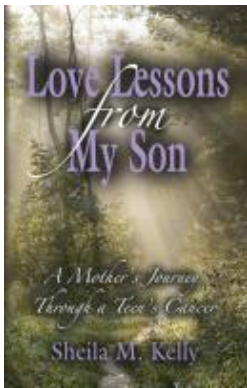
The background of the cover is a photograph of a narrow dirt path winding through a dense forest. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a soft, ethereal glow and long shadows on the path. The overall mood is peaceful and contemplative.

Love Lessons  
*from*  
My Son

*A Mother's Journey  
Through a Teen's Cancer*

Sheila M. Kelly



*The author takes you on a heartfelt journey through the lessons learned from dealing with her teen's diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma. This book captures a parent's pain as well as a teenager's courage. No longer a child and not yet an adult, he is called upon to bear long walks down hospital corridors towards dreaded treatments. Ultimately, it is an uplifting story of faith, hope, love, and happy endings.*

# **Love Lessons From My Son**

## **A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer**

**Order the complete book from**

**[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/7262.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**

**Your free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!**

**Praise for**  
*Love Lessons From My Son*

“I have just finished your book. I have been fortunate today as I have had the day off. My first real day off in over two years.

“I had decided that I would take it for myself to do some reading and to be honest with you reading your book was not on my agenda today.

“However, after reading a chapter in Wayne Dyer’s book “Powerful Intentions,” the Spirit screamed out to me to go downstairs and read your book. I do not want to go into a long dissertation of all the things I got out of this, but let me tell you this:

“It was the first time I felt “present” for a long time. It helped me to realize that I have not forgiven God for putting me through this experience.

“I have been focusing on the negative aspects of my cancer experience which has resulted in me living in a shell. I have, to a certain extent, lacked the courage your son showed. However I know this experience was here for a reason.

“A light has ignited in me this afternoon. Something I have not felt for a VERY LONG time. Of course, it is always there. I have just chosen not to acknowledge it. Why? Because living from fear has served me. It is familiar, it is “safe,” it is the “status quo.” But I am tired. I know through your sharing that there is hope. I have abdicated my purpose, my living to outside forces for too long. This does not serve me, it envelopes me, it constricts me, and it depresses me. I am ready to claim my right. My right to be happy, to be successful, to be at peace and to let abundance into my life.”

*– Jamie Pritchard, President, Aspire Higher Institute*

“I read your wonderful book about Jeff and cried. I think a story like this could inspire parents to revisit or start a journey of faith.”

– *Shelley Cox, Career and Leadership Mindset Coach*

“Sheila writes from her heart and with profound openness and honesty about a very difficult family journey. Her words will resonate with anyone who has faced such a crisis of their own. Though she shares her story not to offer advice or guidance, there is no doubt her courage and strength will inspire others.

“Be prepared for the need to finish this book in one sitting and with a box of tissues close at hand!”

- *Linda L., Mom and Entrepreneur*



*Love Lessons  
From My Son*

*A Mother's Journey  
Through a Teen's Cancer*

**Sheila M. Kelly**

Copyright © 2014 Sheila M. Kelly

ISBN 978-1-62646-844-3

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida.

Printed in the United States of America.

BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2014

First Edition

Editor: Marlene Oulton, [www.MarleneOulton.com](http://www.MarleneOulton.com)



## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to any parent who has held the hand of a sick child. As well, this book is dedicated to my son and his beautiful family.



## **Disclaimer**

This book details the author's personal experiences with and opinions about her son's cancer. The author is not a healthcare provider.

The author and publisher are providing this book and its contents on an "as is" basis and make no representations or warranties of any kind with respect to this book or its contents. The author and publisher disclaim all such representations and warranties, including for example warranties of merchantability and healthcare for a particular purpose.

Except as specifically stated in this book, neither the author or publisher, nor any authors, contributors, or other representatives will be liable for damages arising out of or in connection with the use of this book. This is a

*Love Lessons From My Son*

comprehensive limitation of liability that applies to all damages of any kind, including (without limitation) compensatory; direct, indirect or consequential damages; loss of data, income or profit; loss of or damage to property and claims of third parties.

This book provides content related to physical, psychological and spiritual wellness. As such, use of this book implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

## Foreword

It's been 16 years since I had "a disease caused by an uncontrolled division of abnormal cells in a part of the body" (thank you, Google)...nearly half my lifetime ago. This simple definition doesn't exactly do justice to what someone goes through when fighting cancer. My recollection of the whole experience has generally been tucked away somewhere far away in my mind, but I do know that at the time it felt like "abnormal cell division" was the least of my worries.

