

Chain of Giving -

When you reach out to others, it can help heal your own heart. At the hardest time in her life, Ellen Lindeman learned that. And now she's paying it forward.....

by Kristin Higson-Hughes

It wasn't supposed to be like this. Ellen Lindeman lay in bed, tears spilling down her cheeks. If she didn't move, she could still feel his body beside hers, still breathe in his scent. But the truth was, Ted was gone – and the Hartsville, Pennsylvania mom was alone. How will I go on by myself?, she agonized.

For Ellen, the life she shared with her husband, Ted, and two beautiful children was like a fairy tale come true – crazy, but wonderful. Then Ted was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. “I'll beat this thing”, he vowed. Even while undergoing chemotherapy, he was his good-natured self, roughhousing with the kids and helping to fix a friend's roof. But three months later, test revealed Ted's cancer had spread – and within three days, he was gone.

It's always too soon to lose someone you love. But Ted was just 33, and I barely had a chance to say goodbye! Ellen wept, reeling with shock. So, as Ellen explained, “Daddy's in heaven now”, to five-year-old Taylor and Luke, three, she desperately tried to hold it together. Yet, she wondered: “Where will I find the strength?”

Healing Friendships

The answer, it turned out, surrounded Ellen. “I'm so sorry”, friends called to say. “Ted was an amazing guy. If there's anything we can do.....” Then the doorbell began ringing. “So you don't have to cook”, a neighbor said, handing Ellen a casserole. Others stopped by to play with the kids, or just be with Ellen as she cried. And she cried often. Because, aside from missing Ted, Ellen was terrified. Ted had been the breadwinner, while she stayed home with the kids, working only part-time. “How will we get by?” Ellen panicked.

But Ted's co-workers and families from Taylor's school had a plan. “Please”, moms Debbie and Lana pleaded, “let us help”. And soon, the community had banded together, raising enough money to buoy Ellen until she could get back on her feet! “I can't thank you enough”, Ellen breathed, amazed that out of the most devastating time of her life had come this great blessing. “If it weren't for you, I never would've made it”.

And at bereavement counseling, Ellen was reminded how fortunate she was. “When I lost my husband, I lost our house”, one widow admitted, as others nodded through tears. And that's when it struck Ellen. She had to pay it forward. For the generosity she'd received that made her smile at a time when smiles were scarce, and because nobody should have to worry about money when they're already struggling to cope with losing someone they loved.

Spreading the Love

Inspired, Ellen created the Ted Lindeman Outreach Foundation, a non-profit organization that provides emotional and financial support to families who have unexpectedly lost someone. Because Ted was always lending a hand, whether jump-starting someone's car or coaching ballgames. And because just saying his name made Ellen feel closer to him.

And as Ellen passed the word along, everyone agreed. "Ted always gave of himself – now it's our turn to give."

So when Ellen heard about a family that lost their dad, a brave man who'd battled three separate cancers, and whose 16-year-old daughter was also fighting bone cancer – she held a benefit dinner...and was able to give them \$9,000. to cover three months of expenses – from their mortgage and utility bills, to car payments and insurance.

Soon, the Ted Lindeman Outreach Foundation was helping so many families struck by loss get back on their feet. Like the young mom of four whose husband succumbed to complications from brain cancer. Andy the devastated parents whose 24-year-old daughter died from a congenital heart defect, leaving behind a five-year-old daughter. *Thank you*, they penned. *Because of you, we don't have to worry. We can focus on healing.*

And they weren't the only ones healing. With every penny she gave, a little of Ellen's grief faded. This is the way Ted would've wanted it, she smiled.

Today, Ellen – who works as a medical esthetician – knows Ted will always be with her - in Taylor's smile, in Luke's laugh, and in the thankful hugs of the families they help.

"Helping each other is the way we have to behave in this world", Taylor, now 10, recently said at a fundraiser. "My parents taught me that."

"I know Ted would be proud", Ellen says. "And it can't think of a better way to keep his giving spirit alive."