

2025 Ben Strauss Youth Program  
High School Essay Contest

# Asher Rabinovic

## *More Than a Goodbye*

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When I was a young child, maybe four or five, I would look up to him as if he were invincible. He would tower over me before picking me up and throwing me over his shoulders. I now felt invincible, taller than everyone else. I could see and smell all there was to see and smell in the vast streets of downtown Philadelphia. The baking bread in the Italian Market, or the limitless heights of the Comcast Tower. For all the time I spent with my Dede, I failed to recall a time I ever felt an ounce of fear. His presence brought me safety, as it does now after four treacherous years without him.

I used to stay with him and my Nonna for a week or so as my parents went on a romantic getaway each summer. I vividly remember those mornings as if they were just this past summer. I would wake up after a well-rested night, walk to the kitchen where my Nonna would be waiting for me with a bowl of yogurt with honey and blueberries and a glass of milk. My Dede always arose not long after. He, similarly, would walk to the kitchen, give me a kiss on the top of my head, and sit to drink his cup of tea.

When we were finished breakfast, he would take me to the windowsill where he would teach me all there was to know about the game of backgammon. He taught me all the right moves to make, as well as the ones that I should avoid. Backgammon was always his favorite

game, which I can clearly see he has passed down to my father who I always catch playing the game on his phone in his office.

Another one of my Dede's favorite activities was taking me to as many museums in Philadelphia as he could. Whether it was the Revolutionary War Museum, or the Ben Franklin Museum, I could always tell that he was fascinated. I could also see by the expression on his face that it truly made him content to see me happy and fascinated.

His humor was passed down to my uncle and my father. My Dede was always making jokes; I remember him, my Nonna, and I would sit down for dinner, and as soon as I would look away from my plate for a split second, poof, my food would disappear. He would always giggle before giving it back to me. He found himself very amusing.

As he got older, I rarely ever saw him in times where he needed assistance from others. He never let his age show more than an achy joint every once in a while. In my opinion, he was actually very healthy for his age. Some mornings, he would ride his stationary bike while watching television. On others, he would lift weights. His health was perfect, or so I thought.

I remember my dad talking about how my Dede had been having some pretty severe stomach pains just about four years ago. Dede thought nothing of these pains, but my Nonna insisted that he get them checked out by a doctor. At the doctor, they realized that his body wasn't able to filter the insulin that his pancreas was creating. They quickly diagnosed him with stage one diabetes. For about a week, he was on medicine for it and seemed to be doing much better.

One morning, roughly a week after the initial diagnosis, he woke up with pains worse than he had ever felt. He was immediately rushed to the emergency room where they ran test after test to find out what is going on; what is causing these uncompromising pains. What they found forever changed the way I look at life: Cancer.

By the time they found it, it was too late. He didn't have long left to live. I refused to accept the fact that he will soon be gone. Like I said, he was invincible in my eyes. *This can't be happening! Why!?* You might think losing a grandparent gets easier after the first time. It doesn't. If anything, it only gets harder. I think the worst part of all of this, I didn't even get to see him before he passed away.

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021. A day I will remember for an eternity. I was sitting in math class when I hear an announcement over the P.A system.

"Asher Rabinovic to the front office"

*Did I do something wrong?* I thought to myself. I get to the office to see my mom sitting there on the verge on tears. That's when I knew. In the car, we called my dad who was in the hospital when he found out it was time to say the final goodbyes.

"12:23 P.M" my dad says with a shaky voice.

I instantly knew what that meant. My heart sunk into my stomach. I was overwhelmed with emotions. Sadness but most of all anger. I was angry at everyone. I was angry at the doctors for not being able to treat him or for misdiagnosing him. I was angry at my parents for not letting me see him. I was even angry at myself. The car began to close in, or at least it looked at way. The air felt thinner, and I felt like I was struggling to breathe. You would think I had just run a

marathon. I wanted to cry, but I found no tears coming out of my eyes. I wanted to ask so many questions, but I couldn't find the words to ask them. I wanted to scream, but I found myself staying silent for the rest of the night.

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It is now March 7<sup>th</sup>. I stand there, the cold, frosty grass making my toes feel numb. I have a creepy feeling of Déjà vu from my other grandfather's funeral only a short three months ago, only this time, I don't have my Dede next to me keeping me warm. I've had a couple days to process the death. Even though his death pained me emotionally to an indescribable extent, I still couldn't bring myself to cry.

His death proved to me we are just guests on this planet. We come and we go, and no one can live forever. On that day, I vowed to live my life with no regrets, live life the way it should be lived. The way my Dede did.

To this very day, my Dede is still in my life. If I am every facing a difficult situation, I always close my eyes and think, *What would Dede do?* His memory lives on through my father and my uncle in their impractical jokes or their sarcastic sense of humor. Through my Nonna who still loves taking me to museums. But in my opinion, his memory lives on the most through me. I will always share our sentimentality with others. I will inform my children one day, and my grandkids many days after that, my Dede was the best grandfather there ever was. So, with that being said, until we meet again, I love you, Dede. I remain invincible as long as I have your memory.