When you're 17 years old, in the middle of high school, trying your best to be a "normal" teenager, the psychological battle that goes on when you have a life-threatening disease almost seems as bad as the physical toll it takes on your body. High school is tough; you're trying to sort out your self-identity and establish where you

*Love Lessons From My Son*

belong in the grand scheme of things, but it just seemed a little tougher when you're essentially "the cancer guy" in a school of 1,000. When you're trying to be cool, it doesn't matter that you feel like hell after a couple hours of chemotherapy...it's having the same hairstyle as Gollum in "Lord of the Rings" that really rattles your self-esteem. Losing your hair, especially as a teenager, was the one thing I considered to be the screaming beacon that said "I'm a pretty sick dude, folks"; there's just no hiding it.

But you know what? I never really felt all that uncomfortable with it. Sure I can recall at least one or two awkward moments (ironically due to adults, not classmates), but the overwhelming vibe around me was that everyone just seemed to know that I wanted to be treated as normally as possible. This stemmed from my mom and dad. My mom immediately got to work in creating wallet-size cards that said "Jeff is happy, healthy, and healed" and handed them out to my friends. I was

*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

definitely very sick, but I was still 17 years old, and I remember this being a little embarrassing for me...but I was too weak to fight it. But I was glad she did it.

This small act set the tone for how things were going to go during the course of my treatment (although I can say I wasn't too "happy" after taking my chemo beatings every two weeks). There was no other outcome, no other way it was going to end for me other than happy, healthy, and healed.

And they allowed me to heal by giving me space. I still think about the leeway that my parents granted me during the whole process...they allowed me to still be a teenager, and allowed me to live my life as normally as possible during that time. A common term thrown around nowadays is "helicopter parents" – always hovering around their child, ensuring they are protected to a fault.

*Love Lessons From My Son*

My mom and dad were not helicopter parents. Don't mistake it: they protected me, cared for me intensely, wouldn't let me do anything insanely stupid, but most importantly, they trusted me to make the right decisions during my treatment...decisions that included being with my friends on weekend nights when I should have (probably rightfully) been in bed recovering and resting. They loved me enough to allow me to heal and kill off those "abnormal cells" in my own way. I somehow managed to survive eating a fast food hamburger with compromised immune system (sorry Doc), and camping with my friends (where a few beers may have been consumed). Guess what? I beat it, and I don't recall mom ever pushing me too hard to reconsider eating that hamburger because she understood the risk was worth the reward...I wanted to be normal, not sealed in my room in a Haz-Mat suit.



*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

Sixteen years later, I don't discuss what I went through very often.

I'm honestly not sure how I feel about a book being written about the whole ordeal...it's not easy to think about that period in my life again. I don't proclaim to understand why it happened to me. I don't look back and think of clichés like "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger"...I still wish I (and millions of others) didn't have to go through it. And I don't feel like anything we did as a family to get through it was exceptional, though I fully grasp that a lot of families are not so fortunate to get through cancer as well as we did (we have lost many immediate relatives to the disease).

To me, the fact that the whole experience seemed as "normal" as it could possibly be speaks volumes about the support and love I had...it may have been a different story otherwise. Fortunately, the story that has been written for

*Love Lessons From My Son*

me is that 16 years later, I have a beautiful and loving wife, a daughter that is quite possibly the cutest baby ever born, two parents who love me, and I'm still 100% happy, healthy, and healed. Thank you mom!

**Jeff Kelly**

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	xix
Meeting on the Road Less Traveled.....	xxiii
Love Lesson # 1: Children Teach... Parents Learn .....	1
Love Lesson # 2: Know What's Important - Everything Else Will Fall Away .....	11
Love Lesson # 3: Pull Out All the Stops - Step Up to the Plate, Engage the Heart, Play a High-level Game .....	25
Love Lesson # 4: Miracles Happen Every Day .....	35
Love Lesson # 5: Focus on What You Want - Not on What You Don't Want.....	41
Love Lesson # 6: Gentleness is Strength - Strength is Bottomless.....	47
Love Lesson # 7: Courage is Contagious - Denial is Not to be Under-rated.....	59
Love Lesson # 8: Use Medicine - Call on God .....	71
Love Lesson # 9: Love is All There Is - Fear Screams Loudly for Attention, but Love is All There Is.....	91
Love Lesson # 10: The End of Chemo Was Not the End of Fear .....	99

*Love Lessons From My Son*

One Last Thing .....	105
Update: 2013 .....	107
Bibliography .....	109

## **Introduction**

This book is being written for my son, Jeff. As I write these words in November of 2005, it is with the commitment that this book will be a Christmas gift for him as he gifts *us* with a visit from Alabama.

This book is being written, as well, for the family and friends who were part of Jeff's journey through cancer. Even those closest to us have an incomplete picture of what it was like to navigate the emotional twists and turns of this path.

