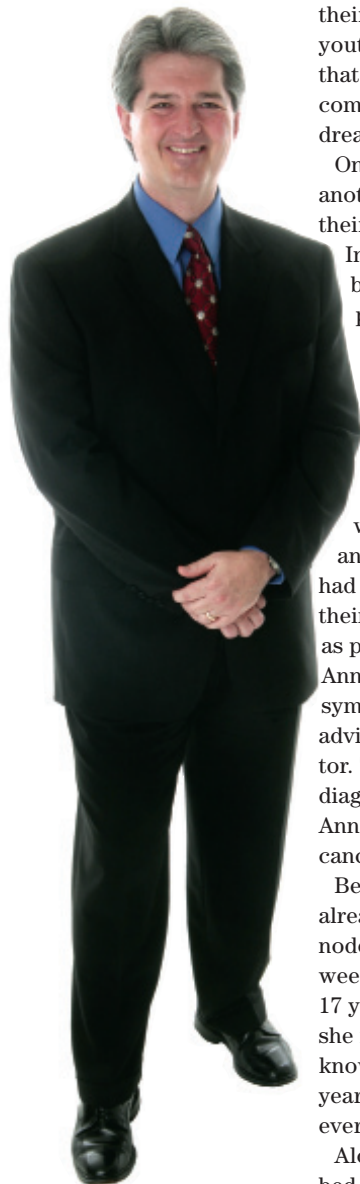


Endings and beginnings

FIND THE INNER COMPASS THAT WILL GUIDE EVERY STEP OF YOUR LIFE



September 17, 1937. A date that probably holds no significance for you, but one that made all the difference in my life. On that date, a young man named Bill, recently discharged from the Army, married a girl named Ann. They were like any other married couple, then or now, with great dreams for their life together and the youthful optimism to believe that those dreams would come true. And their greatest dream was to have a child.

One year passed, and then another and another, and still their dream was not realized.

In all, 17 years would go by as they waited and prayed for the gift of a child. And then one day, the child for whom they had waited so long was born — that child was me.

The next five years were filled with all the joy and love that Bill and Ann had imagined as they wove their lives around their roles as parents. Then one day, Ann began to have unusual symptoms and sought the advice of our family doctor. Tests were run and the diagnosis was confirmed. Ann had terminal, inoperable cancer.

Because the cancer had already spread to her lymph nodes, she was given only weeks to live. After waiting 17 years to have her child, she now faced the certain knowledge that the past five years were all she would ever know as a mother.

Alone in her hospital bed, almost to the point of

despair, she began to pray a single prayer. Her prayer was that she be allowed to see her child grow to become a man. I can only imagine the ferocity of that prayer and the sincerity with which it was offered from a mother's heart.

Within days, her cancer went into remission. I'm sure there are others who would credit the wonderful doctors and the massive medications that were administered. Although she was grateful for them, my mother saw them as only the instruments of an answered prayer. A prayer that had brought her what she wanted most in the world.

The next 17 years were as wonderful, and as ordinary, as they are in the life of every family. It was a full, rich life that in reflection condenses down to a handful of cherished memories.

One of these memories is of a Sunday morning as I was excitedly preparing for my college graduation. Over the preceding weeks, I had noticed that my mother was often tired and seemed to not be herself. Today, she could not walk. Within a few hours, she was hospitalized. The cancer had returned and she was given only a few weeks to live.

Near the end, I sat on the side of her bed overcome with emotion. I could not believe that her life could

be ending just as mine was really beginning.

"It's not fair, it's just not fair," I said over and over again.

To this day, I can feel my mother's hand on my head and hear her comforting voice.

"It is fair, son," she said. "In fact, it's more than fair."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. How could she think it was fair that she would die at the very moment I was ready to launch my life? And then she told me the story of that night 17 years ago and of her single prayer to see me grown.

"So you see, Jimmy" she said, "that's why I'm so happy. I got what I really wanted."

Within days, she was gone. But her example became the defining message of my life — a message that has been the central theme of this column for the past five years.

Every ending is also a beginning. No matter where you are or what challenges you face, you literally choose your life in every moment.

When you go deep enough to know who you are and what you really want, you will have found the guiding compass that will direct every step of your journey.

Follow it, and one day you will know the joy and peace of being able to say in your final moments, "I got what I really wanted." <<

JIM HULING is an executive consultant, a national keynote speaker and a professional coach. His leadership experience spans more than 30 years, including a decade as CEO of a company recognized four times as one of the "25 Best Companies to Work For in America." Jim is also the author of "Choose Your Life! a powerful proven method for creating the life you want." He can be reached at jim@jimhuling.com.