It is Thursday, March 12, 2020, the day before the US begins to lock down for real in response to the initial wave of Covid. My little brother, Todd, and Sister-In-Law, Deb, are in Houston at MD Anderson. Todd is nearly recovered from the ten-hour surgery he had six weeks ago to save his leg following the recurrence of his bone cancer.

Todd is Superman; in his mid-forties, he handles chemo, radiation and surgeries much easier than most. He takes any treatment without complaint and bounces back quickly. He’s willing to do whatever it takes to survive. He’s an optimist with a darn near perfect life and he has always had a real passion for fully living each day.

His oncologist says he doesn’t need chemo or radiation for now, but instead just fresh scans every six weeks to look for tumors, but his surgeon recommends an additional consult with another top doctor in the field.

Todd and Deb enter the office to meet with the head of the sarcoma department of MD Anderson. This man doesn’t know them. He doesn’t know they are parents of two exceptional little girls, that they are leaders in their synagogue and local community. He doesn’t know how much they are adored by their family and many dozens of close friends.

This man is a medical expert and he is there to give them his expert advice. “Todd, chemo and radiation have not worked for you, and unfortunately, this cancer will recur, sooner than later,” they hear him say. “I would love to be able to tell you that we will be meeting here in two years to discuss your situation, but the chance of you living that long, in my opinion, is about 1%. Go and do anything on your bucket list and set your affairs in order.”

Todd and Deb fly home in anguish, and Todd doesn’t get out of bed the next day. Bucket list? The world is closing down as Covid ramps up its reign of destruction. Sarah and Lilah are only five and eight. There is disbelief, tears, fear.

We all feel the weight of the sands of the hourglass pouring out. I can’t travel there and this is the most painful aspect of the pandemic for me.

But Covid comes with some blessings too. With the girls doing virtual school and both parents working from home, they begin to spend so much extra time together. A new plan begins to emerge. They realize the ever more sacred and urgent nature of each day, and determine to take advantage of each opportunity to create precious memories and even more boldly celebrate and live life.

Maybe you’ve heard the Tim McGraw popular song, “Live Like You Were Dying.” It starts like this:

He said, "I was in my early 40s,  
With a lot of life before me,  
And a moment came that stopped me on a dime.  
I spent most of the next days  
Lookin' at the X-rays,  
Talkin' 'bout the options  
And talkin' 'bout sweet time."

I asked him, "When it sank in that this might really be the real end,  
How's it hit you, when you get that kind of news?"  
Man what'd you do?"  
And he said,

"I went sky divin',  
I went rocky mountain climbin',  
I went 2.7 seconds on a bull named Fumanchu.  
And I loved deeper,  
And I spoke sweeter,  
And I gave forgiveness I'd been denying."

And he said, "Someday I hope you get the chance  
To live like you were dying."

By fall, they decide to keep the girls in virtual school and Deb quits her job. They travel by car to a family lake house in upstate NY. These Florida girls wanted to see snow so they pull them from virtual school one day to enjoy a snowy day sledding down hills in Lake Placid. They stay in beach homes in South Carolina and Florida, riding bikes, jumping waves, playing and searching for shells.

By this past November, as the doctor predicted, new scans reveal the cancer has returned to the same leg.

There is one clinical trial and Todd enters it. The treatment at first appears promising and he handles the side effects well.

There is a brother’s trip to the Bourbon Trail in Kentucky, and they watch the Superbowl from a VIP suite at the stadium in Tampa.

Then in March, after additional scans, they make the prudent decision to proceed with an above the knee amputation. This will give him the best shot at the longest amount of time.

Todd inspires me like no one else. And I am not alone in noticing the strength of this great human being.

I fly in for the surgery and again, Superman stuns us all, coming home after only one night in the hospital. He comes to the front door and we watch as he maneuvers a walker to take his first step up into the house. He is wearing shorts and yes, it does look a bit strange as we see him for the first time without his lower leg.

He carefully makes his way in and we have a drink together as we sit on the couch. Lilah says we should each say something nice about Daddy. Then she suggests we make toasts to him. We savor this special moment, as we quickly understand that Todd is still 100% Todd, the funny, cool, loving man we know.

And he bounces back from this adversity with the most contagious, fun-loving spirit that makes you feel blessed to get to hang out with him. He never complains or asks why; instead, he celebrates each moment that he’s alive.

It is now April of this year, over three years since he was first diagnosed with Ewings Sarcoma. There have been so many highs and lows, and you can never prepare yourself for the next dip or turn, and we are in for another bad one.

Only four weeks post amputation, the new scans show that this monster has returned, this time spreading to his lungs. It’s bad, but Todd isn’t done fighting yet. There is one final Hail Mary treatment, an experimental drug that has worked sometimes with other cancers. Though they don’t give us much hope, we learn that the reason you throw a Hail Mary pass at the end of a football game, is that sometimes it works.

Another four weeks later, the scans show the tumors actually shrinking. Next scans are in seven more weeks. There is an incredible family reunion to a beach house, a trip to a Bat Mitzvah, an outdoor concert with fifty friends. There are more trips to the NY lake house and finally a dream week in Maui. More gatherings and travels are planned as long as the July x-rays come back with good news, and they do. The tumors are continuing to shrink. New scans in eight more weeks.

Life between the scans is richer and sweeter. There are no grudges or what ifs. There is sadness, anxiety and tears, side by side with so much gratitude, blessing and love.

Time is filled with rich everyday experiences and once in a lifetime adventures. It is lived with a deep intention to spend the hours celebrating and enjoying the people you love and the people who love you. If only everyone could indeed, “Live Like You Were Dying.”