

Humorous remark signals that dad will be all right

By CONNIE J. SCHLOSBERG

SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

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When I was eighteen years old, my father and I almost drowned off the coast of Florida.

My father had just gotten over an operation for an aneurysm of the aorta and was not working due to his illness. This forced us to move from our home in Allentown, Pa., to my aunts house in De-Land, Fla.

After a few weeks of adjustment, my father decided we needed a break and we headed to Daytona Beach, notoriously known for car racing and as a spring break destination.

Lets go for a swim, my father said. He smiled wide as he got up. The first time in a long time I had seen his grin. I reminded him that I cant float for more than five seconds let alone swim.

He said, Thats OK. I was in the Navy. I can swim anywhere. He motioned for me to get up from the blanket.

The day started out warm and sunny, but we were unaware that a hurricane was on its way.

The water was warm but the waves were rough. At first, we were in shallow water but the waves got bigger higher than my height. I felt like I was caught in a washing machine. I swallowed some water and kept trying to push my head above the ocean.

I could hear my father shouting something. His New York accent was thicker than usual. The silky sand under my feet kept slipping by. I couldnt keep up with the undertow. I got you, my father yelled.

I could no longer hear my father but I felt him grab my hand. His hands felt soft and buttery to me. We both swallowed salty seawater and I think seaweed had coiled around my fathers numbed legs, still black and blue from his operation.

Through reflections above the ocean, I could see his hands gesture the help sign.

A lifeguard appeared handing my father two life preservers. Im not sure how we ended up grabbing the life preservers but I remember being pulled to shore. He helped us walk back to the beach.

I just had an operation. I cant breathe well. My father puffed the words with every breath he could manage.

The lifeguard said, Sir. We need to check your vitals to make sure you dont need a doctor.

My father assured us that he was fine. His

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hands, smoothed from the seawater, held mine.

My father turned to one of the lifeguards. By the way, my daughter is new in town. Maybe you can show her around some time.

Seeing my skin flush as he spoke, my father leaned in to me. Hey, kid. Its worth a shot.

From that moment, I knew he was all right in more ways than one. His humor was still there.

Connie J. Schlosberg works at Peterson Air Force Base. Her dad, a World War II Navy vet, is her biggest cheerleader.

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