2022 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Emily Fasy

Dear Aunt Linda

Dear Aunt Linda,

A lot has changed since you died. I mean for starters, we found out that you and Aunt Pat got married! Apparently, a lot of the family suspected that you were married, I didn’t though. I just thought that you two were best friends and that I wanted to be like you two with my best friend one day. Mom tried to lighten the mood a bit by joking that she was annoyed. Apparently you two promised that if you ever got married, that she could be the flower girl. Anyways, we were all pretty sad when you died, especially Aunt Pat. She had to grieve all on her own because of Covid. She changed, Aunt Linda, and not for the better.

Aunt Pat got cancer, too. Apparently, when she got diagnosed with cancer, she went to go and get some Rita’s Water Ice. But when someone saw her outside without a mask on, they yelled at her for not wearing a mask, and she didn’t fight back, not a single word, Aunt Linda. Can you imagine that? Aunt Pat, the tiny, feisty woman that you loved and married, not saying a word to someone as they are yelling at her. One time, when Mom, Dad, and I went to see her, it ended up with me and her in the office. She sat in the office chair and she turned to me and she said, “Promise me that you’ll always be a good girl,” and don’t worry, I did. I was trying to lighten up the mood a bit and so I said, “Promise me that you’ll always stay funny?” She looked at me with the most distraught look. The only way that I could possibly describe it to you is the look of a woman that has lost everything in her life to live for. But she looked at me, with tears in her eyes, and she said, “I don’t feel very funny.” I had to look away from her. I knew that if I didn’t she would see me crying. Mom and Dad were trying not to cry, so I didn’t want to either. I failed, but at least she didn’t see.

Mom was standing in the door and she started talking to Aunt Pat for a while and when we were leaving, she gave her a hug. So, I gave her a hug too. I was really worried that I was going to hurt her because I have been told that I can be a bit of an aggressive hugger. So I was trying my best so that I wouldn’t hurt her and I guess that she could tell that I was scared. She turned to Mom and she said the most heart-breaking thing that I ever heard in my life, she said “She’s scared of me, isn’t she?” You know what’s the oddest part, I don’t know why that hurt so much. I mean it isn’t like I was ever especially close to you or Aunt Pat. Maybe because I have always been told that I give “the best hugs”. Or maybe because I really wanted to be comforting and I failed.

We kept going to see Aunt Pat after that. She would always ask for us to bring her food, take a couple of bites of one thing, and then she would say that she wasn’t hungry now, but she would eat more of it later. She lost a lot of weight because of it too. She went from being a bit overweight to weighing probably less than me and not in the healthy way. She didn’t look good either, she looked kind of like a saggy anorexic. If she was a stranger, you probably would have guessed that she was in her mid 80s and not 75. She went to one of those hospice places for a week. The ambulance came and eventually got her to go on one of those stretchers, after a bit of a mini protest. Mom rode with her in the ambulance, and Dad and I drove behind in the car. When she came out, she had to get a caregiver. She always was calling Mom and getting her to change the times. Saying that she wants them at the house for 24 hours to 14, 14 to 12, 12 to 8, etc. We still came to visit a lot though.

One time, when she was watching TV, there was this movie on, with Julia Roberts, and her character had cancer. I really just wanted to go, take the remote from its place on the recliner arm, and change the channel so that Aunt Pat didn’t have to watch it. But she just asked in a far off way, “Do you think that I’ll ever get better?” Of course, we all said that it was a possibility, but we all really knew the answer. She kept debating whether or not she wanted to do chemotherapy, she eventually decided that she didn’t want to. When she did decide that she didn't want to, it was clear she restarted smoking. The cigarette smell stopped clearing and went back to smelling like a smoking room. But somehow, it was worse than when you both were smoking inside. I guess that was because it was late fall and the PA weather was horrible. So she didn’t want to go outside or maybe she gave up on quitting and decided to smoke to her heart’s content.

You know one time, when her favorite at home nurse quit, she and Mom had a huge fight. Well, more like Mom had a huge fight. It was a normal day of visiting, we said our goodbyes, and were only feet from the door. But then, quietly, Aunt Pat said “I feel like you’ve betrayed me”. That caused mom to lose it. For about twenty minutes, it was the scariest twenty minutes, she was as mad as I’d ever seen her. You could practically see the smoke coming out of her ears, even Dad was scared. But just like when she went to get water ice, Aunt Pat just sat there and said nothing, no crying, no fear, nothing at all.

She kinda went back to joking around with people a bit, but it was never the same. I mean she still had the same husky laugh from all the years of smoking. Plus she still did similar jokes. It was just as if all of the joy her jokes once brought had just died. Like she was now hollow. I mean it was still funny when she’d jokingly call me Morticia for having my long hair in my face, or Funny Face, but not like when she pretended to be a seal with french fries at the dinner in February 2020. We also eventually found her a caregiver she really liked, her name was Rose. Turns out, she punched Rose’s brother one time because he punched Uncle John. I guess she wanted to make it clear not to mess with her nephew. She was really worried that Rose would be mad at her for it, but she just laughed and said that he had it coming. Apparently Rose was a good cook and hairdresser. Aunt Pat told us one day that she got a chair and some towels in the living room and got Rose to cut her hair back to its short, almost-buzzed look.

You know what else was interesting and sad, Aunt Linda? Patty and Maureen barely showed up. Twice Grandmom convinced someone to take her and sit on the lawn. Grandmom and Aunt Pat also sometimes called on the phone and talked and it was really nice. But Patty and Maureen, the two favorites? They rented a house down the shore for a year when they learned that the state wasn't going to let people rent in the summer because of Covid.

Maureen did show up twice and once took Aunt Pat shopping for clothes. She was so excited to be able to show off her new medium blue pajamas to us. I thought that it was really sweet. One time, mom asked if she wanted some new clothes and Aunt Pat agreed. She asked what she wanted and she was very vague. I thought it would be something similar to what Grandmom always wears, solids, darks, and some with bezzeled pictures. She did want something like that, but I asked if she wanted it to have deer or something on it, since it was close to Christmas, she quickly shot that one down. She did not want to take part in any Christmas celebrations, she said she wasn’t in the mood.

I’ll let you know more later Aunt Linda.

Love,

Emily

Dear Aunt Linda,

Take care of her for me and Grandmom, will you? She’s in heaven with you now.

-Emily