

# THE LAST LECTURE

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and

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## *Introduction*

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I HAVE AN engineering problem.

While for the most part I'm in terrific physical shape, I have ten tumors in my liver and I have only a few months left to live.

I am a father of three young children, and married to the woman of my dreams. While I could easily feel sorry for myself, that wouldn't do them, or me, any good.

So, how to spend my very limited time?

The obvious part is being with, and taking care of, my family. While I still can, I embrace every moment with them, and do the logistical things necessary to ease their path into a life without me.

The less obvious part is how to teach my children what I would have taught them over the next twenty years. They are too young now to have those conversations. All parents want to teach their children right from wrong, what we think is important, and how to deal with the challenges life will bring. We also want them to know some stories from our own lives,

often as a way to teach them how to lead theirs. My desire to do that led me to give a “last lecture” at Carnegie Mellon University.

These lectures are routinely videotaped. I knew what I was doing that day. Under the ruse of giving an academic lecture, I was trying to put myself in a bottle that would one day wash up on the beach for my children. If I were a painter, I would have painted for them. If I were a musician, I would have composed music. But I am a lecturer. So I lectured.

I lectured about the joy of life, about how much I appreciated life, even with so little of my own left. I talked about honesty, integrity, gratitude, and other things I hold dear. And I tried very hard not to be boring.

This book is a way for me to continue what I began on stage. Because time is precious, and I want to spend all that I can with my kids, I asked Jeffrey Zaslow for help. Each day, I ride my bike around my neighborhood, getting exercise crucial for my health. On fifty-three long bike rides, I spoke to Jeff on my cell-phone headset. He then spent countless hours helping to turn my stories—I suppose we could call them fifty-three “lectures”—into the book that follows.

We knew right from the start: None of this is a replacement for a living parent. But engineering isn’t about perfect solutions; it’s about doing the best you can with limited resources. Both the lecture and this book are my attempts to do exactly that.

## I

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LECTURE