

Losing My Mother to Pancreatic Cancer

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When I was four, my parents sat me down and had a conversation with me. A conversation that at the time didn't faze me. They just kept repeating, mommy is really sick, she will need to be hospitalized and have surgeries. My siblings were much older than me and were sobbing and asking why, why us? How could this possibly happen to us. Days, months and years went by and the surgeries became more constant, doctors appointments were routine, and the hospital nurses were beginning to recognize my face and know my name. My mother Kaylynn, had stage 4 metastatic pancreatic cancer and she was diagnosed when she was 32 years old. She was so young they all said. Cancer this aggressive is usually found in an older patient who had a history of poor health. How could this sweet 32 year old mother be so sick?

As I got older, her cancer became very apparent in our day to day lives. And as I continued to grow older, I started noticing her illness more frequently. Other kids had their moms waiting for them outside the school doors. Their moms would take them to their soccer games and cheer them on from the stands and most moms could go out in public without having a surgical mask on. Mine was in too much pain and too weak to even go from her bed to the bathroom at times. I don't at all blame her for any of the things she wasn't capable of doing due to her cancer, but that didn't stop me from being upset at the world from time to time. I remember the first time she picked my siblings and I up from school, I cried. No one really understood why this was such a joyous moment since it seemed like such an average task. But for her it was a milestone. However, these little milestones became less frequent as the years continued. And I knew, in my heart, that she wanted to do all the normal things that moms do, so very bad. She wanted it so bad that she managed to overcome the mountain load of odds that were put up against her. Whenever she was feeling the slightest bit better, she would automatically take us out to do some sort of fun leisure that she could be a part of. I will never forget those little nuggets of adventure that I got to spend with her. She wanted our family to have as many good memories of her as we could. My mom wanted to make as much of an impact as she possibly could on the little world she knew. She desired this so intensely, that she battled until she took that last breath.

My mom and I had a special bond that none of my other siblings seemed to have with her. She was my best friend. I didn't care about going to school and meeting new people when I was younger because I had her. She was supposed to be my lifelong best friend, the person who would love me for eternity, and she was ripped away from me. We would tell everything to each other. I knew that she had my back know matter what, even at the mere age I was. She always had my best interest at heart. She would've given me the world on a silver platter if she could, she would've given me everything. I will be forever moved by her selflessness she held, even when she was gravely ill. She had the right to be selfish during that time but she refused. She

was always giving, trying to make my life better. I think my most prominent memory of her is anytime during the holidays. My mother made them so special for everyone, she was the definition of the spirit of Christmas. She used to make fake reindeer poop so I would believe that Santa was really there. And no matter how crazy my Christmas list was she would always get me everything I asked for because Santa knew how nice of a girl I was. My brother one year asked for new Oreo cookies, and at the time the unique flavors weren't sold in stores, so my mom called the actual manufacturer of Oreos and ordered a bunch of crazy different flavors from them for my brother. My mother taught me how to be completely selfless and compassionate. She was my role model, even today she still remains to be one of my greatest role models. It just baffles me how she remained so pure and kind even while battling with a death sentence for so many years. Every day she motivates me to be a better person, to try and be just as miraculous as her.

In 2008, they finally resulted to removing my mom's pancreas and a portion of her liver and her small bowels. The surgery was titled a success for a while. They saw no new growths on her scans, she had energy and was finally gaining some weight back. This lasted for what felt like a millisecond. The cancer came back, like it always did, and her so called remission had suddenly become something of the past. But, she still didn't give up. I could see her determination still deep within her, I could see that she wanted to survive. Unfortunately, the yearning for life isn't the cure for cancer. On April 12th, 2010 I was called out of school. Not something to out of the ordinary I just assumed I had a doctor appointment. But my dad was with my school principal waiting for me in the hallway. In my heart, I knew what was happening. I didn't want to be right, I didn't want it to be over. She couldn't be dying. As my dad and I walked out of the elementary school he told me that my mom had been moved to a different hospital called hospice. For a second, some hope was resurrected. Maybe she was getting better instead of getting worse. But at the age of 9 I had no idea what hospice really was. When we reached the hospital all I saw were old, senile people who were nearly falling apart at the seams. That last sliver of hope that I was holding onto instantly faded away. She had come here to die.

After my mother's passing, I slowly began healing. I knew that I could control how much I let this impact the rest of my life. Or can I? See, there's something that was missing from the puzzle. How did my mother die so quickly? Why did her cancer come back even more demanding than it was before? After my mother passed we opted to donate her major intestines to science because she was a medical mystery to doctors. And they discovered something. Her cancer was genetic. That's why it came back every time stronger than it was before. Her cells were genetically programmed to be mutated. We discovered that my grandmother, her mom was the same way, who at the time was also battling breast cancer. Next year, I have to begin the process of getting genetically mapped to see if I will have the same fate as my mother. Knowing this information though hasn't fazed me. It has actually motivated me to live my life more fully than I do already. I want to see everything and do everything I possibly can whether I am genetically predisposed to die young or not.

My mother's passing changed me to be who I am today. Because of her passing I now know tragedy like you wouldn't believe. I have learned that life is truly a gift and you can't take it for granted. You have to follow your dreams because for all we know this is the only life we will know and have. Do everything you can possibly do to be happy and make others happy. You can't spend your whole life making excuses out of your personal losses. Yes, I might very well come across the same battle she faced but I will never let that stop me from living a free and full life.