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Dad takes up cause where son left off

LUNG DISEASE | Plans to do 94-story climb at Hancock

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There was one thing Eric Gold was eager to do after getting a double lung transplant in 2004: climb 94 flights of stairs in the John Hancock Center.

The first time he participated in the annual Hustle Up the Hancock fund-raiser, Gold scaled the tower in 35 minutes.

He would have taken part in the event a fourth time next Sunday. But the 26-year-old law student died of cancer last month.

Now his father, Randy Gold, plans to climb the Hancock in his son's place. And he'll be joined by Eric's girlfriend and younger brother.

"When Eric was diagnosed with lymphoma [last year], I said I was either going to do it with him or for him," Randy Gold said. "He's going to be with me in spirit doing this."

Non-Hodgkins lymphoma was the last in a series of illnesses Eric fought during his brief life. He was diagnosed with diabetes at age 7 and lung disease five years ago.

With each one, Eric "didn't let the disease rule him. He ruled it," his father said.

Eric was a professional photographer in his second year of law school at the University of Florida. Before that, he had earned bachelor's and master's degrees in speech and language pathology from Northwestern University.

And from the time he was a child, Eric, who grew up in Florida, had also been involved in a nonprofit camp for children with diabetes -- first as a youth counselor, then on the board of directors.

"For somebody to have accomplished what he did in spite of everything he had, he lived a very full life," Randy Gold said.

But cancer proved to be "the one obstacle he couldn't jump over," he said.

Randy Gold started training for Hustle Up the Hancock after Eric's cancer diagnosis last summer, walking up 11 flights of stairs to his son's hospital room every day. The 56-year-old federal prosecutor also hired a personal trainer to whip him into shape for the grueling stair climb.

"I'm probably as ready as I'm going to be," he said.

Hustle Up the Hancock raises money for lung disease research.