2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

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I Didn’t Know Her Well, But I Knew of Her Love

I woke up, and it was a normal day. I woke up on the firm mattress of my own bed in my welcoming home. The blankets cradled me in their warm embrace. The strength of the sunlight was weakened by the blinds, but nonetheless shone through. I heaved myself out of bed and trudged through the doorway into the wall of light, the massive window that let in the impressive sunshine. My mom’s cautious, concerning tone of voice traveled down the hall to me and it pulled me into the room and away from the light. We sat, my mom, sister, and me; huddled on the dusty, not-quite navy-blue air mattress. She gently told me that morning that my Nana had passed away in the night. However, I didn't react immediately. One thinks *this could never happen to me* until it does. I know that she is in Heaven where there is no pain and it is a blessing for my Nana, but for me it was a curse. It was almost impossible to appreciate her reprieve from cancer because of the anguish her passing caused me and my family. All of a sudden, the shock of having my Nana be gone forever was unreal. It wasn't real. It couldn't be real. The news hit like a hammer, bashing through my chest. After the initial vibrations, the pain settles in. Even after a long time, the area that was struck is still sensitive to the touch. Eventually, my cheeks became slick ice with my tears. They poured out of me, wave after wave of water. Every time I tried to talk about her, a bottomless reservoir of tears would release its next wave.

“She was the happiest when she was around you guys.”

Even though I didn't know her that well didn't mean I didn't love her, or that there wasn't immense pain when she left us.

*I want her back!* I pleaded and begged inside my head. My heart is crumpled and the feelings within it struggled to make sense of the maze my heart had become with its creases and corners and twists; only sadness seemed to find an outlet and it took control of me. I had only been given a few chances to see her before she was diagnosed and we left Germany, and she died after we got back. She was stolen from me and everyone who knew her; death crept in through the night. Emma and I were robbed of fond experiences that could have been, like visiting both grandparents; having them come to our activities; and us finally living near them, 20 minutes away, after 15 years of hopping from place to place. Two, both, plural, grandparent*s*. No matter how much sorrow seeped through the cracks in my heart, there was always more, and Nana was still gone.

“I miss her!” “Why did she have to go?” I cried out in a cracked voice. I was in a pit, a pit of emotion that was too deep to ever overcome it. But there was no answer that could *fix* the tragedy because only time can heal wounds like that. A Neosporin for tragedy is surrounding yourself with loved ones, and sometimes a good cry can speed up the process as well.

“The reason she went through all the medication and treatments was so she could see you and Emma grow up,” my mom informed me. I couldn’t fathom how greatly someone could love me, but that statement put love into perspective. It assigned it to one action, one action of choosing between life and death. The purity of that decision was like a chandelier of stars, glistening in the theatre of night; the chandelier shone brighter when her light went out.

Tears gushed out of me with new ferociousness. They slipped into my mouth with their salty taste, and some fell to the airbed beneath them. We were glued to the mattress almost all morning, and the dark water spots speckled the surface of it. The emotional weight was like dragging a grand piano tethered to my heart. The density in the air was the sadness and wariness of mentioning the matter; it could be felt by each of us, but we continued to wallow, mourn, and talk. Now that I am writing this paper, I have touch back into my emotions that morning. I have to talk about her and how much she loved us. The tears felt warm against my cheeks, and as they dried, they turned cold and made my face feel stiff. The cool mattress certainly didn’t comfort me, but I sank into its chilling skin after hours of remaining in one, singular spot.

“She would hold you so I could sleep, even if you were crying. She didn't care.”

One of the most infuriating things in this whole ordeal was that she was in recession and then she died. It was false hope, a brief moment of rejoicing and miraculous blessing that was ripped away and snatched from our grasp with her. The blood within me boiled. How unfair it was makes me clench my fists to the point where my nails bite into my palms. Annoyance is spelled on my face through my pursed lips and wide, unblinking eyes. *Why? Why do people have to die? Why does it hurt so much? Why is it so unfair?* I am cut deeply and stung with pain because I loved Nana and I miss her.

My legs ached from my slumping on that bed where hearts poured out as well as tears. I would never be able to call her for advice. I would never be able to ask for prayer when I had tribulations. I would never be able to see her in an audience at one of my events.

“She was a good listener, and she gave good advice,” my mom told me about her since I never got the chance to truly know her.

And now it was too late.