



Rainer Stoerring

And I gave him
my word

Each life has its story

R. G. Fischer

“Malignant cancer” and “aggressive”, these were the words none of us had wanted to hear. We had expected anything but this. All of a sudden, we were confronted with a seemingly hopeless situation, and it required decisions.

Determined to start fighting back against the cancer, my father asked me to accompany him on this final stretch of his journey. Without any experience regarding which task lay ahead, which challenges would present themselves, and which painful decisions would ultimately have to be made, I accepted his request – “and I gave him my word.”

A very emotional book about fears and desperation, about confidence and hope. With a lot of sensitivity and almost infinite sympathy, this story provides an insight into the life of a cancer patient and the feelings of the people by his side. It quickly becomes clear that every period in life is also a part of one’s own story.

Rainer Stoerring was born in 1966 in Frankfurt am Main. After a sabbatical year in the USA, he was confronted with his father’s cancer. Rather than resuming his career as a banker, he embraced the opportunity to support his parents. Owing to his experiences during that time, today, in addition to his mandate on the Board of Directors of the Katharina-Stumpf-Stiftung, he works in a voluntary capacity for a variety of charitable and humanistic institutions and organizations.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek:
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>

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Orber Str. 30, D-60386 Frankfurt/Main
Cover photo: Wavebreak Media Ltd © 123rf.com
ISBN 978-3-8301-9577-1 EPUB

Preface

Death is the last experience in everyone's life.

The unexpected loss of a loved one is awful. The clear knowledge of losing a person and being powerless is just as awful, but in a different way.

In memory of my late father, Adolf Stoerring, and his final journey.

The year came to an end. Autumn drew in the nicest colors. A summer that had kept all promises made by spring slowly moved on. Strengthened from the past months, nature expects the winter. In its perfect strength, winter will cover us gently. Its silence ends the year.

How often has every one of us experienced these times. Year after year, nature shows us her perpetual rhythm. For millions of years, she has returned, again and again. Nothing can stop her. She nurtures us, lets us blossom. She warms us, invites us to pause. And, most notably, she gives us life.

"I'm worried about your father."

"What do you mean?"

"Lately, he behaves so strangely; quite different from how I know him."

"Mother, you are imagining things. I haven't noticed anything unusual about him."

"How should you? You haven't been here for the past year. I am together with him every day. There is something wrong with him. Would you please talk to him?"

"What do you think he will tell me? If he doesn't talk to you about it, he will definitely not talk to me."

My mother looked at me. Her face did not reveal what she was thinking. All I saw was an expression of anxiety. Worry about the fact that something was going on, something she could not specify. Did she feel helpless, facing something she did not know? Something she did not

know how to gauge? Of course, because it is exactly in these instances that we recognize we have forgotten something. Something we could have learned throughout our lives: paying attention. The difficulty lies in finding the right time. Every day, we are confronted with demands. We meet most of them without giving them much thought. The human being is a creature of habit. Regularity arranges most aspects of our lives into order for us. From the moment we are born, a role is assigned to us. This role has been predetermined over the past millennia. Created by the experiences we have gained from it. Humans have not changed that. On the contrary, in the course of our evolution, we have reaffirmed our roles, over and over again. The man is the leader. The woman is his companion. Actually, she is not only his companion; she does not only stand by his side. She looks after his welfare. She gives birth to his children. She organizes his home and keeps it in order. Puts her own needs behind the man's. And she is much more. She is the power behind the throne. What would a man be without the woman by his side?

My father. My roots. Not only that. A father is not just the father of another person. He is the leader of the pack. He ensures that the family stays on the right path. He keeps the family safe. As a solitary hunter, he is responsible for the procurement of food. He is the final authority for decisions. His basic task is to lead the family.

My mother. The woman who carried me in her womb for many months. She gave birth to me. She showed me the light of the day and the light of the night. She gave me my role and my place in the community. She gave me my life. Not only that. She always made sure that everything my father provided was put to use towards the family. She organized the internal life of the family. She kept the family on the track that my father had decided to be the right one. It has always been a mystery to me where she gained the knowledge to do that. Because she never had the privilege of learning it.

