

Dying dad's last wish

A WEDDING FOR MY DAUGHTER



The 38-year-old, who has colon cancer, was delighted when Suzannah, 16, made him a grandfather with the arrival of Kwayde, five months.



The teenager and her father's dream wedding included all the traditional trimmings – but no groom.



The proud dad got a last dance with his best girl, in front of 30 close friends and family.

'I got an opportunity to see her in a wedding dress, and I was all dressed up'

DAVID GAVE HIS BELOVED GIRL A GIFT SHE WILL CHERISH LONG AFTER HE GOES

Like so many dads, David Ruddle looked forward to one day dancing with his precious daughter at her wedding. Only his daughter was still 16 years old, and David was dying.

The devoted father's wish still came true when he held his teenage daughter Suzannah in his arms and danced with her on her wedding day. Although this was no ordinary ceremony – Suzannah isn't yet engaged and there was no groom.

When David, 38, was told he had just months left to live, he decided to give his daughter something special for the wedding day he won't live to see.

The father-of-two embraced hospice philosophy to live every moment to the full by setting up a mock wedding that could be filmed so that

when Suzannah one day weds, David will have already danced with the bride and can toast his daughter and her future husband from the grave.

MEMORIES FOR HIS KIDS

"Since finding out I was terminal, basically everything has been about the kids," says David, who was diagnosed with colon cancer in 2009. "I thought about the fact I probably won't be there at Suzannah's wedding in person, so I wanted to figure out a way that I could be present somehow."

The event was a special day for the loving father, who even made a small toast to the bride and her unknown future groom.

"This is something that will be filmed and played on her actual wedding day. It gives me the chance to say from the grave, 'I'll be watching you'," David says with a grin.

Suzannah adds, "It was such an amazing day. It was so special for me to share that moment of being a bride with Dad. I really felt like a bride and one day I'll be able to play that video at my wedding and feel like he is there with me."

The wedding – which didn't have a ceremony and resembled the after-function of a marriage, including a speech, food and dancing for about 30 close friends and family – was only made possible through people's generous donations.

"I got an opportunity to see her in a wedding dress and I was all dressed up, and even though it wasn't a real wedding, it felt like it was in a small sense," he says.

David, who worked as a nurse before he fell ill, was amazed by people's generosity. Everything was donated, from a wedding gown from Jenny's Bridal, the venue at Mantell's Westhaven, catering by hospice volunteers and staff, to the flowers, make-up, hair, transport, photography and much more.

"It's absolutely blown me away, I didn't think it was possible. People spend thousands on weddings and this has happened in a few weeks just because people have donated so many things," he says in awe.

Dancing With the Stars' legend Brian Jones even gave father and daughter free dance lessons so

their last dance together could be perfect.

"I got really good at standing on her feet and she got really good at tripping over mine," David says with a smile. "But Brian must be very good at what he does because I think I finally caught on!"

Suzannah says she felt nervous and excited about showing off her new dance moves.

"It was so much fun," she says. "It's a moment that I will never forget and will treasure forever."

WISHES FOR FUTURE

David adds that the song he chose, "My Wish" by Rascal Flatts, was perfect.

"The words of this song said exactly what I wanted to say to Suzannah about my wish for her future," he says.

"Weddings can be timeless and I thought this was the most priceless and timeless present I could give her. It's better than a food processor anyway."

He has also been busy preparing for other special occasions that he will miss in his son Raymond, 18, and Suzannah's life.

"I thought about what I can leave behind for my kids," he says. "So I bought both of them 21st keys and wrote something on the back of them."

David adds he is lucky enough to have already experienced the joy of having a five-month-old grandchild, Kwayde. "Suzannah made me a grandfather at an early age," he says. "A lot of people say they feel sorry for me because I'm dying at a young age, but I'm a grandfather, so I already feel old," he smiles.

With death coming so early to this full-of-life dad, David says he's sad he won't be there in person, but adds, "I will be at her wedding, I'll be watching down over her."

WD
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