**The Patron Saint of Hopeful Causes**

**It started with her father's prayer and a promise**

**Back in the 1940s, MY DAD, Danny Thomas, was struggling to make it as a comedian. His wife was about to have their first child and he didn't have enough to bring mother and baby home from the hospital. All he had in his pocket was 10 dollars.**

**He'd grown up poor, the child of Lebanese immigrants, devout Catholics. His father, who spoke little English, had never made much of a living; my dad was terrified that history would repeat itself. One Sunday the sermon was about Saint Jude, the patron saint of hopeless causes. Feeling scared and hopeless, he beseeched Saint Jude and asked for an intercession, some sign that he was headed in the right direction.**

**Then he took out seven precious dollars, put them in an envelope and said he needed 10 times that to get his family out of the hospital. He promised that someday he would build a shrine to Saint Jude. The next day he got a call to play a singing toothbrush on the radio. The pay? Seventy five dollars. He had his sign, his prayer was answered and he had enough to bring his wife and newborn home from the hospital. (P.S. That healthy baby girl was me!)**

**My dad was a man of faith and a man of his word. For the next 15 years, as his career flourished, he remembered his promise. He dreamed of a place where kids with seemingly hopeless diseases like cancer could come for free and get the finest surgery and treatment, and where doctors could do research to find cures. He even drew a picture of what his hospital would look like, with a statue of Saint Jude right out front.**

**People sometimes ask me how my father got involved with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, which has become the world's leading institution for research and treatment of children's cancer. I tell them that story. My father made a promise and he kept it. It was his vision. And for years he traveled all over the country raising money for something that only existed in his head and heart. My earliest memory of St. Jude was Daddy getting on a plane with Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope and George Burns to do a benefit somewhere to raise funds for the hospital.**

**It was no surprise to me that my father loved the kids at St. Jude. The three of us Thomas children grew up experiencing that love, warmth and sense of humor every day. I remember Daddy teaching me how to ride a bike. I fell off, scraped my knee and started crying. "Don't cry, sweetie," he said. "It could be a lot worse." I looked up at him, tearfully asking, "How could it be worse?" With an impish grin, he said, "Well, it could have happened to me." We both burst out laughing. He always had a way of making things better with humor.**

**In front of our house in Beverly Hills, Dad would put up the most elaborate Nativity set. Mary and Joseph were at least three feet tall, and he kept enlarging the scene, stringing lights from the trees, hanging a huge star he took from the Sands Hotel in Las Vegas. Most of our neighbors were Jewish, but they got into it too. One day we looked out our front window and saw a real live camel wearing a blanket with the Star of David on the side. A present from the TV producer Aaron Spelling. All the neighbors ran over to see. We always had something funny going on.**

**As Daddy got older, he assured my sister, brother and me that he didn't expect us to carry on with St. Jude after he was gone. "It won't be your burden," he told us. "It was my promise." I think we were relieved. We saw how hard he worked for the place. But when he died, I wanted to visit. For him. For the kids. For everyone who worked there and loved him.**

**I flew to Memphis, and the policeman who always picked my father up from the airport gave me a ride to the hospital. When I saw that statue of Saint Jude, the symbol that had brought such hope to so many children and their families, I burst into tears. I couldn't get out of the car. I could picture Daddy visiting the kids, joking with them like he did with me. *Pull your together, for the kids and their parents*, I told myself. *They have enough heartache of their own.***

**I was shocked to find full-blown party going on in the lobby: ice cream, cake, confetti, balloons, the works. "Whose birthday is it?" I asked a nurse. "Oh, it's not a birthday party," she said. "It's an off-chemo party. One of the kids just finished treatment." I had never seen anything like it. All these children deriving strength from one child's turn for the better. Right then I breathed in what my father had been a part of for so long. I'd walked into a place where hope lives, a place for the hopeful, not the hopeless! I had always thought of my father as a good man, a philanthropist, but until that moment, I hadn't truly understood how deep and personal this all was to him. "There are two kinds of people," he once said, "the givers and the takers. The takers may sometimes eat better, but the givers always sleep better." What a giver he was.**

**A woman brought her little girl over to me. She was around five, with a pink ribbon tied around her little bald head.**

**"Do you know who this lady's daddy is" the mom asked her daughter.**

**"Yes," said the little girl. "Saint Jude."**

**In that moment I fell in love with her and this wonderful place. I've taken on, along with my sister and brother, the "burden" that Dad said we didn't have to take. Through the years we have each found our own way to carry on his promise. We don't consider it a burden. It has enriched our lives in many ways. I think our dad would be proud.**

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***(Taken from the December, 2014 issue of Guideposts magazine, by Marlo Thomas, starting on page 59)***