

2017 CSCGP High School Teen Essay Contest

1st Place Winner

A Long Battle

By Jennifer Guo

My grandmother was the epitome of “healthy living.” She was always happy and optimistic; she ate all the right foods, and she often exercised by walking around our neighborhood.

I never expected cancer to take my grandmother. She had survived the disease twice, and she recovered relatively quickly both times.

The last recurrence was the worst. It started with a headache. My grandmother was never a complainer, so she did not make a big deal about it. Eventually, the pain became too much, even for her, and she went to the hospital to get it checked out.

Bad news awaited her. The doctor explained to us that tumor cells were floating in her brain and spinal fluid, so surgery was not an option. My grandmother decided to undergo radiation and chemotherapy. I still remember my grandmother’s signature sunny disposition as she endured each round of treatment and her hair gradually fell out. She handled the situation with grace. Her smile, although not as wide as it used to be, never completely faded. Despite having been weakened by the treatments, my grandmother was still relatively healthy, and her cancer was under control.

Unfortunately, things suddenly went downhill.

My grandmother was rushed to the hospital when she did not wake up after an extended period of time. My heart was racing as I watched the ambulance peel out of the driveway with

flashing lights and blaring sirens. I later found out that she had gotten pneumonia because the cancer treatments had obliterated her immune system.

She managed to pull through. I remember visiting her in the ICU. I will be honest; it was one of the scariest moments of my life. As soon as I walked into her hospital room, I was bombarded with the sounds of the ventilator and the heart monitor.

Beep, beep, beep. Hisss, Hisss, Hisss.

I could barely see her under a pile of blankets with a ventilator mask strapped to her face, surrounded by a plethora of machines. She only had enough strength to wave goodbye when we left.

Her condition deteriorated while in the ICU. Her prognosis was not good, and the doctors recommended that she be placed in hospice care. My parents eventually agreed, and two weeks later, my grandmother came home.

Although she was healthy enough to be discharged, she was still terribly sick. She no longer smiled or spoke. She barely ate. Because she was bedridden, she relied on my grandfather for everything. It was agonizing to see her like this, reduced to a shell of her old self.

My grandmother was also in a lot of pain. At night, when she could not fall asleep because of the cancer-induced headaches, she constantly moaned and groaned. Her room was connected to mine by an air duct, and I could hear each and every single moan when I lay in bed. It got so bad that I had to move to another room because her tormented sounds kept me up at night. The noises that she made still haunt me to this day, and I do not think that I have ever pitied someone as much as I did her.

Cancer weakened my grandma considerably, and pneumonia delivered the final, devastating blow. Three months after she contracted pneumonia, my grandmother succumbed to the illnesses and passed away.

It was December 3, 2014, and it began like any other day. I woke up and got ready for school. But I could tell something was different as soon I got downstairs.

My parents and grandfather were gathered outside my grandmother's room. My mom quietly ushered me to the door. I knew what had happened before someone told me. The sickly-sweet scent of death enveloped me as I entered, and my gaze rested on the body in the bed.

Before seeing the lifeless form of my grandmother, I had not understood why people described the faces of the recently deceased as peaceful. But now I do. My grandmother's face, although devoid of color and warmth, was without anguish or pain.

The reality of her death did not hit me until I was at school. I made it through my first class completely fine, but then suddenly, on my way to my next class, I started crying uncontrollably. My teacher sent me to the counselor's office when she saw my tears.

As I sat in the counselor's office, trying to dry my eyes, I had a lot of time to think. I realized that although my heart was broken, I was happy for my grandmother then. She was finally relieved of her pain and suffering, and after a long battle, she deserved to be at peace.