

Area Bloggers



[TOP](#)

A Few Words from Lora Galati - Larry B. Jones H.O.P.E. Campaign

MARCH 24TH 2016 BY DEE LOFLIN

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I've spent the last two days contacting H.O.P.E. Campaign and 18 FORE Life love offering recipients, in order to obtain pictures of our local heroes to be included in a tribute video at 18 FORE Life's annual banquet this June. It's been awesome to reflect on each of these amazing individuals and their stories. Pictures have been arriving in my inbox and stories... amazing stories... that go along with each one. Today marks the 5 year anniversary of my dad's burial. The work for the H.O.P.E. Campaign has been therapeutic for our family. As I've reflected on each person our family has been able to reach out to through the H.O.P.E. Campaign, I remember why we do what we do. We've been in their shoes. We remember how loved and supported we've felt through both Dad and Mom's battles with cancer, and through the unexpected loss of my sister. It means so much, and we want to do that for others.

Rev. Kevin Eskew stood before us at Dad's funeral in his green tie that day. I had no idea until that moment it was St. Patrick's Day, but 5 years later as I'm reflecting on this, I love that he still incorporated that! In the midst of my grief, that made me smile. It was very fitting of his personality, and he is deeply missed in this life as well. I'll never forget Rev. Eskew's message that day. It was a beautiful message about spring and re-birth and about how all things good come from God. He spoke of the H.O.P. E. Campaign that day, and referenced the acronym:

Healing, Optimism, Prayer and Example. He reminded us to not forget the greatest example that Dad left us with. He shared with everyone there how powerful it was the day a therapy tub in Southeast Hospital was turned into a baptismal pool. Dad followed Christ's example that day and I am so proud of him. He was too weak to move himself, so he was lowered on a lift into the tub.

Person after person came to us after Dad's passing and shared with us such special stories of how he's helped them along in one way or another. We are so glad that Dad's memory lives on. With each love offering that is mailed out, we remember that Dad and our Sara are still helping people on this side of Heaven. Up until 18 FORE Life had asked for us to share photos of love offering recipients, my record keeping had been very informal. Very thorough, but very informal. Upon adding all the names into a spreadsheet, our family was blown away with the number of heroes/warriors that have benefited from gifts from the H.O.P.E. Campaign and from 18 FORE Life. From the time of Dad's passing in March of 2011 until the Summer of 2013, when we officially teamed up with 18 FORE Life, the H.O.P.E. Campaign mailed out fifty-two \$300 gifts. These gifts were for the family to use however they needed.

In June of 2013, we began turning names of cancer warriors in to 18 FORE Life. This amazing charity has been blessing others for the past 16 years. They do what they do and they do it well. I will never forget when Dad was diagnosed, and receiving that envelope from their charity. There was \$1,000 enclosed. Dad and all of us were so incredibly touched. It was not about the money. There was a message of hope... love... support... encouragement, a feeling that we were not in this alone... and this was an incredible feeling, indescribable, really. And then, 2 weeks after we buried my dad, my mother's breast cancer that she had battled and beat in 1998 & 1999, returned in her bone. Stage 4 cancer, 2 weeks after we lost my dad.

I remember meeting with Rev. Kevin Eskew in the foyer of his church building a few days after the funeral to deliver a couple of floral arrangements from the funeral. Although beautiful, we did not have room for all of them in our homes! I shared with him that Mom's re-diagnosis had not yet been confirmed, but there were strong suspicions. I broke down and cried. He hugged me tightly. I told him I couldn't do this again. We had just lost my dad and it was terribly hard, and I couldn't face another battle like this. I don't remember his exact words, but they were good... as always... And he was right. We're here and we're doing it. Mom's cancer "re-diagnosis" was confirmed. We've been battling Stage 4 breast cancer

with metastasis to the bone and liver for 5 years. 5 YEARS!! We are so grateful for these 5 years! There have been many ups and downs, and it's been hard at times and harder at other times. But, it's also been good at times, and really great a lot of times! Each good and great high on the roller coaster of life has been worth every low. Each low has shaped us and molded us and taught us. We are who we are today... each of us... you and me... because of everything that life throws our way.

We all have struggles and we all have difficulties in life, but we're all here, and we're all surviving, and we're all helping each other get through. I am so proud to be from Southeast Missouri. I've witnessed such amazing strength and commitment and love and dedication from our community members... churches, schools, places of business, families and individuals, and I can't thank you enough. When Mom received her re-diagnosis, another envelope from 18 FORE Life arrived in the mail. Another \$1,000 was enclosed. Wow. Mom felt guilty keeping it. She wanted to return it. They had already blessed our family. We were told, no... to keep it... the first gift was for dad and this gift is for her. Amazed. Blown away. We're not alone. People care. People love us. They're fighting for us and praying for us and working for us, to give us hope and strength and encouragement. We want to do that for others.

If Mom and Dad had been diagnosed with something else, or another tragedy had occurred in our family, we might have a different focus, but when both of your parents are diagnosed with Stage 4 cancers within less than 6 months of one another, my heart is nudged to focus on cancer warriors. I love and pray for everyone in life experiencing hardships, as do many of you, and this is important. We are only one person, each of us, but if we each do what we're called to do each day, we can make a positive impact on others and slowly change the world.

Maybe your role today will be to offer a smile to a stranger. Maybe it will be to hold the door open for someone who looks like they're in a hurry. Maybe it will be to say a prayer for the safety and health and happiness of another. All of these small gestures are blessings to others. When Mom and I have been at an oncology appointment, especially if we have gotten less than good news, and we're faced with a smiling face or a nice gesture, it means the world. Those strangers have no idea how much their kindness and compassion mean in those moments. Our family and friends are amazing and wonderful and love us through each day, but we all have an opportunity each day to be a blessing to others. And, if you slow down for a minute when you do it, you'll realize it's a blessing for

you as well.

Mom goes back to her oncologist next week for the second infusion of a new treatment. We've been on a total of at least 15 different treatment regimens over the course of the past 5 years. Not 15 different medications, but actual regimens with a different focus of attack on the cancer. Eventually, her body will become immune to all approved treatments. We are currently in the process of actively exploring clinical trial options that will fit her type of cancer. If you're willing to pray for Mom, please pray that we find the right trial for her. She looks amazing, and has been feeling well for the most part. We are incredible grateful for this, and we do not take not even one day for granted.

Since June of 2013, we've turned in 86 names of cancer warriors to 18 FORE Life. 86 people. 86 heroes. \$86,000.00 that has been given out to families to use for gas, hotels, medical bills, even new mattresses so they can be comfortable while fighting the battle of their lives. Whatever they need the money for. But, more than the money, they get the same gift of hope, love, encouragement and support that our family has received from our amazing community. And, this means so much. In the past 16 years, 18 FORE Life has gifted over \$1,750,000.00 in love offerings. If you'd like to help us gift more, please let me know. This year, the H.O.P.E. Campaign is doing a raffle! Next year, who knows! But, we'll be doing something! If you'd like to contribute a gift that is tax deductible, we can do that as well. I'm hitting "Publish" now! Want to get this in before midnight! Feeling inspired tonight for some reason to put this all out there! Thanks for listening! Lora

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