



2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program High School Essay Contest

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My Shari Amour

Boxed in by the wooden casket that surrounded her, her body lies still. My eyes traveled to her face, skin creased, cheeks flushed, eyes shut, and mouth expressionless. Painted on her was a hickory foundation to match her warm complexion. It sat atop her face seeping into each fold produced through years of life. She wore bronze makeup that emphasized the roundness of her eyes, and contour that highlighted her prominent cheekbones, a trait we both shared. Ruby lipstick decorated her rested face, just missing the indent of her cupid's bow. Her long-sleeve dress hugged her arms and chest, tying into a bow around her waist and spreading out past her hips, legs, and eventually reaching her feet. I hadn't imagined I'd see her, my grandmother, in the flowy gown that draped across her body. I had always seen her in her uniform of a fitted top and pants, with the exception of her last few months. It was then, when the breeze of the summer air became too heavy for the depleting health of her body, forcing her to wear weighted blankets and hoodies. Her appetite was the first to go. She made meals, putting the needs of everyone else's hunger before her own, and avoided eating as a whole. Over time both her mind and stomach rejected just the idea of the consumption of food let alone craved the absence of its taste. With the lack of an appetite came the decline of her weight. Her body, which once weighed

one-hundred and forty-five pounds dropped to a number that seemed as if it should be foreign to a scale, but instead, it was belonging to her. Initially, my family and I hadn't noticed the changes in her activity. She had always been slim and never really ate. Always lively, with off days, and never hesitated to act in a time of need, especially my own. Her speech was disjointed and faltering, with words trailing off and sentences left unfinished. She struggled to verbalize her thoughts, her mind grasping for words that seemed to elude her. It was as if her tongue had forgotten how to form a sentence just as a baby forgets the warmth of its mother's womb. Her words were fragmented and erratic, like a thread unraveling at its seams. This hit me the hardest. I watched, as our once-intimate conversations turned to brief encounters. A simple, "Hi, grandma", with no response, "How are you feeling?" with nothing back. When she was housed by the hospital, I was put in charge of my younger sibling and cousins and cared for them how she did me. I became her, and took on the responsibilities she once carried, a task I today still fail at. Even now, having lost her 3 years ago, I am still met with her image when looking at my reflection, but have yet to come to terms with the fact that I can never amount to what she was. My grandmother spent two years battling cancer most of which was spent alone. The pain she had gone through, and the suppressed urges that kept her up at once, keeps me, in a state of dismay. I questioned how I couldn't have known what had been going on with her, how alien she had become to me, and how my family had been so discreet about her disease. It worsened when she came back home, and the once-busy shelter so familiar to my being, proceeded me, causing me to grieve her before she was dead. Her being admitted from the hospital early only caused more dejection for the family dynamic we all shared. Her mind was the last to go. There were no longer family dinners spent at her house, or sleepovers, and movie nights. But in its place was the



sound of her voice calling out to a version of each of us that left with her. “Ashera”, my mother's name, was the one she spoke the most; calling to her for aid, but nothing past the six letters that were her name. Though when the silence had gotten too loud for any of us to handle, Shari had then, gone silent too, and the response of the cancer her body harbored was noise enough. Even after her passing, I've realized that her love still follows me. When I look in the mirror, admiring the features that furnish my face, I remember that I have received them from her, and she is what allows me to keep going; it is her passing that made me realize that it is not always about the amount of time you have with the person but the impact they leave you with.