



2020 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
High School  
Teen Essay Contest

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## Feeling Lost and Loss

To navigate an unknown path is a challenge. To do it without a map, without light, without guidance, that is even harder. Especially when you started out your journey with those things and you lost them along the way. I started my junior year with light, guidance, and even a map of sorts. I felt good and certain. I felt like the year was going to be good and that I would enjoy my journey and it would end happily. But then, when I actually began to navigate my path of junior year, I quickly became lost. I felt the vicious winds of the pressure to figure out the rest of my life so quickly cast around me constantly, sweeping the map right out of my hands. Storms of difficult classes and assignments rained heavily over me, leaving me with no light or guidance of any kind. I had already felt lost enough in the tenebrous and dismal woods of junior year, so losing my grandmother to ovarian cancer made those dark woods pitch black.

The first few days and the first month were the hardest. When I found out, it felt as though all my clothes were stripped of me. I felt naked, exposed, and isolated. During those first few weeks it was as if I was in the deepest part of the woods and a single rain cloud was pouring constant freezing, unforgiving rain on my bare body. I had no light in my life, no sun ever present to warm me. I felt cold, alone and useless, like I would never find a path out.

Then in March of 2019, about a month after her death on the 14th of February. My family organized a “celebration of life” for my grandmother at a restaurant near her home. I knew that this was my path out of the woods, but ironically I was still apprehensive to face my grief head on. Because even though the woods were terrible, looking the beast of grief in the face, let alone defeating it, is a task that I was unprepared for and afraid of. I almost wanted to stay in the woods with the cloud of numbing rain hanging over my head. So that I never had to feel the pain of loss again. I wanted to continue to hear it’s pitter patter because that sound was far better than hearing the growl of my intrusive thoughts in my ear. Sometimes I wished the cold wind would get colder, and freeze me in my place, giving me an excuse as to why I could not fight the beast. I wished that the tall trees would hide me in the forest, because even though my heart wanted to get out of there more than anything, my mind, my fear, my sadness halted me from doing anything to move forward.

However regardless of my anxious and uneasy thoughts, I followed the path, knowing in my heart that it would be my first step into something better. I was right. Going on that path to her “celebration of life” opened me up to a clearing. A clearing filled with warm, comforting air that hugged me when I entered it and blessed my ears with the chirping of birds and opened my

eyes and heart to the idea of the sunflowers, that encased the clearing. When I saw these beautiful, glowing sunflowers, which were my grandmother's favorite flower, I began to understand and finally to come to terms with her death because I realized that she represented all that a sunflower is. The sunflower symbolizes healing, warmth, happiness, vitality, faithfulness and light. So, even though my grandmother left us physically, the spirit of the sunflower that resided in her heart and soul will never leave us.

It is with this in mind, that I was finally able to leave the woods of grief and confusion. Even though I experienced the tragic loss of my grandmother, I am no longer lost. In fact, her loss is what led me out of those horrible woods. Her loss, although tragic and heartbreaking, happened for a reason. She and her sunny spirit constantly reminds me that it takes time to heal, to take warmth and cherish it, to soak up every drop of happiness you possibly can for as long as you can, that her vitality will shine within me and guide me through the many woods that I will travel through in life, to keep faith even when it feels like everything is falling apart, and that after darkness there will always be light.