I'm also writing this book for all the parents who have had to walk this painful path. Please know that my heart goes out to you. Perhaps reading this book will help with your understanding or your emotional processing. It is not

*Love Lessons From My Son*

meant to be a “how to” guide, for I know that no matter how valiant the efforts of parents and medicine are, sometimes, (and too often in my opinion), cancer claims our beloved children. This is really a “how I” got through the alternating periods of peace and fear. It was not an easy journey, but somehow, we did get through it and emerged triumphant on the other side. Personally, I drew upon deep spiritual beliefs to get me through. Those beliefs brought me all that I needed to survive this extremely painful and emotional time. Yes, there were moments of deep personal despair, but they were always put aside so that I could tend to my child. It was my “job” – my purpose at that particular stage of my life.

And, finally, this book is for me. It has not been easy to write. I realize that I still have pockets of pain embedded in my body... memories of the traumatic experience of traversing the terrain of cancer. Even within this distance of time, there is deep sadness and pain around this life-

*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

altering event. However, I feel blessed that I was able to just be “with” Jeff and hold his hand through the life-threatening illness.

Going through experiences such as these are what I refer to as the Olympics of life.

If you know of anyone who would benefit from the reading of this personal story of living with cancer, please pass it on with our gratitude and appreciation.





## Meeting on the Road Less Traveled

Heavenly hues and blissful blues  
Swirled in the realms of light,  
Lovingly two sparks embraced  
Prepared for earthly flight.

The charted course held twists and turns  
Though both were well aware,  
If the road should bend too sharply,  
Then the other would be there.

From "here" the route seemed very clear –  
The shadows posed no threat  
But once the dark clouds came to pass  
They would sleepily forget...

"A challenging task" ... the wee light said,  
"Do you think we'll make it through?"

*Love Lessons From My Son*

"How can we fail?" the wise one asked,  
"You'll have me and I'll have you!"

"I'll go first and pave the way,"  
"But I pray we're not long apart..."  
"Because I've written in a scene or two  
That's sure to break my heart..."

"That'll be my cue," chimed the little light,  
"As you're bound to need me then.  
We'll meet 'on the road less traveled'  
And we'll call each other friend."

"For my road as well shows pain and doubt  
I'll need to find you too."  
"I'll light the Course," the wise one said,  
"So you'll trust your path is true."

*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

So all will be well... yet a golden tear fell,  
For who would play the Son,  
And a wiser voice from a higher realm  
Whispered softly - "Mom ... I'll come!"

Then one by one the sacred script  
Was cast with Souls of Joy,  
In honor of one who would teach such Love  
Yet appear as "but a boy."

The wise one smiled, but questioned,  
"If we'll not shine so bright...  
Will you know me in my humble form?  
And recognize my light?"

"Be not concerned". The wee one said,  
"If we'll not know your face,"

*Love Lessons From My Son*

“We'll know for certain it is you,  
By your Strength and through your Grace.”

Written by Sheila's dear friend, Rev. Theresa Tomilson,  
December, 2006.

**Love Lesson # 1:**  
**Children Teach... Parents Learn**



*“While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about.”*

*– Ralph Waldo Emerson*

When he was twenty years old, my son Jeff wrote in a card to me that I was “beautiful,” and I could only think that he is the one who exemplifies beauty. As I opened his gift, it reflected a depth of understanding about me that deeply touched my heart. His gift was perfect: a blue leather bookmark with a circular gold medallion engraved with my initials. When I pointed out to him that blue and gold were the colors of my *Course in Miracles* book cover, he said, “Yes, I know. That is why I chose those.”

Of course! I didn’t think he paid much attention to that book which is worn from years of reference. I was reminded once more that not much missed that keen young mind of his.

*Love Lessons From My Son*

If I had thought at all about the nature of the mother-child relationship when my son was born, I would have thought of myself as the teacher and he, the student. Ha! This gentle being who has graced us with his presence has been a great and powerful teacher for me. From the moment of conception, he has been a reminder of how little I really know about how to walk through life with grace and certainty.

In fact, initially I did not have the wisdom to realize that children teach the real lessons of life – the lessons of love. I may have been intelligent, educated, smart even, but I was not wise.

At the time of Jeff's birth, my husband and I were doing what everyone else in our circle of friends seemed to be doing: Working to make our lives better than that of our parents. We, and especially I, were operating under the assumption that a bigger house, a more expensive car, and



*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

a nicer neighbourhood to park it in, would surely make us all happier.

