

It Hurt, But It Taught.

My grandmother was my best friend when I was a young girl. She would babysit me every day while my parents were at work. She would teach me how to read or help me memorize all the presidents of the United States in order of which they were in office. She was one of my biggest role models growing up. But then, when I was just 6 years old, cancer took her away from me. Years later, cancer took my grandfather from our family as well. By taking some of the people I love most away, cancer taught me what death meant. Cancer taught me what it meant to hurt so deeply, that you don't know how to handle your emotions. I will never forgive cancer for the pain that it has caused my family and I, along with millions of others affected by it.

During my childhood, my grandma was constantly complaining of severe stomach pain. She knew something was wrong but every time she went into the hospital, the doctor would just brush it under the rug and blame the pains on acid reflux or indigestion. 4 years' worth of visits later, her doctor finally decided that it was time to do more thorough testing. Once the results came back, she was diagnosed with stage 4 stomach cancer. Being a 6 year old at the time, I didn't know what cancer really meant. All I knew was that cancer was bad, and it was causing my family a lot of pain.

My grandma was constantly in and out of the hospital, getting surgeries or having food pumped into her because she wasn't able to eat on her own. The cancer kept getting worse and got so bad that she had to get her stomach removed. Because of all the surgeries and constant pain she was in, she was almost always on painkillers, which caused her to sometimes make her forget who we were. I have one vivid memory of a time that I walked into her room, but she didn't know who I was and screamed at me to get out. For a 6-year-old who didn't understand what was happening, it really hurt me when she did this. My family kept telling me that she

didn't mean it and she just wasn't herself at that moment, but I still couldn't understand. I wasn't able to wrap my head around the whole situation, because I didn't even understand what cancer really was or why any of this was happening! I was just a kid who knew that something was very, very wrong.

Months later, just weeks before my 7th birthday, my grandmother died. She was only 63 when she passed, and she went way too soon. Up until her passing, I have never had to deal with the death of someone close to me. Sure, I've been to a few funerals by then, but I never really understood what was going on. When my grandma died, it really opened my eyes to what death meant. I wasn't going to be able to see one of my favorite people anymore. I was never going to be able to drink the last sip of her coffee again when it got cold. She was gone. All I had left of her was 6 years of wonderful memories.

Following her death, I noticed that the people in my family seemed a lot sadder. My mom didn't smile as much, and there was a lot more crying in my house. We wouldn't spend Christmas or Easter with our family any more, and it honestly felt as though we had lost the one person that held us all together. I missed seeing my grandma all the time, and her death showed me what it was like to have someone you care about to be ripped away from you. Her death showed me a horrible pain that I didn't even know to be possible, at the time.

Many years passed, and all of a sudden, I was 14 years old. I would still think about my grandma sometimes, but the pain wasn't as strong. Life was going well, and everyone in my family was happy and healthy. But sadly, that didn't last much longer. In 2017, my grandfather had gone to the hospital, and we found out he had gallstones. After that was taken care of, everything was fine for a while. About 6 months later, however, he had gone to the hospital because he was having problems with his diabetes. During that hospital visit, he ended up being

diagnosed with leukemia. My family was absolutely devastated when we got the news. We had already gone through my grandmother's cancer, so when we heard that yet another member of our family had cancer, we knew it would be tough. He did well for about 4 more months, the cancer wasn't acting up too much and he was feeling relatively okay. But soon, the leukemia started acting up and his health started quickly deteriorating.

Because of the cancer progressing so aggressively, my grandfather had to go to the hospital multiple times a week. During these visits, he would either be having his blood tested or getting chemotherapy and blood transfusions. It was hard for him to travel between his house and the hospital so often, due to the ill feelings and pains he constantly battled. This commute became such a problem that sometimes, other family members would have to help him, even if he insisted that he was okay on his own.

During the last few months of his life, he had to stay at the hospital for multiple weeks at a time. We would visit him very often, but it hurt to see him become more and more sick, knowing that he would continue to get worse until the end of his life eventually came.

I was 15 when my grandpa died. I had been through this before with my grandma, but this time was different. This time around, I understood death. I knew that I would no longer be able to go see him. I knew that he would no longer be able to come over and fix anything at our house. Because I had already gone through this, I felt stronger this time. It still hurt to lose him, and it still hurt everyone around me. But this time around I was more mature, and I knew how to handle and confront my emotions.

Cancer has done many horrible things to my family. It caused endless pain and suffering to my grandma and grandpa, as well as a long line of extended family on my mom's side. My

great-grandpa had colon cancer, my grandaunt had breast cancer, my granduncle had mesothelioma, my mom's cousin had rare blood cancer, my other granduncle had esophageal cancer, and my mom's other cousin had leukemia. Cancer is by far the most common disease in my family, and there seems to be no end. Although cancer is extremely dangerous in my family, it has taught me a lot of valuable things. It taught me what death is, and it taught me how to handle my emotions. It helped me grow and mature as a young adult. But most importantly, it taught me to hold my family close. It taught me to not take my family for granted, because one day, they may not be there. I will always hate cancer for everything that it has done to the people I love, as well as everyone else affected by it. But I am, and will always be thankful for the lessons that it has taught me.