

DIARY OF A DYING MAN is the heart wrenching tale of one man's journey and his pursuit of life. Dylan gave everything towards making a difference in the lives of others...until his life was turned upside down by an illness. Now, he must decide whether or not to fight...

Diary of a Dying Man

by Orlando Ricci

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DIARY OF A DYING MAN



THE CHOICES WE MAKE LEAD US TO OUR FINAL DESTINATION.

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COMING SOON

DANGEROUS LOVE

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PRELUDE

Dylan Anderson is a 34-year-old Social Studies teacher, football and wrestling coach at Parkside High School where he's worked for 12 years. His love for education and coaching has made him one of the most popular teachers and someone who can reach more students than most. He pushes each student to be the best person he/she can be and to always strive for more in life; just like he does in his own life. Dylan has a short and stocky stature, black hair, brown eyes, and an olive complexion. Due to his exotic features and the fact that he's in great shape, Dylan's considered to be an attractive man.

Dylan grew up in a suburb of Buffalo, NY, where he excelled in the classroom and on the playing field which led to him earning an academic scholarship to attend West Virginia University. In college, he had a successful wrestling career while earning his Bachelor's Degree in History and a Master's Degree in Secondary Education because he always wanted to give back to less fortunate teenagers. He wanted to give them a chance to learn values that would help them succeed in life; not just in the classroom or on the field of play. Dylan's style of teaching was strict yet entertaining as he expected more out of his students and received more from them in return. His athletes were well-coached and recruited by many colleges. All of his efforts provided each of them with an opportunity to make more of their life than what had been afforded in the lower socio-economic environment where they grew up.

As the years went on, Dylan put everything he had into teaching and coaching, which caused his personal life to come a distant second. Dylan not only taught about being successful and the value of hard work to his students but lived it himself as he worked extra jobs to make enough money to pay his bills. He never complained, but did what was necessary to live a modest lifestyle. He took his athletic background and bounced at local bars throughout the spring and

summertime when he wasn't as busy coaching. Dylan would also work wrestling camps throughout the summer not just for the extra money but for the opportunity to touch the lives of more athletes.

Though Dylan had fun when time permitted, his social life was less than desirable. He remained single for long periods of time and usually the relationships he'd get into only lasted a few months prior to his many jobs getting in the way. Dylan was left lonely and wondering if he'd ever find that special woman to be in a serious relationship with...a relationship that could lead to marriage and the ability to start his own family.

Throughout the 2015-2016 school year, Dylan was constantly sick and felt more worn down than usual. He'd grown accustomed to long hours since he became a teacher in 2004. But this didn't detour him from continuing to push through, keeping all of his commitments, and always giving everything he had. On several occasions, Dylan was encouraged by faculty members, coaches, parents, and even some of his closest athletes to go get checked out. However, Dylan always shrugged it off as just a lack of sleep and promised that once the season was over he'd have time to take care of his health.

Yet, deep down inside, he knew it was different from any other feeling he'd ever experienced. As the season came close to the end, Dylan couldn't deny that despite being in great shape, he had shortness of breath, fatigue throughout his entire body, coughing fits, and just a general feeling of pain in his chest. These warning signs were brushed off as he took over-the-counter medications while trying some old family remedies to clear up the ailments that he'd deemed to just be a severe cold that wouldn't go away.

As another successful wrestling season finished, Dylan finally went to get checked out. On Monday, February 29, 2016, Dylan visited Doctor Ray Wilson for his yearly check-up and to get some medicine to finally kick his ailments. To his dismay, Doctor Wilson felt as though something more serious was wrong after listening to Dylan's chest. This led to blood samples being drawn and a number of tests ordered to be run over the following days.

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X-Rays were taken and a CAT-Scan was scheduled in order to determine what might be causing this illness that had lasted far too long and had progressively gotten worse. Dylan was uneasy by the prognosis but wasn't discouraged. His positive nature and attitude were too strong to think otherwise as he truly believed that everything would be fine in the long run. However, Dylan could never have imagined what the tests would show. This is the unforgettable Diary of Dylan Michael Anderson.

DYLAN'S DIARY

PART I – THE DIAGNOSIS

Monday, March 7, 2016

Charlotte, NC

This is by far the worst day of my life! I still can't believe this is happening to me! Today, I was diagnosed with lung cancer and given three months to live. I went to my doctor a week ago because I wasn't feeling well, and after speaking with him, he wanted me to undergo several tests. Doctor Wilson called me in to discuss the results, and he broke the news. He told me that I'm in the final stages of lung cancer as it's already spread to my intestines, which means I have less than a 10 percent chance of surviving with chemotherapy and radiation treatments.

