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My Loss of Someone Close

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For as long as I can remember, my grandmother helped my parents rear my brother, two sisters, and me. When we moved to Plano from San Antonio, my parents decided that my grandmother was no longer capable of taking care of herself and asked her to move in with us. From then on, my grandmother became my roommate. She and I became very close. I admired many of her personality traits and her affection. As she grew older, it was our turn to take care of her. I began to feel she was my responsibility and did all I could to make her feel comfortable. Knowing about her fear of hospitals, on one occasion I spent the night with her and slept by her side, holding her like a baby. This was her last trip to the hospital, yet when she was released she was not assured good health.

One day my mother took her to the doctor for what she thought was a routine check-up. My mother sat me down and relayed what the doctor had told her.

"Sandy, Grandma is not doing well. The doctor said that both of her kidneys have failed, and she will undoubtedly go into renal failure."

"What is that? Is it serious?"

"The doctor said she probably won't make it through Thanksgiving. The toxins from her kidneys will poison her blood, and she will eventually die."

I was not a young child, and I understood what she was saying, but it did not seem likely. I thought that surely they were overreacting. She seemed fine to me. Her character had not changed, and she still made us laugh, not knowing she was funny. After all, they did not know her the way I did. I would be the first person to realize that her health was failing.

My mother, being a devout Catholic, a few days later asked our priest to come over and give her the "last rites" of the church. "Yeah, whatever," I thought to myself. Later that evening as I was getting ready for bed, I sat down next to her and asked, "Grandma, how do you feel?"

"Good." She replied.

"Do you know that you are not well?"

"No, I'm O.K."

"Does your side hurt?"

"No," she answered.

"Good, then you'll be ready to go jogging tomorrow."

She let out a snicker and gave an amused, "mañana!"

When Thanksgiving came around, Grandma was still

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alive—as I knew she would be. Everyone else was amazed that she was still holding up so well, but not me; I knew she was fine. Besides, if there was any way to "show up" those "know-it-alls," she would do it. Still, there was the chance that what I was told could actually be true. I left for school in the mornings fearing that they might call me out of class to tell me my grandmother had passed away. Every day upon returning home, I would immediately go to my room to make sure that she was all right.

After Thanksgiving, my grandmother's health began to deteriorate. She would constantly tell my mother and me she loved us. She sounded like a broken record, and it occasionally annoyed us. I understood it to be that she realized she was sick and did not want to die leaving us to wonder how she felt about us. She became insecure and no longer wanted to be left alone. The only time we could leave her by herself comfortably was when she was sleeping. One morning, as I was getting ready for school, she had awakened and asked me, "Where are you going?"

"To school, Grandma."

"Don't leave me!"

"I have to."

"Take me with you!"

"I can't, Grandma, I don't think my teachers would like that." I found that remark rather humorous. Surely she knew she could not follow me to school. She got out of bed, grabbed her cane and my hand, saying, "Come on, let's go." When I rejected her the second time, she began to cry. I put her back in bed and laid down next to her until she went back to sleep. As I ran my fingers

through her hair and scratched her back, I realized she was afraid of dying alone.

My mother thought that it would be nice to reunite all my grandmother's children. This was the first time they had been together as a family in forty years. We thought she was fighting her death so that she might see her children one last time, but even after they left, she was still alive and kicking. At least, that is what I thought.

We came to the conclusion that if it was not her children she was waiting to see, it was Christmas. By this time she was bedridden, and the only time she got out of bed was when we put her in a wheelchair and took her for a stroll. She did not say very much, but every once in a while she would hold my hand and say, "Don't get old." She understood that I understood she was in a lot of pain, although she never made it noticeable.

We felt she awaited each holiday, the next one being New Year's Day. Not only did it bring in another year, it also brought my grandmother's eighty-ninth birthday. I realized that I had to accept my grandmother's death and let her go. I did not want to do so, but I felt as if she was waiting for my permission to die. I sat on her bed beside her and said solemnly, "Grandma, I don't know if you understand what I'm saying, but I love you. You have taught me so many things, and I will always cherish our relationship, but I know that you are tired. You have lived a full life, and there is no use hanging on. I will never forget you, and you will always have a special place in my heart, but now it is time for you to rest. It's O.K. for you to die. No one will be mad at you, and you won't feel any more pain."

After the holidays my grandmother appeared to have become better over night. I no longer felt obligated to

spend all my time with her, because I thought she still had several months to live. One evening, as I strolled in from work, my mother asked me to check on her. I walked in my room assuming she was asleep. My mother stood in the doorway watching me and asked, "Is she O.K.?"

Hoping that I was mistaken, I turned to my mother calmly and told her, "Mom, I don't think she is breathing."

Mom said, "Well, she probably isn't," as she examined her a little closer and confirmed she was not.

A tear ran down my face, and all of a sudden I felt numb. I stared at her and became angry, because she left without telling me good-bye or allowing me to be by her side when she died. I remembered all the funny things she would say to me. The moment I had been denying had finally come true. I had a few minutes with her to myself when I realized....I was alone.

I watched as the coroner took her body away, but it was no longer she. Without life, that was not my grandmother. My room felt empty and I immediately missed her. Yet I understood, even though I did not want to say good-bye. That night I went to bed without my roommate, without my friend, without my grandmother.

Although my grandmother's death caused me a period of grief, the memories of her cause me much joy. The time we shared together could never be replaced. I knew that my grandmother would never die, because she had earned a place in my heart. Every time something reminds me of her, I realize that although she may not be with me on earth, she still lives in my memories.

