



2019 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

3rd Place Winner

Bridget Munoz

Blue Teddy Bear

When my parents told me about my grandmother's cancer, I just thought she was just a little sick, like a cold or a flu. No one had ever told me about the severity of the situation, and losing someone as close to me as my grandmother seemed unrealistic and unfathomable to me at six years old. On the long, bland drive up to the hospital, I wasn't thinking about my relative's near death. Instead, I was thinking about the boredom of the car ride. I saw the trees pass in my window and sighed at the repetition of the road. The cool breeze coming through my slightly ajar window reminded me of where I would rather be, out in the sun.

As I leaned my head against my window, my mother said to me, "Now your grandmother is very sick, you need to be really nice to her..."

I zoned out before she could finish her thought. Instead, I pondered about things I considered more important at the time.

What am I going to eat for dinner tonight? Will I be home in time to see my favorite show?

My mind raced with these thoughts, but none were about the wellbeing of my loved one.

After arriving at the hospital, I felt immediately gloomy. This place did not feel comforting. The tall, colorless room put a depressing filter on the people in it. It smelled of sanitization, and everyone who I saw looked depressed and sleep deprived. I saw a bald man shuffling with an IV wrapped around his wrist, and to his left, a new mother cradling a smiling newborn in her arms. The light hit the fair skin of the man, and the glistening eyes of the mother. Some people were just sitting, looking out a window, some were crying; my emotions numbed as I walked further into the hospital.

Once I saw a gift shop, I immediately forgot about the people who seemed hopeless in the lobby. After beseeching my mother to take a quick look at the merchandise and finally persuading her to buy something, I went up to my grandmother's hospital room, blue teddy bear in hand. I felt a rush of excitement when I thought about giving the toy to my beloved grandmother.

When I opened the door, all my excitement ceased to exist. Who I saw was not my grandmother. She was bald, pale, and wore a frown on her face. My mother never warned me that she would be this unrecognizable. Who I saw looked like the ghost of the woman I loved and appreciated. Her eyes were smothered by black bags, and her green hospital gown made her look even paler than she already did.

I no longer saw the person who took me out to parks, the one who made my favorite meals on my birthday. I couldn't see the fun, caring woman who shaped my childhood and was my role model. All I saw was her frown and her sad, sky blue eyes.

"Hey Mom," My Mother whispered, her voice cracking.

I didn't know what to say. I had never seen anyone like this, and especially someone I was this close with.

"We brought you something." I held up the stuffed animal and shuffled over to her hospital bed.

"Thank you so much Bridge," she said weakly, taking the bear and cherishing it in her frail arms. She looked me in the eyes and gave a light smile. When I saw how she looked at me, I should have known something was wrong.

In that very moment, the innocence of my childish thoughts took over me. When I looked at her for the last time, I had no idea that it would be the final image in my head of one of my best friends.

Leaving the hospital that day felt short, but returning to those memories is painful and long.

My Grandmother died later that night. Her name was Bonnie Gray. She was a wife, mother, and scientist. Her stage 4 leukemia got the best of her at the young age of 60. Surrounded by her loved ones, she passed away a little out of it, but she still had a slight idea of what was happening to her. While her chosen funeral song was playing, her emotionless face was enclosed in a coffin after being exposed to the sunlight one last time. In her pearls and

makeup and wigs to hide her sick appearance, the overpriced bear had no place in this scenery. Regardless, she had it cradled in her arms as the coffin was lowered.

As a kid, I had little idea of how death can affect a human's soul and their families. My immaturity and childish thoughts had gotten the best of me, and I missed my chance to have a real goodbye with my grandmother. Even today, goodbyes are still hard. But now my regrets have shaped me into someone who always says "I love you" before hanging up the phone. After all, you never know which time you speak to someone will be the last.