I can't believe it! I've never smoked a day in my life! How did this happen to me? Could all of the nights I spent drinking in bars where other people were smoking lead to this? I can't believe those arrogant selfish bastards! They obviously don't care about other people's health by putting me and every other non-smoker in grave danger. All they care about is getting their next nicotine fix not the fact that they're poisoning the clean air that we use to breathe.

What should I do? Should I fight this, and go through the grueling and dauntless task of these vicious treatments, or shouldn't I? This is hard to believe! I need to get a second opinion because maybe I was misdiagnosed. Maybe they were someone else's results. That can't be why I've had these pains and this cough. It's probably just bronchitis or something similar.

I'll set up an appointment for Thursday morning to get a second opinion since I already have off for our Annual College Basketball

Conference Tournament party at Brad's. Until then, I'm going to try to go about my business like nothing's wrong which will probably be damn near impossible. I'm not good at turning my mind off at night. I constantly think about situations and problems, which is why I'm writing this journal, to help get all of this off of my chest and release it. I highly doubt it'll work, but it's better than nothing.

I can't get over the fact that I could be dead in three months; I have no idea what I did to deserve this! I'm a good person! I'm a teacher and a coach, one of the most admirable jobs you can have. How can someone who gives back to his community like I do be diagnosed with a disease like this? Especially since I don't smoke! I know that life isn't always fair, but this is beyond that. I'm only 34 years old and in the prime of my life! I should be enjoying time with my family, but I never got to do that. I always thought I'd have plenty of time to meet the right woman and start having children. So it never bothered me that I hadn't found her yet. I just knew it would happen when the time was right, but I guess the time will never be right.

Instead, I spent all of my time working with teenagers and helping them make a better life for themselves. This is hard to even fathom, but did I make the wrong decision? Should I have done something else with my life? Was Candace truly the love of my life and the only woman I'd ever love? We broke up 14 years ago and I never got over her. I always thought I needed to meet the right woman and then the love I still have for Candace would fade. But she never came; leaving me all alone which I guess I'll remain for what's left of my short life.

I have to stop thinking this way. Hopefully I'm getting ahead of myself and the second opinion will show that I'm fine. I have to be! I watch what I eat and I exercise regularly. I can't be dying...it's just not possible. I'll be fine; the results from the second doctor will prove it!

Thursday, March 10, 2016

Charlotte, NC

I had a consultation with Doctor Brown this morning. He's looking at my previous results and running some more tests. It feels like I'm back to square one and stuck playing the waiting game. I hope I'm able to quickly get my new scans scheduled and be back in his office so that I know the new results as soon as possible. I just hope they tell me that I'm going to be fine. I can't have cancer, it just doesn't make sense. I'm too young to die especially since I haven't even lived my life to the fullest yet.

If I sit around dwelling on what is or isn't the truth, I'll go crazy! Luckily, it's time to celebrate and party with my friends at our Annual College Basketball Conference Tournament Party. It's time to spend the next two days drinking beer, watching basketball, playing horseshoes and cornhole, and eating all of the amazing food that's been prepared, especially the smoked turkey and chili...which I love. They're two of the best days of the year. We all take off of work, let loose and enjoy life with some of our closet and best friends. That's really what life is all about or at least it should be.

Life shouldn't be about your job consuming you and taking you away from your friends and family; instead, it should be about having fun. But being a teacher doesn't afford me with an opportunity to do this as much as I'd like because I don't make enough money. Instead, I'm stuck working side jobs like bouncing and officiating just to pay my bills especially since we haven't been getting our raises like we should be. It makes a huge difference when you add up how much money I've lost over the past few years. I've seriously lost thousands of dollars each year which is a lot of money for most people.

It's not like I live extravagantly. I have a car and a house which isn't cheap to do on your own. If I had only found the right woman to share my life with, we could've been in this together. But, that will never happen and it pisses me off! I don't deserve to be all alone, especially at a time like this. I have nobody to console me and make

me feel better. I wish I was still with Candace so that she could hold me and comfort me and let me know that everything will be alright.

I'm driving myself crazy! I've got to stop thinking about this. This party couldn't have come at a better time. I'm going to do my best to forget about everything and just celebrate with my friends. If I'm lucky, I won't have one of my coughing fits while I'm with everyone. I really don't want anyone to question me about my health. I just want to drink and forget about my problems.

