

THE FAMILY MAGIC

It was 1981. The family rented the Winnebago and drove 14 hours straight through to the ocean. On the way, the two-year-old toddled up and down the aisle of the camper, stopping only for breast-feeding breaks between laps. Dad rode shotgun silently but vigilantly for the entire 700-mile journey. Dad, mom, their oldest daughter, her husband and two young children, their older son and his wife, and the youngest son, had loaded way too much food, booze and clothing into the Winnebago for a weeklong escape.

When they finally arrived in the middle of the night at their other daughter's house on the northern coast of the Atlantic, they unloaded everything they'd brought into her suburban home and went to bed. All but dad slept soundly from the exhausting trip. Dad sat up all night smoking, thinking and silently shuffling his thumb slowly over each of his fingertips until morning.

The next day they loaded everything and everyone back into the camper and drove about a half a mile to the beach to play, and party and picnic. But as soon as they arrived at the beach, they were met with spectacular thunder, lightning and torrents of rain. Undaunted, they huddled inside the crowded camper eating, drinking, laughing and sharing stories despite the stormy skies, the crashing waves and dad's terminal cancer. Never once stepping outside the camper, they returned to the daughter's suburban home at dusk. Dad smoked and smiled and nodded, but the massive radiation treatments to his lungs and brain made him queasy, quiet and aloof throughout the day.

Finally, the family magic was unleashed around midnight. After many rounds of alcohol laden Gorilla Milkshakes, they began to sing. Everyone knew the old family favorite tunes; The Whiffenpoof Song, Danny Boy, You are My Sunshine, Let Me Call You Sweetheart, Playmate and all the rest. Dad's smooth and silky baritone caressed mom's sweet harmony and the kids drunken chorus, to produce a loving musical memory that will never die; a shared moment of harmony in the midst of tragedy, a shared memory of the family united in song.