

Third Place

Changes

by
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It was my eighth grade year; a year which for many is filled with memories of a trip to Washington D.C., or hanging out with friends every day after school. My eighth grade year brought different memories. I have memories of my mother being slowly taken away from me by a terminal illness, and memories of my father struggling to raise my sister and me while his wife was dying before his eyes.

I first learned of my mom's illness when I was in the sixth grade. I was at an age when I could not really grasp the concept of losing one of my parents. It was a time of great transition in my life, the transition from a regular kid with two loving parents to a teenager who now had to help take care of his own mother. By the seventh grade I had realized the inevitable; my mom would soon die of C.J.D., an illness similar to Alzheimer's, but much more rapid in the process of taking one's life. I often talked with my dad about how things would be different when my mom died, but it never truly prepared me for that day.

My mom was the most amazing and influential person that I have ever known. She was always willing to listen to people and offer any advice that she felt could help. My mom loved the outdoors. Our family used to visit her parents in Arizona. We would take hikes as a family in the mountains that surrounded Phoenix. She was an excellent photographer, and always had her camera on hand. She even ran her own photography business earlier in her life, but it was taking pictures of our family that she loved the most. My mom always made sure that we knew how much she loved us; and we did.

My mom struggled with C.J.D. for two years. She first lost her motor skills. After about a year she lost the ability to talk. She never lost her ability to communicate though. Even though she could not talk, I could tell what was on her mind. She never lost her ability to smile either; she could still light up any room with that smile. My mom died in the early hours of the morning on November 7th, 1998. It was the day after my dad's birthday. I woke that morning half knowing that she had already passed away. When my dad woke me up to tell me, I was not surprised. I lay there in my bed for a while before finally rising to face the day that I had feared for so long. Instead of attending school that day, I went running. I went to a near-by park and ran for about an hour. The whole time that I was running, I was thinking. I thought about life, about the challenges that would lie ahead, about everything.

I miss my mom deeply. I miss her kind voice, her sense of humor, and I miss hugging her every day before leaving the house. Not a day goes by that I do not long for one more hug from my mom, or to tell her that I love her, and hear the same from her. It has been five years since my mom's death, but the pain has not gone away. The pain may never go away.

Although my mom's death was the most tragic experience of my life, it has played a major role in shaping me as a person. Her death has taught me to cherish life and every moment that I spend with someone I love. The experience has helped me realize that I can overcome any obstacle or challenge that is presented to me. I have become more aware of how precious life truly is, not only my own life, but also every person, and every creature's life. I believe that everything in life happens for a reason, whether it is a tragic experience, or a positive experience. This tragic experience has helped me appreciate life, and people, and become truly grateful for everything that is good in my life. I have learned that life has many sharp turns; it is the way that one chooses to handle these turns, and obstacles that defines his or her character. I am confident, in part because of my experiences, that I can handle the sharpest turns, and the toughest obstacles. I will not shy away from challenges put before me, but welcome them head on, because that is what my mom would have done, and she is the one who taught me how to be strong.