Knowing the guys, I'm sure they'll lift my spirits, even without telling them I'm down or what's bothering me because that's who they are. I'm lucky to have so many amazing friends in my life even though I don't get to see them enough. Too many of my closest friends live out of the area; but my local friends are amazing people, and I'm so happy and blessed to be with them at a time like this. It's time to load the cornhole boards, the lasagna, my cooler, and my case of beer into my vehicle and get over to Brad's. I mean, the sky is blue, the weather is amazing, and I know it's going to be a great day!

Saturday, March 12, 2016

Charlotte, NC

Wow, it's going to take me all day to recover from that two day binder...a case of beer down on Thursday and even more on Friday. I'm glad we got to see some great basketball and had plenty of laughs with amazing friends. I'm really happy that WVU won both of their games which helped keep my mind off of this damn cancer. There's no way I have cancer, it can't be! And it's going to feel like forever before I see Doctor Brown again.

At least my Mountaineers are in the Big 12 Championship game tonight. They're playing extremely well. These teams are having so much trouble with the press! Hopefully they can beat Kansas and win

their first Big 12 Championship. If we pull it off, it should allow us to get one of the top seeds in the NCAA Tournament which would be nice. This is some of the best basketball I've seen us play since I became a fan in high school. Being at WVU were some of the best years of my life. I met so many amazing people and gained lifelong friendships. Lifelong...kind of has a new meaning since my life might end a lot sooner than anticipated.

How can I be having these feelings of joy while I'm riddled with fear of what might be? I hope everyone at the party didn't notice how distant I felt from them at times over the past two days. I wouldn't even know how to explain what's happening to me. What do I say? How will they take it? And these are some of my closest friends. Then there's my family. My mom will be crushed; and my brother will try to be strong for me, but I know he won't have the words to make this situation any better.

I'm getting too far ahead of myself again. I know I'll get the results I'm looking for when I see Doctor Brown this week. He'll tell me that I'm just a little sick and will be back on my feet in no time. Anyways, no need to dwell on it. It's time for me to shut my mind off the best I can and watch the Big 12 Championship game while relaxing on my couch, drinking tons of water, and eating Chinese food to get over this damn hangover. Let's Go Mountaineers!!!

Sunday, March 13, 2016

Charlotte, NC

Unfortunately, WVU didn't win the Big 12 Championship. But, I'm still proud of my team and grateful that they're my Alma Mater. I'm disappointed that we couldn't beat Kansas, but I'm happy that they provided me with a distraction for the past few days. I think this deep run in the tournament is a sign of good things to come for me and for WVU.

I feel good today which hasn't been the case over the past few days and hopefully is a sign of good fortune to come. I'm excited to see where we're seeded in the NCAA Tournament and watch my Mountaineers come out victorious in March Madness! At least these games are giving me some reprieve from what's going on. I have to stay hopeful that the results of the second set of tests will be negative for cancer. Like they somehow messed up and misdiagnosed me. I'm too young and have stayed in great shape all of my life just to avoid something like this from happening. I can't be sick; there's no way I have cancer!

I have so many dreams that I still need to achieve. I can't leave this place without making the mark on it that I've wanted to. I have championships to win as a coach. I want to find a woman to marry and start a family. Plus, find a way to make more money and provide a living for my family that I've always dreamt of. I never had it easy growing up, and I promised myself that I'd never let that be the case for my family which is why I've worked so hard for so long.

Unfortunately, this is going to be the longest week of my life until I see Doctor Brown. I'm going to do my best to take my mind off of this. Maybe I'll hit the gym after school and see if some of the guys want to spend extra time on the mat working on a few moves that'll better prepare them for the off-season tournaments and next year. Being physically active has always been the best way to improve my spirit and to help me solve any problems I've had or at least feel better about the situation. Besides, it's kept me healthy and I thought it would keep me from having the same medical problems as the rest of my family. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe it's impossible to prevent an illness like cancer, even if you've done everything right.

I wish I could talk to someone, but I'm afraid to alarm them about what could be nothing. If I had a wife, she'd be able to help me deal with all of this without alerting everyone. Instead, I'm stuck with this huge secret eating away at me. Hopefully I'm not too distracted in class and can get through my lessons. I might have to change my lessons around to help me deal with all of this. Maybe we'll play some games or do something else to lighten the mood. I don't think

I'll be able to just stand up and lecture in front of my students. That'll drive me crazy while I'm trying to ignore this situation. I just need to try and keep my hopes up because I really can't be that sick. It will turn out for the best...I know it. It has to!

Friday, March 18, 2016

Charlotte, NC

This has been such a long week. I spent most of it dwelling on 'what ifs,' and it's been driving me crazy. I took off of work and started my spring break a day early so that I could go to my follow-up appointment with Doctor Brown. To my dismay, he discovered that not only were the original results correct, but it's even worse than first diagnosed. The cancer is not only in my lungs and intestines, but it's now spread to my liver. I'm already in Stage 4, which is even worse than what Doctor Wilson stated and means that I have no hope at all!

