



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

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Mela-no-more

Today when I think about Carol, I don't think about our goodbye. Instead, I think about Christmas, learning how to knit with her, and playing fetch with her dogs.

Some of my favorite memories with her were the Christmases my family and I spent with her. Every Christmas for as long as I can remember, my family and I always spent a piece of ours with her. She lived alone and spent Christmas without anybody for most of the day. After we got home from my grandmother's house, we went straight to hers, one of my favorite parts of Christmas. We started into the door, and we were always greeted, by Bob and Rodger. Rodger was a big, fluffy, white dog who could find a way to get you to rub his belly. Bob was a tiny, jumpy, curly-haired dog, and he was always looking for attention and was always jealous of his big brother Rodger. Behind the dogs was always Carol, a smile on her face. I don't think I remember her mad, sad, upset, or anything other than happy.

She gave us a warm welcome into her house, and we were always greeted in the living room by sweet cookies. We would finally sit down and talk for a long time, about anything. We could just enjoy each others' company. Occasionally we would see Carol's shy black cat, Lydia, run by. If we were quiet and waited long enough, we might get to pet her. After we opened all of our presents, we would thank her, give her hugs, and sit back down. After another hour we would say our goodbyes for the night, by this point it was nearly midnight.

I remember the first Christmas we had without her; I've only spent two without her but they just never feel complete. My favorite memory with Carol might have been when I was in first grade, and she taught me how to knit. She only taught me a simple pattern but it was so meaningful to me because even though she had so much yarn and so many needles she still gave me some to keep for myself. I always saw her make amazing things; she made me a big purple owl for my birthday one year. My mom used to come and help her clean her house because her house was really big and she needed a little bit of help. So one day when my mom went to help her, Carol sat down with me and started to teach me. She handed me dark blue yarn and yellow and green long needles. She started to teach me how to do the first layer, even though I was having a lot of trouble, she never gave up on me. Eventually, I did it. With a little bit of trouble, I got pretty far on the scarf and was going to finish it at home. I was just making a scarf; looking at it years later, it didn't look too good, but she always told me I was doing well, and it helped me keep going. My mom and I finally left her house and I was going to finish the scarf and I got to the end but I didn't know how to finish it. I never asked her to help me finish it. This is one of the biggest regrets in my life.

Carol was always willing to play with my siblings and me whenever we asked. We would ask to play with her dogs all of the time. We got a few tennis balls to throw to them, and we

went outside. Bob and Rodger would stare us down drooling while we had the ball then once we threw it they would race for it. Whichever one of them got it first would always sprint back as fast as they could with their ears flopping up and down. After the dogs or we, whichever one came first, got bored with fetch, we would start to chase them around. I remember Bob has the most energy out of any dog I've ever seen, but Rodger likes to lay down in the sun and get belly rubs. While my brother and I chased Bob around for a while Carol and my sister would pet Rodger. Eventually we would all end up petting the dogs, once they got too tired or hot we would bring them inside. After we went inside we would give them their treats. Rodger always wanted food, so if Bob's treat fell on the ground Rodger would snatch it right up from under his mouth. Then Bob would look up at us with a sad face as Roger looked for more.

One of my favorite things about Carol was how she didn't treat me like I was a little kid; she always thought of my problems as important and didn't brush them off. Carol wasn't even technically related to us, but she quickly became part of our family with all of the memories we made with her and the good, and bad, times we spent together.

Carol had melanoma. This cancer was absolutely vicious if it wasn't caught early enough. She had it before and beat it once. She got the spot checked out removed and that was that. But then it came back. I guess she didn't catch it early enough; because you could just tell she was getting sicker and sicker slowly by each day. My parents needed to help her with some stuff at first, and we thought she could get better. Then summer of 2017 came around, and she could hardly walk by herself. My mom would go to see her every morning to get her food and water or help her get through the house and anything else she needed. My mom was there every day before my siblings and I were awake and always came back home between lunch and dinner. My dad visited her everyday after work and came home late after I was asleep.

That summer was very boring, but I knew I couldn't complain because I wasn't the sick one. I could still move around; she was the one who needed my parents most. I know Carol felt extremely guilty about the whole situation because my parents told me, and she never liked anyone using their time for her or helping her even though she helped everybody with whatever they needed. After summer passed, we were at school so we didn't notice that Carol's condition was intensifying, and we had homework and school to help take our minds off of it. Then the next summer came around and you could tell she wasn't going to get better. We tried not to lose hope but it was looking pretty grim. It started to spread throughout her body, and they couldn't perform surgery on her because it could make it even worse, so she had to suffer through every painful minute of it. My parents couldn't be with her every second of the day, so she had to get nurses to stay with her.

Eventually, Carol did pass away that summer everybody was devastated and heartbroken, but now at least we know that her suffering was over and she was at peace.

When I said goodbye to Carol, I didn't know it would be the last time, so it kind of made it easier to leave. It wasn't sad, and no one was crying. It was better this way because we were talking, just like normal, not saying goodbye for the last time or never seeing each other again. It was me, my one brother, and my sister. We talked a lot about the memories we had with each other. We had a lot of laughs with her during this conversation, and it felt so good to see her happy. Once it was time to go, we all gave her hugs and told her how much we loved her; then right before we left I gave her a bracelet that I made her out of string. I made it very tiny because of how thin she had gotten, but it was still too big; this was just another reminder of how bad things were getting. I gave her one final hug and said goodbye.

It was hard to go because every time we left we knew there was a chance it would be our last time with her, so we had to make every moment special.

I learned so much from Carol. She was a huge role model throughout my life and will remain one for as long as I live. One of the best and purest human beings I knew was Carol. She would always help people when they needed help or were in trouble, and was more generous than any other person I know. I learned, from her, how to look for the best in everyone and everything.