

No, It Doesn't

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“Everything happens for a reason.”

A phrase often associated with comfort. A phrase used to console someone's tragedy. A phrase to help people move on. I don't associate that phrase with comfort or relief that there is justice within suffering. It just makes me feel more lost.

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We were sitting in the living room, the whole family. It was just a routine, completely normal summer afternoon. Birds were singing, our small neighbors were running around outside, and the world was turning.

“We need to talk to you all about something,” came the voice of my dad.

A short pause that seemed to last a lifetime filled the room all around us. My heart beat continued to rise with every passing second in anticipation of what was to come.

“Grandma has cancer.”

That was when the world stopped turning. The air around me was sucked away, and my throat tightened faster than a speeding bullet. My parents continued to speak about how Grandma isn't defined by her cancer and how we would get through this, but I couldn't hear it. The earth turned cold, and it suddenly angered me that the birds were still singing, the children outside continued to shriek with laughter.

I looked over at her, my beautiful Grandma relaxing and smiling in her rocking chair. She looked fine. She looked well. She always had the most positive, love-filled presence, and in that moment, she smiled at me. I'd expect her smile to be hollow in the situation, but no. It was as wonderful as ever.

I never expected this to happen to my family. You always think bad things happen to everyone else until something happens to you. The thought constantly going through my brain that day was: *How is it fair to damage someone so lovely?*

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That summer, we decided to take a much-needed vacation to the Upper Peninsula in northern Michigan. We stayed in an adorable little beach town on the coast of Lake Huron. It felt like something out of a movie with its quaint, old-fashioned diners and historic charm mixed with modern ideas. It was such a beautiful place, but it will forever be ruined by cancer.

There was always a constant, underlying pain when we were there. Grandma's conditioned had worsened visibly. She was thin and pale, and I could see her sickness like a full-body tattoo. Her smile never vanished, though. Everyone knew she was in pain, and she accepted it, but it didn't stop her from taking every second into her heart and relishing spending time with her family. Her love did not cease.

Our hotel sat about thirty feet from the rocky shore of the lake, and the sun rose right in front of our window every morning. One crisp morning, I watched the dawn with her. This watching of the sunrise was different than any I'd ever experienced. Just being there with her, basking in the sun and the other's presence, was fulfilling. We didn't say a word, yet we said so

much in the deep, heavy silence. When I looked at her face, I saw no fear in her eyes, no doubt, but firmness and love-filled intensity. That sunrise could never fill the gaping hole in my heart made by watching her suffer, but we both shared understanding satisfaction that day.

Vacations are supposed to be break times, times to be happy with your family and unwind. Cancer didn't leave us during that vacation. It followed, looming over us, no matter how many times we internally and sometimes externally demanded it leave our lives forever. It showed itself plainly on my Grandma's and all our faces.

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I never want to go back. I never want to go back to the hospital with the bland chicken tenders and empty environment. I never want to go back to the family room where my cousins and brothers and I spent long hours hoping that if we stayed long enough, maybe the whole situation wouldn't be real. I never want to go back to the place where I watched cancer take away my grandma's health.

I could sense the change in atmosphere when I stepped into her cramped room, a room that had been occupied by thousands of people before, thousands of other emotionally unstable families, thousands of people who shouldn't have had to be there. I sat down next to my parents and took in the room around me. The room was silent all except for the pained, steady breathing from Grandma. My parents, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends had silent tears streaming down their faces like gently heavy rain. The room was weighted with raw, intense emotion. I felt more pain and more love than I'd ever felt before. I don't remember how long I sat there. There was so much to process during those days spent at the hospital that hours felt like minutes.

My mom told me that one's sense of sound is the last to go, so we gathered around her bed, all of us, and played music. We played all of her favorites, all of the ones that reminded us of her. We played Stevie Wonder. We played Barry Manilow. We played Lynyrd Skynyrd and Bob Marley. As we stood and sang, she tapped her finger along with the beat, and I could hear her in the music. I could hear her in the joyful tunes and the songs about love. I now realize that the songs we played are the most beautiful songs in the world.

Later, I stepped into the room alone, but I wasn't alone, because she was there. I knelt by the side of the bed and talked to her. I emptied myself out and tried to keep up my strength, though it was difficult. It was so hard for me to see her in all the pain she was in, but it was incredible the courage and strength she had. It was clear on her face that she feared nothing, that whatever was going to happen, she was okay with it. She was so content with her life and the love she shared that she was full of love until even beyond the end.

"I love you," she told me, the last words she would ever say to me, and I know that she did love me, with all her heart.

"Everything happens for a reason."

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I guess the conclusion to this is that there is no conclusion. Why did my grandma have to go through so much pain? Why did my family have to go through such a horrible time? Why did Grandma have to die? Yes, cancer was the reason behind my grandma's suffering, but if there's a reason behind everything, what is the reason for cancer? The reason for cancer is to ruin lives. It's to bring horrible physical and mental pain to anyone who encounters it. Its reason for existence is to be a hateful destroyer. What justifies that reason? The answer to that question is

nothing. Nothing justifies cancer. No one in the world could convince me that there is a good, legitimate reason for my Grandma's death. At my grade school, I remember one girl telling the class that it's selfish to be angry at God that someone died or someone suffered. Maybe I am selfish. I just don't understand how there is justice in injustice. I don't understand how cancer can exist and the world can be happy. I don't understand how people can sleep at night without knowing the reason behind hardship, the reason bad things happen. My anger is real. My anger is alive. I never have nor will I ever regret the anger I feel.

My grandma was the most beautiful person I have ever met. She was the sunshine of my life and so many others' lives. Grandma was, is, and will always be love. Cancer could never take that away.

"Everything happens for a reason."

No. No, it doesn't, and I hope that one day I'll be okay with that.