Oh my God, what am I going to do? How am I going to break the news to my friends and family? Should I fight this disease or let it slowly kill me without putting up a fight? I have less than a five percent chance of survival if I let them go through the gauntlet of treatments, but it'll quickly make me weak and force me to be stuck in the hospital or in bed. Is that what I want to do? Be forced to have needles stuck in me while all types of drugs are pumped into my body for the slight chance that it might work? Five percent isn't very good odds; I just don't know if it's worth going through these horrible treatments. If I don't, am I throwing in the towel on life?

I have so many decisions to make and so little time. What are my friends and family going to think when I break this news to them? Are they going to push me to undergo these treatments, or will they encourage me to just live out my days as comfortable as I can be?

I feel so alone! I wish I had a wife or even a girlfriend to support me and help ease my pain. Why didn't I find the right woman to make

my life complete? Was this God's plan all along, so that I don't hurt someone when I die? If it is, I think that's a shitty plan! I've done a lot of good for others, and this is how things are going to end up for me. I'm going to die alone without accomplishing most of my goals and dreams.

Who should I tell first, and how do I tell them? I can only imagine what they're going to say. I'm sure they're going to encourage me to try the different treatments, weakening me, and forcing me to remain hospitalized or in my bed all day every day; but is that what I really want? Will they hate me if I decide not to fight? I'm so confused, and I need some guidance in making this decision. I've done research on my type of cancer and what the treatments would be like, but the survival rate makes this practically a death sentence. I've never before given up on anything. And the athlete in me loves a challenge, but is this challenge worth taking on?

I can't even imagine how my athletes and students are going to handle the news. I need to figure out what I'm going to do and how long to remain at work. There are so many decisions and so little time to make them. I wish I had support in making these decisions. Someone who could love me and hold me when the pain gets to be too difficult to deal with. Instead, I'm going to die alone without experiencing unconditional love from a wife and family.

This isn't fair! I don't deserve this! I gave all of myself to so many people and in the end, I get screwed! I don't understand why I got this disease at such a young age. If I was 75, this would be different. I would've accomplished so much more, but I'm only 34 and my days are already numbered. I need to tell someone because I need help figuring everything out. Otherwise, I'm just going to drive myself crazy.

Saturday, March 19, 2016

Charlotte, NC

Being diagnosed was bad enough, but today took me to a new level of pain and anguish. A wave of pain crashed down on me like nothing I've ever felt before. It was like a swell that had sucked a surfer under it suffocating them and giving them no hope of survival. It caused me to fall to the ground, writhing, as if I had no control over my body and took nearly an hour to recover from the excruciating sensations that overwhelmed me.

This forced my hand as I had no other choice but to share the fact that I'm dying from cancer with my family and a few of my closest friends. Mom needed to be calmed down from crying as she almost had a nervous breakdown over the phone. She couldn't believe it, and I had to reassure her that everything would be all right, which felt odd, as it should've been the other way around. Once she recovered from the initial shock, we talked about my options, but I didn't get any closer to a decision. I still have no clue what to think about all of this or what to do.

I've been trying to accept the fact that I have this disease, but it's almost like I'm in a horrible nightmare and can't wake myself up. Like I'm screaming for help, but nobody can hear me and my body won't jolt itself out of the deep sleep to protect me from whatever evil is lurking in the shadows and coming after me.

My ray of light came from Steve. He was able to remain calm and supportive of me. He took the news much better than Mom did which is understandable as I'm her youngest child. It has to be one of the worst things a parent could ever hear about their kid no matter how old they are. Steve's been such an amazing older brother. I know he's going to have to help Mom cope with all of this. I feel bad putting everything on his back, but I'm thankful that he's here for me.

I'm really glad that Steve lives so close and is planning to come for a visit soon to help me handle things and make any arrangements that I need to. I feel bad asking for anything more from him because

he's done so much for me throughout my life. He's been the best brother a guy could ask for, but this shouldn't be something that he has to go through. He's already done enough by taking care of our grandparents and our father before they died. He's been the caregiver for so many of our family members, and I don't want to burden him with that once again. I hope he doesn't act weird around me like I'm about to die. I just want him to treat me like the little annoying brother I was while we were growing up.

