

What I Learned from Kate

At times, we all feel a little possessive about things that aren't really ours, like a parking spot or a certain table in a favorite restaurant. That was the case for me when I worked at ASHA. I was a regular at the employee gym, where there was only one elliptical machine, and it was Mine.

One morning, I walked into the gym, and there – on MY machine – was a tall, slender woman with long, thick chestnut-colored hair, and I thought, “What’s *she* doing on My Elliptical?” As I stood there, giving her The Evil Eye, she turned to me with a big, bright smile and said, “Hi, I’m Kate.” I liked her instantly, and that was the beginning of our friendship. It was also the first of five lessons I learned from knowing her. **Lesson #1** was “Give people a chance. You just might end up with a great friend.”

That’s exactly what Kate was – a very kind, caring, thoughtful friend. I could always count on her for sushi, shopping, or (along with Kelly) a Tai Bo workout. When I started playing golf, she gave me a bag of wiffle balls. She loved my dog and took good care of him whenever she dog sat for me. When I was injured in a car accident, Kate did my grocery shopping for a few months. That’s something I never forgot.

Lesson #2 was “do something crazy once in awhile.” Kate is the only person I know who’s ever been “zorbing.” That’s when you get inside of a giant ball and roll down an enormous hill. She’s hiked the Grand Canyon. She’s jumped out of a plane.

We all define “crazy” a little differently, and for me, “crazy” was getting my belly button pierced – and I knew *exactly* who to call. Kate came with me, she blocked me from running out the door when I changed my mind, and held my hand when it was being done. We had just begun planning a girlfriend vacation when she got her diagnosis.

And that’s when I learned **Lesson #3**: “A good attitude will get you far.” She called me on a Sunday night to tell me what was happening to her. I felt like the floor was opening up and swallowing me. If *I* felt like that, how did *she* feel? She said it in her blog: Strong. Fighting. Surviving.

For a time, things stayed pretty normal, at least from my perspective. The only really noticeable thing was what she jokingly referred to as “chemo brain.” Chemo brain caused her to forget to unplug the iron or take Remy out for his morning walk before leaving for work. When that happened, she would call me to see if I could run over to the house and remedy the situation. “I’ve got chemo brain today,” she’d laugh.

Her attitude about her condition made it easy for me not to worry, even as her body began to show some signs of the fight she was waging. She lost her hair, stopped working, and our dinners out and shopping trips were replaced by movie nights in her living room, car rides to doctor’s appointments, and – last summer – sitting by the pool. Sometimes, as we lounged under an umbrella, we would talk about what Kate would like to do when she got better. She wanted a job doing something to help other people with cancer.

Although her outside began to change, her inside never did. Through it all, Kate remained the same caring and faithful friend. I would sometimes become mired in my own problems and neglect to call her. *She* would call *me* to see how *I* was doing. She always demonstrated an unfathomable optimism, and she made me think differently about how to face a challenge.

If a good attitude can get you far, then the **fourth lesson** was “Faith will take you the rest of the way.” A lot of people in Kate’s place would probably ask God “Why me?” but she never did. Instead, she asked God why she had lived so much longer than others with the same cancer. She worried that she hadn’t done what she was supposed to do with that extra time.

It was easy to assure her that she had: Kate encouraged and inspired so many people through her blog – and that alone would have been enough. But she also testified on Capitol Hill on behalf of patients with pancreatic cancer. She worked with the PanCan Network, sharing her survivor story. She spoke with the *New York Times* as part of its series on the “Faces of Patients with Pancreatic Cancer.” Over and over again, she shared her message: “I am more than a statistic.”

Kate taught me so much about grace under any circumstance. She fought hard, yet she sought to be happy regardless of where she was or what might happen. She showed me the kind of person I want to be.

The **last lesson** became clear a few weeks ago: “Take the time to help a friend in need – they just might be there for you when you need them.” There are so many people in this room who, like me, have experienced Kate’s love and kindness. You didn’t forget, either. So many of you brought her meals, took her to doctor’s appointments, gave blood or visited her – it was clear how much everyone loved and cared about her.

And now we have to say goodbye. It’s hard because we feel possessive about her, but she was never really ours. She belongs to God, and He’s taken her home now. I don’t know why we didn’t get to have her for longer, but I’m thankful that I knew her at all.

I’ve shared with you what’s she’s meant in my life. When you think about Kate, ask yourself what you gained from having her in yours – and then be grateful for it.

Thank you, God, for entrusting us with her. Thank you, Kate, for being my friend, and a special person to everyone here. We’ll always cherish the time we had with you.