I do not look back at that period of my life with any sense of personal pride in whom I was. That phase of my existence contained, at all times, an undercurrent of anxiety. A forced pleasantness from me did not fool anybody else any more than that it fooled me. How I got to be 31 years old without understanding the things which truly matter in life is not the focus of this book. I could only say to my son that I loved him beyond measure, but that love was flawed by what could be called emotional insecurity and immaturity. This feeling is not so unusual perhaps, but sad nevertheless.

If Jeff came into my life to teach me about love, he has been the teacher of teachers.

*Love Lessons From My Son*

At the time he was born, I was love deficient and didn't even know it. I thought I knew what love was. I was mistaken. I can only say "thank you" to my son for allowing me glimpses of the love that would ultimately be revealed as we journeyed together.

The first glimpse of the meaning of love came at the time of his birth – that magical moment when I held him in my arms for the very first time. I was totally unprepared for the emotion of falling in love with my baby boy. I was so exhausted from a long, difficult labour that my husband had to wheel me down to the hospital nursery in a wheelchair. I had not held Jeff in the delivery room because he had been rushed to intensive care in distress, the result of being two weeks overdue, swallowing meconium (the dark green substance forming the first feces of a newborn infant), as well as the use of forceps and an epidural in a very long labour.

*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

It seemed that everything had gone very wrong during delivery, but Jeff himself was so very right. At first, I did not know if I had the strength to hold him, but once I did, I did not know how I could let him go.

Despite my loyalty and commitment to the well-being and care of our child, despite the intense knowledge that I would indeed die for him, despite my willingness to put aside my own needs, despite the knowledge that something deep within me stirred with love, there was still much that needed healing within me.

Thankfully, we cannot see into the future, so I could not predict at the time of Jeff's birth the power and impact of the lessons he would teach.

I certainly could not predict that, 17 years later, on a day dedicated to celebrating love, February 14, 1997, our beautiful boy, my son, would be diagnosed with Hodgkin's

*Love Lessons From My Son*

Lymphoma. Perhaps it was the kindness of the surgeon; perhaps it was because we were exhausted after enduring all that we did to get to this point; perhaps we took some clues from our son on how to handle the impending news, but as the three of us (son, mother, and father) sat in a drab hospital office, we received these words with unbelievable calm and stoicism. Minds may have been racing, hearts may have skipped a beat, but on the outside, each of us put on a brave face.

I had a burning question inside my head, "Does Jeff know that Hodgkin's is cancer?" The surgeon had not used the "c" word. As we got into the car, I turned around to Jeff in the back seat and said to him, "You know that Hodgkin's Lymphoma is a form of cancer, right?"

"I know that," he informed us. Turns out that one of his hockey heroes, Mario Lemieux, had just completed successful treatment for the disease. Jeff's brave words

*A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer*

from the back seat of our Honda were, "I know I can beat it, too."

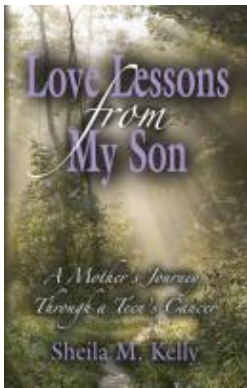
What we didn't know then and what we didn't find out until the end of treatment was that Jeff's illness was much different than Lemieux's. Lemieux was treated for a nodule in his neck. We knew Jeff's tumor was in his chest, but what I found out in a follow-up appointment after the end of treatments made my mouth drop. We were sitting in the hematologist's office, Jeff and I. I was feeling so happy and relieved that Jeff was out of the woods and that everything looked fine that I looked at the doctor and said, "Jeff wasn't as sick as you thought he was." The doctor looked at me and said, "There was a lot going on with Jeff that had me very concerned. The tumor in his chest was the size of a football."

I am so glad I did not know the size of the tumor until after the treatments were finished. I am glad that no one

*Love Lessons From My Son*

told us. I am glad that none of us asked. If that is denial then it seems to have served us very well. To know the size of the tumor would have added an unnecessary layer of concern to the fear I was already experiencing.

We were about to begin a journey through chemotherapy: a journey through a dark forest; a journey to save his life. His belief that he could beat it, just like his hockey hero, well ... I was up for supporting that belief!



*The author takes you on a heartfelt journey through the lessons learned from dealing with her teen's diagnosis of Hodgkin's lymphoma. This book captures a parent's pain as well as a teenager's courage. No longer a child and not yet an adult, he is called upon to bear long walks down hospital corridors towards dreaded treatments. Ultimately, it is an uplifting story of faith, hope, love, and happy endings.*

# **Love Lessons From My Son**

## **A Mother's Journey Through a Teen's Cancer**

**Order the complete book from**

**[Booklocker.com](http://www.booklocker.com)**

**<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/7262.html?s=pdf>**

**or from your favorite neighborhood  
or online bookstore.**