

**2024 Ben Straus Middle School Teen Essay Contest**

**Honorable Mention**

**Jayna Adams**

**Dragonflies**

Cancer impacts a lot of people. I know I’m not special. I do understand how lucky I am that my cancer experience isn’t nearly as bad as many others. However, I feel every story should be heard. This is a story from before I was born that I think about very often. Many people are there when their loved one passes on. They know the difference between their loved one being there and not being there. I don’t. I wish I had a chance to be a part of her life. I will always wish I got to know her in my own special way.

My grandmother was diagnosed with stage 4 pancreatic cancer in 2005. It was too late for the treatment to work long term. When she was diagnosed, my mom was in Disneyland, and she didn’t believe it. My grandma had visited the doctor with symptoms a few months before and they said she was fine. They were wrong. My grandmother died in 2006. Six months after her diagnosis.

When I was growing up my mother would point out every dragonfly she saw. She would point at them and say, “your grandmother sent these dragonflies to watch over us because she can’t be here herself”. My mother pointed out dragonflies so much that I started doing it. Every time I saw one, I made sure it was noticed. Another thing my mother used to do was show me photos from long before I was born. Her wedding photos, photos from her old house in Tucson, and photos of her when she was my age. I never recognized my grandma in the photos. Now when I look at them, I can recognize someone I have never met. Along with pictures from Tucson my mom also showed me cassettes. Most of these cassettes included my grandmother speaking.

 I listened to all the cassettes. Almost all of them. There is one cassette that I believe is the most important. It also happens to be the one I’m not allowed to listen to. We are too scared it will get ruined. It’s a recording of my grandmother talking to me. When I first heard about it, I didn’t believe my mom. How did my grandma know who I was if she died before I was born? Well, my mom told her that she wanted two kids. She also included the names. My brother’s name is wrong in the cassette. My grandmother will always know my brother by a name which he does not have. My grandmother has had one conversation with me and I haven’t even heard it.

Another thing that is very important to me is the colored index cards. A few years ago, my mom walked into my room with a binder full of colored index cards with motivational quotes and life tips. I didn’t understand why she did. It was because these colored index cards were little notes my grandma wrote to us. She knew my mother planned on having kids and she wrote down little messages for us because she knew she would never get the chance to actually say them.

I never got to fully learn who my grandmother was. I don’t know the difference between her being alive and her being dead. I wasn’t here to learn the difference. Because of this my grandmother is as alive to me as she can ever be. She’s alive through the things my mother shows me. I never get to know my grandmother in my own way, and she won’t know me in her own. I am able to recognize her face and voice, but she will never see or hear mine. She told me everything she would ever get to say to me on a few colorful index cards and a cassette I’ve never listened to. It’s funny how you can miss someone you never met.