

**DRAFT #1 : AFTER 25 PAGES OF NOTES, 5 NIGHTS OF NO SLEEP, AND MANY TEARS.**

Fifteen cars parked in the yard of the stone and ivy covered home just off of 95th street. Inside, a semicircle of folding chairs surround Jeff McMahon's bed upstairs.

In the chairs sit co-workers, a few best friends, his mother and step-dad. In bed lying next to him are his wife, two daughters and his son, senior Sean McMahon. Sean and Jeff sit so closely their legs leave no room in between. Sean's arms wrap around his dad's broad shoulders. Sean's toes grip the beige carpet and his fingers fidget as tears glide down his cheeks. Sean's head drops into his dad's chest as the room silences.

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When Jeff was diagnosed on Feb. 27 with stage 4 Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma, a cancer affecting white blood cells, he was scared, but not that scared, he said. The doctors told him the odds were on his side. They told him it would be chemotherapy, a stem cell transplant and then it would be over. But it wasn't. On Oct. 25, doctors told Jeff they had done everything they could to help him, and there was an estimated month left.

This news attracted his friends, family and the Lancer football team to his bedside— traveling as far as Hawaii to see him.

"I've told everybody who has been in and out, 'I want you to come over whenever,'" Jeff said. "I feel like the old woman in the nursing home, who begs you to come see them."

And friends have fulfilled this request. Since Jeff's diagnosis, friends set up a meal train supplying mounds of chili, enchilada casseroles and vegetables. Visitors flew in and out beginning at 10 a.m. with berry Slurpees or a Dairy Queen peanut buster parfait, some Jeff's favorites. Sean shaved his head in solidarity and when Jeff could hardly lift his wrist to read his watch, his wife Annie was there to bring him everything from a morning coffee to casseroles.

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The tan bandage crossing his left shoulder sticks out just above his Adidas shirt. White gauze wraps his elbow with a small tube sticking out, these pieces which became part of him just ten months prior have defined every day since.

Cancer meant no more Royals games. No more hours of fishing with Sean. No more playing catch outside and most devastatingly, no more watching Sean on the field for Lancer football.

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"There are a million regrets of 'I wish I hadn't picked on that kid in 3rd grade'" Jeff says.

"What about that kid at work?" His co-worker Chris Jones quickly retorts. The room bursts into a flood of laughter as Jeff smiles, lightly shaking his head.

Jeff's mom, Susan Bates, leans over to Jeff's co-worker next to her with a teary-eyed smile. "This is what goes on all day."

Senior Sean McMahon's arms wrap around his dad Jeff's broad shoulders. Sitting on the edge of the king-sized bed, Sean's toes grip the beige carpet, and his fingers fidget as tears glide down his cheeks. His head sinks into his dad's chest as the room silences.

Next to them in the bed is Jeff's wife Annie and two of his daughters, Danielle and Madeline.

Circling his bed are twelve folding chairs. On this day, the chairs held co-workers and family members. Some days they held friends from elementary school and other days he was surrounded by members of the Lancer football team. Light spills into the room, illuminating the turquoise walls that surround the people Jeff impacted as a father, husband, friend, co-worker and coach.

These people in Jeff's bedroom and visitors to follow make up Jeff's "team." They were on the sidelines of his life, filling his last moments with stories of losing kids at the park, jokes about his co-worker Chris Jones being homeschooled and debates over who is responsible for Sean's fishing skills. In the midst of laughter, for just a few seconds, everyone forgets the reason they were there in the first place.

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But on Oct. 25, doctors told Jeff they had done everything they could to help him and estimated he had about a month left – two weeks later he was admitted to hospice. Jeff took his last breath at 6:55 a.m. on Thurs. Nov. 10.

This bedroom is a microcosm of Jeff's life. His family, who sit as close to him as possible, were with him since he first noticed a lump on his left shoulder. His friends who sit around him came from as far as Hawaii to be at his side through his battle.

The ACE bandage crossing Jeff's left shoulder sticks out just above his Adidas shirt. White gauze wraps his elbow with a small tube sticking out; these pieces became part of him over the past ten months and defined every day after.

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One chair empties as his boss, Dom Schilt, gets up to catch a plane back to Chicago; the room settles from laughter into silence. It's quiet enough to hear the sharp breath both Jeff and his boss take in with a tight hug.

"There hasn't been a lot of sadness in the room until they come and go," Jeff said. "When they come it's 'thank you for being here, I love you' and when they go, it's 'I love you a lot I really appreciate you being here' – there's no goodbye."