2023 Ben Strauss Youth Program

High School

Teen Essay Contest

Honorable Mention 1

Cara Ewerth

Time

It was dark outside, and all I could do was stare out the window of the car at the highway passing by quickly as I tried to choke back my tears, until I heard my sister crying. Then I broke down. So many questions flooded my mind as I analyzed those short but powerful words.

“Grandmom has cancer,” my dad told my sister and I in such a way I can still hear it today.

The first thing I could think about was how much time was left. Time is precious, but we take it for granted until we realize there really is a limit on how much of it we have. Those words put that into perspective for me, like I was watching in slow motion a glass fall before hitting the ground, but the reality is it happened so fast. That’s how the next several months felt.

She got progressively worse throughout the school year, and eventually it started to feel normal. Hearing bad news, being with my grandparents a lot more than usual, and trying to communicate with my dad’s sisters from across the world became a part of everyday life. Eventually things changed. In May, she started to get really sick and seeing her became less and less frequent. The glass felt like it was getting closer to the ground, but we couldn’t see it. How much time until it hits the ground? We did not know. Soon enough the emotions bottled up inside me felt like I was walking around with a heavy weight on my back. There was nothing more the doctors could do. It was all I could think about, but I kept it hidden. I knew everyone in my family was hurt by this, but we really never talked about the emotional toll it was taking on us.

Late May was the first time my Aunt Sandy and her family came up from Florida to visit. That weekend time stood still. The glass did not move. We saw my grandmom a lot, but it felt as if there was a strange tension between everyone. We all knew what was going through each other’s minds, but no one talked about it. It was almost like if we didn’t talk about it; then it wasn’t really happening. After they left, my questioning began again, and I could see the glass falling again. Was that the last time my cousins will see her? How much time is left? When will the glass hit the ground? The weight felt heavier the more I thought about it.

School ended, and I remember thinking; is this summer going to be the same as all the summers before? Will we still go on vacation and spontaneous adventures, or will we stay home, just waiting for what is next? Waiting felt like a waste of time. We had a relatively normal summer for the first two months, but it was always in the back of my mind. How much time is left? My other aunt, Aunt Karen, came home from Kenya that summer for about six weeks, and she was always at my grandparent’s house helping my Granddad or spending time with my Grandmom. As the time approached for her to go home, I started to wonder, will she really leave? Doesn’t she want more time with Grandmom? Kenya is so far away. We knew once she left; it most likely would be the last time she would see her mom.

After she left things got increasingly difficult. August was that month of being home and helping Granddad while waiting. Waiting makes time slow down. It’s the feeling when you see a glass fall off the counter, and you close your eyes until you hear it breaking. Those three weeks felt like forever, but not in the way I was expecting. It was exhausting. It felt like I was waiting for the climax of the story. I knew it was coming, but I didn’t know when or how. A little bit of adrenaline rushed through me every time my dad’s phone rang the first week. Was it Grandad? Is her suffering over? The adrenaline lessened as time went on. The longer we waited, the more we started to take that time for granted.

“It could happen any day now,” is a phrase I found myself repeating in my head everyday, but it started to lose its value. The next day would come, and she continued to suffer, her body weaker than ever. The days felt longer as we waited and waited. The thoughts deepened. How much longer did we have with her?

Then the glass shattered.

My heart dropped. It no longer felt like a minute was an hour and an hour, a day. It felt like time had moved at the speed of light, as fast as the highway was passing by as I looked out the window of the car when we first heard she had cancer. It hit me like the ear-piercing sound you hear when glass breaks. All the pieces settled to the ground, and no matter what, there was no putting those pieces back together, not even for one more second of time.

Time is the one thing we hold onto the most, but we only realize that when we realize it’s running low. In the moment, it can feel long or like no time is passing at all, but when that time is up; we look back, and it feels like it’s only been a few seconds. We should have more time, but we don’t. So, I’ve started to live my life thinking the glass is about to shatter and I only have a second to go. I don’t wait around and waste it. Once that second is gone, I can’t change it. I can only remember it, hope I have no regrets, and not feel like all I want to do is put the pieces back together for one more second of time.