

Durian, the king of fruits, lay there staring at me, with its intimidating appearance. As I peeked inside the bag, the smell wafted up and I was struck by how strong the scent was. The smell had a stark similarity to a gym locker room and the thought of even tasting it seemed inconceivable. Then Auntie Jingyan, you walked up from behind without notice and asked, "why don't you try it?" My first reaction was, "I don't like it," but then you asked, "have you tried it before?" I gave a subtle "no...." You then proceeded to open the bag and get a piece of the fruit, "How can you not like something you have never tried?" I had a moment of courage and took a small morsel of the stinky fruit. To my surprise, the taste was serendipitous. It had a sweet taste, but also with a funky kick that came along with it. It worked in perfect harmony just like how wine and cheese work. That was the last encounter I remember having with you. A month later, you stopped all treatments for breast cancer.

After a hard-fought, fifteen-year battle with breast cancer, you passed away three years ago. The news hit me like a lightning bolt. "How come no one told me that she was battling cancer all this time? How come she never even mentioned it to me? I've known her my whole life!" With these thoughts racing through my mind, I felt disoriented and adrift.

Auntie, you had been a constant, loving presence in my life from the time I was born. Since we lived in different cities, I hadn't seen you for quite some time. I could not picture you as sick, frail, and bedridden. I refused to. In my mind, you would always be the strong, exuberant, compassionate Auntie whose heart overflowed with love and warmth for all those around her. Those are the memories I held--and still hold onto.

Auntie, do you remember the first time I visited you when I was one year old, after you were diagnosed with breast cancer ? The night before we left, we had a big dinner. My mom told me how much I loved the pork feet soup you made. It was my first real dinner that wasn't baby food. The pork feet soup was so good that you sent the rest home with me. My mom told me that I ate the soup for four days straight. Even though I was too young to remember this moment, it brings me comfort and joy to know I started as an adventurous eater--with your food.

Auntie, do you remember how I used to follow you around the house, holding your hand and pointing at the places where you kept the goodies? "What's inside?" I put on an innocent look and a curious voice, as if I didn't know the secret. "Eh? I don't know either," you played along, "so, why don't we find out together?" Pretending you were opening a Pandora's box with me, you pulled out fruit roll-ups, sun chips, fruit snacks ...Every time I see sun chips, I think of you. The warmth of your hands. Your gentle, playful voice. Your bright-eyed smiles lit up the room, even after you just had a relapse.

Auntie, do you remember how much I loved your "hong shao rou," or red braised pork? I was starting middle school and had fallen in love with cooking. Every time I went to your house, you would make delicious "hong shao rou." Standing next to you near the stove, I saw you put all your effort into making the dish for us with no sign of recent chemotherapy treatment. While we were eating, I would ask, "Why don't you eat this?" You smiled back at me, "I am enjoying this through you guys and seeing you guys eat is enough for me." When we were happy, you were happy. We were the ones

that were supposed to take care of you; however, you were the one caring for us every time we visited.

Auntie, can you see me from above? Now I am cooking for people whom I also care for and food is the gate to the heart. You have always emphasised how important food was and now I cherish this belief with all my soul. You have taught me to be adventurous and I am trying to create new dishes anytime an idea comes up. I Hope I can become the warm chinese Auntie that will take care of everyone and make everywhere seem like a hearth.

Auntie, you have given me so many gifts throughout my life, from the big bag of gifts, to the small snacks that made me smile. The biggest gift of all was concealing your diagnosis of cancer from me. Although at first I was furious that everyone made sure I didn't know and this seemed like a punishment, I know you wanted me to enjoy my time with you unburdened without any inkling of sadness.