

Representative Petersen:

In February 2010 my 65 year old father, David Shew, Sr., began experiencing severe abdominal pains. This was a symptom my family assumed would turn out to be a gallbladder problem or something simple like acid reflux. Unfortunately, a simple diagnosis was not in the cards. On March 14th, 2010 my father was diagnosed with metastatic pancreatic cancer. We knew that this diagnosis was a death sentence. Once a person has been diagnosed with the condition, the general life expectancy is only 5 to 8 months. We were lucky...my father lived 11 months after his diagnosis. He passed away on February 12, 2011, a week shy of his 66th birthday. My father, who was an Alaskan, a veteran, and a friend to everybody he met, experienced a long, painful journey to his final days.

Upon receiving the devastating news of my father's illness and finding out that this is also the type of cancer that killed my paternal grandmother, the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness set in. Once the shock wore off, I knew I had to do something. I had to make sure that my father's legacy would live on and that I would—from here on out—be his voice. I educated myself about the disease and I found support online through an organization called the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. To my disappointment there were no organizations or support groups in Anchorage (or Alaska for that matter), and nowhere to turn locally. I vowed that in the future, Alaskans suffering from pancreatic cancer and their family members would have local access to information, education, and support resources. They will have a way to get involved and a way to have their stories heard locally, at home. This is a disease that few understand and those who have not been touched by it cannot fathom the impact, pain, and devastation. It is vital to have a support network and a place to turn.

Thank you, thank you, thank you for doing what you're doing and for helping me to fulfill one of the last promises I made to my father. That promise is that I will do whatever possible to create awareness about this disease so that there is hope in the future and those diagnosed will have a fighting chance to survive.

Sincerely,

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Kim McFadden, Volunteer
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