When I broke down and told the news to a few of my closest friends, the reactions ranged from shock to them being upset and even supportive of me. I know this has to be hard on everyone knowing that someone they care for only has a short period of time left to live. I can't imagine what many of them are thinking, but I hope that if they try to be there for me that it's not because they feel pity for me. That's not what I want. I just want a feeling of normalcy in my life not one where everyone's trying to treat me like a sick child or a wounded animal.

After such an emotionally draining day, I wonder what it's going to be like over the next couple of weeks when I let more people know or the word begins to spread that I'm sick. I need to figure out how I'm going to break the news to everyone at school. The faculty and administration will have some problems dealing with this, but I can't imagine how my students and especially my athletes will react. They deserve to know, but when should I tell them? I'm going to have to think about this as I don't want to jump the gun and tell them before I've even decided whether or not I'm going to go through treatments. Plus, I need to figure out what to do about my house, my car, and the rest of my possessions. I'm going to have to make a will and make sure all of my wishes are set in stone. I have a lot to do...I just don't know where to start.

This is overwhelming me, but I have to make a choice right away. I can't tell more people without making that decision first. Besides, if I decide to go through the treatments, I need to start immediately. I've already postponed all of this for way too long which is why I'm in such bad shape. If I had only gone to the doctor earlier then I might

have caught it early enough to have a real chance of beating this disease. But like most guys, I was too stubborn to go to the doctor at the first signs of being seriously ill.

Thursday, March 24, 2016

Charlotte, NC

I returned to Doctor Wilson to show him the other results and to discuss my options. He wrote me out of work and put me on disability in order to give me a chance to decide whether to fight this or just to live out my final days. He also suggested that I should write down my pros and cons. Like, will I really be fighting for my friends and family or for myself? I'm not sure if I'm more upset about hurting them if I decide not to fight or the fact that I'd be accepting this disease and preparing to die. I can't help but wonder; why did God pick this fate for me?

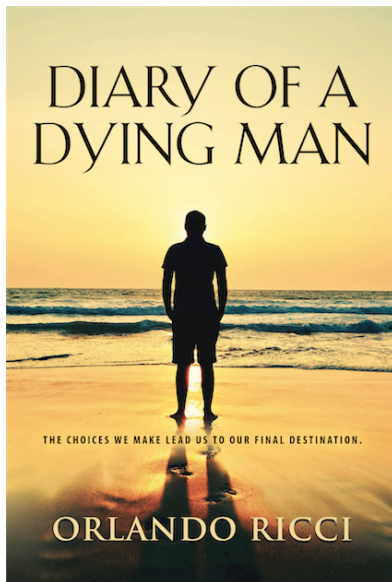
I have so many questions and no answers. I don't want to fight this disease, just to be weakened and die sooner than three months or be forced to live out my remaining days in misery. But I don't want everyone to look at me as a quitter. I've been a fighter all my life whether it was athletics, school, work, or anything else I've done. Will this change everyone's perception of me if I don't fight? Conversely, would it allow me to enjoy what's left of my life?

I don't have a lot of time to make this decision because Doctor Wilson said that if I choose to fight the disease that I needed to do so within the next couple of days so that we can have a punchers chance at killing the cancer. It seems like my time is limited in more ways than one. I know I can talk with Mom and Steve to get their input. But, I'd really like to hear what everyone has to say and if they'd be upset with me if I decide not to fight. The decision's hard enough, but if I don't want to fight, getting everyone to accept that choice will be challenging.

Doctor Wilson was nice enough to give me a few days at school to get my affairs in order before I leave for good on March 31st. This is going to be extremely difficult telling my co-workers, students, and athletes. How will they handle the news especially all of the kids? Some of them haven't had to deal with anything like this before while others have seen this far too often. Because it's unfortunately become a normal occurrence for them to experience losing someone that's important to them.

Too many of these young men and women have become accustomed to having a male figure leave them for good without knowing why. I don't want to leave them without an explanation. I'll have to coordinate this with the school, since some of my students and athletes will need to talk to someone afterwards. Maybe I can even give them a way to keep in contact with me if they choose to do so. I could add anyone who friend requests me on Facebook or on Twitter and Instagram. It could be a way for them to feel involved with everything that's going on with my last months...or even weeks. I don't know if that would be wrong of me to let them see or read about me being weak and dying. Or could this be a good lesson for them to understand how fleeting life can be and for them to live everyday as if it's their last. Maybe even encourage them to pay more attention to their loved ones or their own health as this could happen to anyone.

This is adding to how stressed I am. I should be worried about how I'm going to handle my remaining day; instead, I'm thinking about everyone else. That's just the story of my life, always worrying about others and putting my own well-being behind theirs. I need to take care of everything at school and then it's finally time to focus on myself; to finally enjoy my life or at least what's left of it.



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