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The Diagnosis

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Thomas Montroy

Third-Place Winner

Creative Nonfiction Category

2019-2020 Emerging Writers Contest

The Diagnosis

The times of the year were becoming very difficult for me. Many things happened that changed the way I saw things in the world and in my life. The toughest one was my mother, Auraree's, diagnosis of stage four colon cancer in November 2017. This diagnosis was very hard to hear for all our family as it was very shocking to my father, brother Amarin, and to myself because my mother was a very healthy woman her entire life. She was a very short woman, not even five feet tall, brown hair, and always such a happy and genuine lady who cared for everyone. Since she was a very healthy woman, her outlook on the cancer was always positive. She seemed to understand her circumstance very quickly and she would always try to be a very happy and loving person to everyone she would meet or hang out with. As the diagnosis hit our family hard, the difficult times followed all after that.

One year after her diagnosis she went through lots of pain. The summer of 2018, my family and I traveled to Florida for a vacation with some of my mother's friends. The trip was for my mother as it was needed to get her and our own minds off the diagnosis. One of her friends at the time of the vacation was also going through a divorce and made the trip very difficult for everyone. However, this setback did not ruin the trip at all. Everyone seemed to put the divorce to the back of their minds and continue having a fun and enjoyable trip. My mother wanted to be a good example towards all her friends by being positive and boosting their morale. Everyone and myself wanted to keep my mother happy throughout her diagnosis.

Difficult times occurred after the vacation in 2018. Later in the year she started to work her job again as if things were normal. The hardest times were earlier in the year of 2019. In January of 2019, my family and I found out that her chemotherapy had stopped working for her. I remember going to the hospital with her one of the times and the doctor saying, “I am sorry Montroy family, but the chemotherapy is not working on Auraree anymore, but I have one possible solution: Clinical Trials at Emory hospital.” We decided to enroll in the clinical trials at Emory, and my mother was able to start it with her condition after she had to take tests to see if she was healthy enough to continue. The trials began shortly after. Once the trials started, it all went downhill from there. Many days my mother would grunt and be in excruciating pain constantly, even while being on all the medications they gave her. It wasn’t even four months that we found out that she had failed the clinical trials.

Shortly before she failed the trials, her sister, Khanitta, who lives in Thailand came to visit her for a few weeks, as she was unsure if my mother would ever be healthy again. Khanitta would boost my mother’s day and would always bring a smile to her face, as they do not get to see each other often. The day Khanitta went back to Thailand was the day my family and I found out that my mother had failed the clinical trials at Emory. That day was very distraught to our family as we all did not know how to act. I tended to be quiet around my family because hearing the news was very depressing to me. My father was very concerned after the trials had failed and only cared for my mother. He would call off work some days to stay home and care for my mother and make sure that she was happy and resting peacefully in her last days. Still, no matter what, she was always so positive and happy throughout her days and would always try to make everyone happy with her positivity.

A month later in April was my birthday, and she would send me texts throughout the day saying, “Happy Birthday! I love you bunches Thomas!” This would make me very happy to see that she would be on her phone and thinking of me, as she would get headaches doing too much on her phone. It was a few days after my birthday that she had texted me saying, “Happy Birthday Love! Go out and have fun!” This made me very concerned and I had texted her shortly after, “Love you Mom, but my birthday was last week.” She responded very quickly saying, “I’m sorry! I love you! Meds are making me confused again.” This was very hard to read for me as it was very depressing because my mother was not getting better from anything the doctors gave her. A few weeks after my birthday, the hardest thing in my life came to happen.

May 4, 2019 was the hardest day of my life. I was supposed to play in the state championship in Rome, Georgia that day, but it had started raining and the match got postponed to the next Tuesday. This allowed me to go home and spend the day with my mother who was in lots of pain. That day my brother Amarin had become a monk for a day as a ceremonial ritual for dying parents in the Thai community. My mother had asked my brother to become a monk for her. He came home later in the day and she seemed very happy after seeing him. This allowed her to say many words to our family and her friends that came over to see her. I remember looking outside and seeing so many cars I couldn’t count how many. If I had to guess we had around 200 people at our house on this day for my mother. My mother said many things that she was able to such as, “I love you all, I want you to all remember me. I’m sorry for anything I have ever done that was bad,” which was very heart touching and sad to hear because she had accepted her death which was soon after. However, there was nothing she needed to be sorry for. I remember all her friends there and everyone that came over was crying and I had been by her side ever since I got home from Rome, but for a few minutes I had to lock myself in my room

and let a waterfall of tears run down myself. This day was very difficult for me because I had accepted that I was going to lose my mother, my best friend from this world. Still, she was so positive and happy with her life and wanted everyone to do the same with their lives.

Two days later May 6, 2019 was the day she passed away. I had AP exams to take earlier in the day and after the exams I went straight home and spent the day with my mother. She was in lots of pain and my father and Aunt Sue had to take control to try and get her comfortable, but it was very hard. From 1 pm to 11pm that day, she could not speak, and it was only her heart beating as the hospice nurse had said. Later that evening, shortly after 11 pm, her heart stopped beating and the nurse confirmed her dead. This was the hardest moment of my life. The next day I went to school and spoke to my first period weight training coach. Instantly he saw my face and asked “What’s wrong Thomas.” After he asked that, tears ran down my face and he embraced me with a long and warm hug. I asked him if I could go talk to my counselor to which he said “Of course you can.” I spoke with my counselor for about thirty minutes and started to head back to class. Walking in the hall, I ran into the principal, and he asked, “how is your mom doing?” and I responded with tears saying, “She passed away last night” and right away he said, “Son, we need to get you home. I know you have a match today for the state championship, but we need to get you home to grieve with your family.” I went home after a few minutes when my brother had picked me up. A few hours passed and I asked Amarin, “Can we go play tennis? I want to see if I can still play tonight because I’m playing no matter what. It’s for Mom.” He responded, “Of course we can man, of course.” We played tennis for thirty minutes and I was feeling good to play. Later in the evening it was time to play the match. I got there earlier than my whole team and they knew what happened and I was bombarded with hugs and a great silence before the match. After we had our team warm-up, it was time to play the match. I looked at the crowd and

there were around three hundred to four hundred people there watching us play in the finals, and everyone knew what happened the night before. I had asked the student section leader to get all the students watching to wear black to honor my mother. After a tough match, I was able to dominate and shortly after our team clinched the championship. I was interviewed by the Gwinnett Daily Post, and they asked lots of questions about my mother. And as my mother would have wanted, I was positive with everything I had to say about her and the match. I told the interviewer, “This win was all for my mother. When we get the state rings, I am going to have her name engraved on the side so that she knows it was all for her.” The outcome of her life had taught me to be more positive throughout life no matter the circumstances.

Throughout my mother’s diagnosis, she taught me many things. The one that stands out to this day is to remain positive all throughout life no matter what is going on, and to cherish every day and all your friends because they love you. She would always act as if this were her life motto, which maybe it was, and I believe it to be. She was a great mother who raised me into the man I am today, and now positivity is my goal in life no matter the circumstance.