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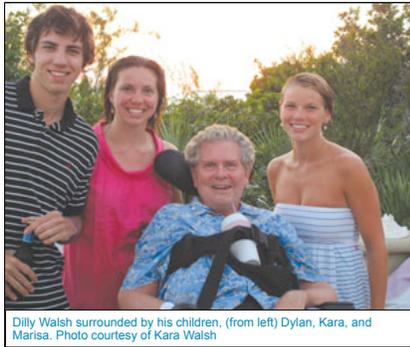
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Father's Day wish

By Kara Walsh
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When I smell the salty damp air on the boat ride home, I will always think of my Dad. And one day too soon, that salty taste will be bitter, as I arrive to a home without him. That is because my courageous father, "Dilly", has been battling ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) for almost two years. It has taken his ability to sit up and to move his arms, legs, fingers, and toes. One day, it will take away his ability to eat, drink, swallow, speak, and breathe. There is no typical progression, so each day we wonder what will change and when.



Dilly Walsh surrounded by his children, (from left) Dylan, Kara, and Marisa. Photo courtesy of Kara Walsh

Despite this debilitating disease, he has not lost that twinkle in his mischievous eyes or the ability to make many friends wherever he goes.

He first came to the Island when he was in his 20s, and fell in love with this place. Not too long after, he met my mother who had also found her way to their "storybook island." They formed a passionate, committed romance that my family celebrated this past weekend 34 years after they married on the Island.

I thank both my parents for giving me their love of the Vineyard, which will undoubtedly be the glue that continues to hold my family together as we all stumble through this mess of illness and sorrow.

This Father's Day, I am aware of my Dad's limited time, so I wanted to celebrate publicly the gift that he is to me by telling our Island more about him. I feel the community deserves to know how full of life my father is while he battles bravely each day to continue living.

Thinking back to when I used to watch him tend tomato plants lovingly in his garden after a long beach day, I never thought I wouldn't be able to ask his advice about gardening or cooking or countless other things that I trusted he would know. My dad also taught me to love the ocean, floating and diving quickly beneath the spray of the waves, and I will always wish for him to be by my side when I'm near the water. And one day when I bring my children to the Farmer's Market, I'm sure I'll glimpse my Dad among the stands picking his goods and suggesting I try a little taste of something new.

Needless to say, I have countless memories that will not go lost when my dad is no longer here, because I'm not the only one that loves him. Sharing my sorrow is my mother, Barbara; sister, Marisa; brother, Dylan; and, along with countless friends, our dog, Promise, who continues to nuzzle his hands though my dad can no longer pet her. We have all been bolstered by the Island community that I love so dearly, so thank you all this Father's Day.

I want to send out a wish: I wish that everyone is able to cherish their families today, especially their fathers, because every day after this I will wish I had one more to be with mine.

Kara Walsh, a seasonal resident of Chilmark, is a recent graduate of Boston University's School of Social Work and currently interns at the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

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What a beautiful homage to your Father. It is devastating, that ALS continues to strike, for some cruel, unknown reason, such incredible people. Some people call it "the nice person's disease" and reading this story only makes me believe this to be true. This article is beautifully written but heartbreaking at the same time. This disease offers no hope- no drug or treatment and quickly and cruelly takes thousands of lives every year. I find it outrageous that so many people have no idea, just what ALS does to a person.

I believe, the more people who write about their experiences with ALS and those it affects, that awareness will lead to the cure.

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I am constantly researching and reading, to follow the studies and Lab's whom are searching for a cure. I pray it is soon so this story will never be told again. One top neurologist said "It is the worst disease to befall human kind" and I truly believe it.

To add to this sadness, Dr. Stan Appel(in front of congress on behalf of the world's largest Lab searching for a cure for ALS, The ALS Therapy Development Institute), urged Congress to help fund research because "ALS is not incurable, it is underfunded"

I wish you every special moment with your Father and that those who bump into your article do something to help a disease which is largely ignored, yet every 90 minutes- anyone can be the next person given 2-5 years to live.

Posted by Michele on Thursday, 6/18/09 @ 12:27am

I agree with Michelle; this is a beautiful and heartbreaking article.

I happen to know that Dilly Walsh is once again holding a fundraiser at his home on July 23 for Compassionate Care CCALS because he wants to do something for others who have ALS.

I hope the island responds with auction items and ticket purchases because ccals (ccals.org)has so many pALS patient and limited resources.

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Posted by John on Thursday, 6/18/09 @ 12:51pm

A wonderful Father's Day wish from a daughter that is an inspiration.

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Posted by Paul Murphy on Thursday, 6/18/09 @ 4:00pm

Kara this is just beautiful !!! Our thoughts are with you and your courageous family. What a wonderful and caring daughter you are and such an inspiration to so many !!!!

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xoxo Lesley and Holly

Posted by Lesley on Thursday, 6/18/09 @ 6:04pm

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