



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program
High School
Teen Essay Contest

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My Fight for Her

Her phone still sits on the corner of the coffee table next to her signature spot on the couch. Each time I saunter down the stairs of my boyfriend's house, the iPhone always slips into my vision, flooding my mind with a series of images of her sitting there. Every time I walk in unannounced as my usual routine involves, by habit I turn towards her spot on the couch and am disappointed each time. I like to believe she is eventually coming back when in reality, she is gone. In the living room, there is a massive empty space where the hospital bed used to reside and where she died on December 5, 2019, at 12:10 AM. The room screams of her missing presence, while in correspondence, my heart wails in pain and longing.

A cloud of sadness continues to follow me even after four months of her having left this Earth, as well as a shower of guilt. The guilt is stronger than the sorrow though, the feeling of unlawfulness at my response to her death, the fact that she was not even my mother, yet it feels as if I lost mine. I am embarrassed at how angry I am at the world for taking her away as if she

was mine. The concept that my boyfriend, who I imagine to spend the rest of my life with, although one may think that we are just “high school sweethearts,” that he will live the rest of his life with a hole in his heart that I or anyone will never be able to fill leaves me empty inside. The idea that I barely got to know her, but that she could have been a monumental piece in the rest of my life continuously gnaws at me. The thought that my future children may not have a paternal grandmother who would love and spoil them breaks my heart. It was these thoughts that I felt selfish for. I convinced myself I did not have the right to mourn her passing; other people had that privilege but not me. My therapist soon taught me that I, as an individual, was allowed to have these feelings and to miss Kristine and that if I suppressed these emotions, I would only worsen mentally.

Even with counseling, I continue to struggle to find peace in her death. My relationship with my boyfriend Colin was altered completely right away. It was as if I was walking on eggshells whenever I was around him, I did not want to push him to talk to me about his pain if he did not want to, but I also did not want to seem unresponsive and cold. I was lost to how I was supposed to respond to his tragedy. Most days, he was numb and distant. He slept through the aching loss for multiple days. Suddenly though, it was as if nothing had happened. He returned to his normal, carefree self and surrounded himself with his hockey team. Once again, I was at a loss for actions. I had no clue how to proceed as Colin was thriving, yet I was still drowning in grief. I concluded that maybe this was his way of coping, but mine was the complete opposite. I could not mask my emotions the same way and constantly wore tears upon my cheeks. I wanted to always be Colin’s support system, but to do that, I first had to support myself. I was lost in a labyrinth of trying to figure out how to manage that. The guilt of my reaction was tugging at me day in and day out while Colin continued to live life as he did prior.

I overthink what Colin says many times but more specifically what he does not say, but I am not the only one. Colin's father once asked me, "Does Colin ever talk about Kristine to you? He does not talk to me about it, and I am getting worried." I sat there in silence, choking on my words. I could not give him an answer without breaking his heart. To me, it was as if she never existed in Colin's mind. I never heard him talk about her except maybe once or twice since she passed, but only like a memory of a stranger. It concerned me as well, his lack of vocalization about his pain. It appeared to me that he was stuck in denial. His younger brother Gavin followed suit, a boy known as the class clown soon turned mute and sat in the back with his head down. I started to realize there was nothing in my power to help them directly, other than to be there both physically and mentally for their family because I alone am not enough to heal all of their grief.

I started to slip through the cracks at school. The usual perfectionist no longer existed. I began to lose focus in class and fall into an abyss of depression. My motivation faltered and I began to allow myself failure after years of never accepting less than 110% effort from myself. After each long day, I would curl into a ball in my bed and dissolve into the sheets, reluctant to venture out to complete any of my studies. Most of my teachers did not seem to notice or if they did, they did not seem to be concerned or approach me about the matter. There was one outlier who cared and continuously checked in on me daily, that teacher I will forever be grateful for, for showing compassion in a society that is merciless.

The most destructive response was my lack of forgiveness of God and my deteriorating relationship with him. I grew up in a very Catholic home where faith was one of the most important things to possess. I went to church, followed the Ten Commandments to the best of my ability, and even prayed outside of church. In the two years of Kristine's battle, I prayed often for her recovery and for her pain to dissipate. The moment I was startled awake by Colin's call, my

trust in God diminished. I had never heard such raw pain in another human's voice. The words, "She's gone, Court. She's gone," are ingrained in my mind for eternity and play on repeat some days. After that, I resented God. I began to not believe there even is a God. I questioned how a "god" would allow such a horrible thing to happen to such a young and vibrant person, to a mother of two boys and to someone who was a loyal wife. I buried my cross necklace that I wore every day deep into my drawer and refused to attend church for any occasion. The one person I thought I could count on betrayed me.

I am writing this on the four-month anniversary of her passing, and I am going to be completely candid at this moment; I am still not handling her death well. There are still days on end where my body is limp and my mind blank, unable to process any thought but utter sadness. Not just grief fills my mind, but disdain. I have not yet forgiven the world for taking away an angel from this Earth, and I honestly do not know when I ever will. There feels as if a part of me never will understand why such an incredible woman was taken so viciously. I will continuously question why Kristine was chosen to endure such chronic pain for so long, so young. It seems that I will continue to blame the world for the unfairness it has shown to myself and others equally affected. What I have always been taught is that life is fair because it is unfair to everyone, but this is a circumstance that causes me to wonder if that is the truth. Is all suffering to the same degree for each individual? Is life truly fair then if not, even with injustices divided among the masses?

Each day, I think of Kristine and thank her for raising such an amazing son that loves me more than anything. Each day, I acknowledge her grace as she battled through such a horrific disease. Each day, I aspire to be more like Kristine in the way she appreciated life, even in the

direst of times. She serves as an exemplary mother that I yearn to be, and I am forever grateful to have known a woman as strong as Kristine.