“Good morning, father. Everything okay? You've looked a little sad in the past few days. Are you concerned about something in particular?”

My father looked at me. His face showed his attempt to decipher the words I had spoken. I had never asked him this kind of question before.

“What do you mean by that? Everything is as it always is. I can’t complain.”

“Mother thought you are concerned about something. You are different from your usual self.”

“Your mother. Did she ever care about my worries? She shouldn’t brood and exaggerate so much. I’m fine.”

“I can imagine she notices changes and that she reflects on them. If you don’t want to tell me what’s going on, I can’t force you. However, nothing can be solved by keeping it to oneself. So, either you talk about it, or you don’t.”

My father nodded and ended the conversation, as always, with an evasive question. I had to be satisfied with that. In situations like these, further conversation about the actual issue was impossible. I had learned over the years that he needs to let some things sink in first. He needs time to contemplate certain situations. Not that he would bring it up voluntarily at a later time. He had his special way of showing now I’m ready, let’s continue to talk. Later, as we were sitting together at lunch, he looked at my mother, then at me. My mother noticed and started the conversation.

“You didn’t tell Rainer anything either. What is the matter with you? Do you really believe I don’t notice when something is bothering you? You are concerned, and I am not blind. I notice things. Besides, I also noticed that there is blood in your underwear. Please, talk to us.”

My father glanced at us. He continued eating, slightly embarrassed. My mother directed a demanding look at me.

“Father, tell us what’s going on. If you don’t tell us, how can we know? Blood in your underwear. What’s causing it? Do you have problems urinating? Mother didn’t tell me about that. She’s worried. We talked about that. So, what’s going on? Perhaps you’re not the only man with this problem. Think about Uncle Heinz. Sooner or later, I, too, may end up in the same situation. You have problems urinating. The sooner we address this problem, the better things will go.”

“It’s a little strange. I notice that I have to go, but nothing comes out. Although I have the urge, I can’t go. This happens a few times a day. Eventually, the pressure is so bad that nothing flows at all. I strain; first a little blood comes out, then I can pee. I think I’ll buy some bladder tea at the pharmacy. That’ll flush everything, and the problem will take care of itself in the next few days.”

The ice had broken. His face brightened with a certain amount of optimism. Whether it was related to the presumed solution, the bladder tea, I could not and did not want to answer. Today, I believe that he felt better because he was finally talking about his problem.

“What do you mean, dad? Do you believe the bladder tea can work miracles? I think you should see a urologist and have yourself examined. Heinz had these problems, too. I would guess that it has something to do with your prostate. I don’t know exactly how such cases are handled, but I think the topic is no longer a taboo and it’s not as bad as it used to be.”

“I don’t know any urologists. And I am not going to a hospital either.”

“Ignorance may protect you in some instances, but this is a matter of health, your health. Set an appointment with your family doctor. We’ll talk with her about everything. She can give us a referral. Don’t be concerned about the hospital. Some procedures cannot be performed at

home. Nowadays, many hospital stays after surgery last only a few days. Afterwards you'll be glad that you made the right decision. You are not the only man at your age with this problem."

Two days later, the appointment with Christiane B. had been set for 8:00 a.m. We sat in the waiting room and leafed through magazines. My father's nervousness was obvious. Thousands of questions went through his head. But they couldn't be answered before the conversation with the doctor. In order to relax somewhat, my father started talking.

"I don't think she can help me. We should have called Professor D. after all. Our neighbor told me he is very good in that field."

"Wait a minute, you discussed this topic with a stranger? Why then did you make it so difficult on yourself to talk to me or mother?"

"I didn't talk to anyone about this. He had told me about his operation. We've known each other for a very long time but hadn't seen each other for a while. Werner told me about it on his own accord."

"And why not. As I said, a lot of men your age are affected by this illness, some even younger than you are now. Medical science is based on many years of experience. Sure, we don't know the full extent of medical science, but there are enough doctors you can trust. Trust is the foundation of everything. There will always be some kind of problem you cannot solve yourself. When you've reached the limits of your own knowledge, you have to consult a specialist. With respect to your current troubles, you need a doctor. So the logical conclusion is to consult one. You've made the right decision by scheduling this appointment. You'll see, after the consultation you'll know more."