



Complex Child E-Magazine

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Channeling Dan

by Jennifer A. Peterson

The wake of Patrick Swayze's death from pancreatic cancer serves as a bittersweet reminder of someone else I lost from the same disease: my former boss. His name was Daniel Bebble. He was a loving husband, father of four, formidable attorney, community leader, and all-around solid guy. Dan died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 37.

The approach I take in life is that everything happens for a reason, and I think I worked with Dan for a very specific purpose: to learn lessons I would later need to advocate for my child with a disability. In college, I started working for a degree in nursing and I managed to learn a vast amount of medical terminology and anatomy. But in the end, I changed my major to justice studies and then went on to work for Dan. There is no doubt whatsoever the work that I did for Dan paved my future as an advocate for my children. He helped me to realize and apply my potential.

Dan was my favorite of the attorneys I have worked for. It most likely has something to do with our proximity in age. He was of the mindset that I was his "assistant" and not just his "secretary." He is part of the next generation of lawyers who respect the women in their employ and their capabilities. He preferred to do a lot of the administrative tasks that other attorneys usually delegate to the support staff.

Before working with Dan, I knew how to format a letter but did not know how to *write* one. In time, I learned his style of stating the facts, maintaining neutral tone, and playing to the preferences of the reader. I learned how to be a pussycat, purring to cozy up to the reader, and returning favors in kind. But I was also agile and swift when action was demanded of the recipient. My bite is in the facts. There needn't be malice or an overbearing attitude to get the desired result. I've since used this technique in many advocacy letters for my children.

He was a fair person to work with and took any mistakes I made in stride. One time after having to admit a very serious mistake that other people would not have shown up to work the next day for, Dan proceeded to ask me if I would be interested in doing the medical record summaries for the plaintiffs in our cases. I was elated at his capacity for forgiveness and the opportunity he offered. It was truly a defining moment in my life.

Another privilege I had on one occasion was to attend a set of depositions with him. I took notes on the testimony before the witness transcripts came back. It was fascinating to observe the dynamics of people testifying under oath in a given dispute. I stored the

memory for use in future IEP and 504 meetings.

Fast-forward to right now, and with the lessons I have learned from Dan, I have been able to sift through my children's records and play the part of their personal assistant. Drafting correspondence in support of their needs has been a breeze. I have produced reams of work related to coordinating their education supports and medical issues in the classroom. All thanks to Dan.

In the years since Dan passed on, I have often found the right path to take simply by asking, "*What would Dan do?*"

Jennifer Peterson is an at-home parent and uses her experience as a Paralegal to ensure the medical and educational needs of her children. Both of her children are medically complex with diagnoses spanning multiple food allergies, Eosinophilic Disease, Mitochondrial Disease and High-Functioning Autism. Despite everything they have been through, Thomas and Natalie remain chipper, smart and cute kiddos with infectious smiles and curious natures. Although her family has been dealt the tougher hand, they make it by relying on resources, tricks of the trade and an offbeat sense of humor.