

The Open Door

I am a firm believer that when a person is extremely ill, they should have the right to “give up” on life when they feel it is time. They shouldn’t have to worry about how their loved ones will be if they leave. When my mother passed away seven years ago, this was reaffirmed. Saying goodbye to my mother for the last time was the hardest day of my life. She had been fighting ovarian cancer for almost a year. I had been with her every single day during those dreadful months. From the day she told us she had cancer, I made the thirty-five minute drive to her house every day. I was like the mailman...”through rain, snow, sleet, and ice, I’ll be there”. I didn’t want to miss a single day with her. I watched her fight so hard to beat this beast. It was like she was in a boxing match. She would get knocked down, but get right back up. Then she would knock the beast down, but unfortunately it kept getting back up. There came a day when she just couldn’t get back up and had to stop fighting. She said to me, “I have to go.” I had been dreading this day. It hit me like a bullet through the chest. With tears streaming down my face, I said “I love you and I’m going to miss you every day. Please watch over us.” She was so strong at that moment. She said, “I promise I will.” She reached up and put her hand on my shoulder and said “I will be right here on your shoulder, always. I love you.” I knew right then that I couldn’t plead with her to stay. I knew how much pain she was hiding behind those forced smiles. I can remember it was like a door opened up, and reminded me that I cannot ask anyone to stay on earth to keep me from the pain of losing a loved one.

Pop, my father’s father, was one of the strongest men I have ever known. Pop was like a mountain in my tiny eyes. As a child, I feared him; he was the lion and I was the cub, obeying every command. In my late teens, he came to live with my parents, after living alone as a widow for nearly 13 years. I started spending more and more time at their house getting to know this man that had always been so scary to me, sharing stories, having lunch, taking walks, and driving to doctor’s appointments.

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At one point, I had moved back in to my parent's house, and Pop and I were often like children laughing, playing cards, and watching out for each other. He had so many stories to share about my family, especially my grandmother, Granny. I would sit and listen for as long as he was willing to talk. We loved to play Crazy 8s. When I was probably only six or seven, he taught me to play. Throughout my childhood, when my family went to Pennsylvania to visit him, we would play every night. We would eat Good's potato chips and sip "pink things" through bendy straws. Pink things were simply strawberry soda floats, but my siblings and I always believed that my grandparents were geniuses for having created this sweet concoction. Pop and I would watch out for each other by making sure that when my father went grocery shopping, he would get what the other liked to eat. He always made sure that I had milk and Lucky Charms. I made sure Pop got his cans of Spaghetti O's. He liked to eat those for dinner on occasion. He would open a can, pour it into a bowl and eat it cold. The thought of trying to swallow those cold, slimy noodles made me want to throw up. As repulsive as they were to me, I knew how much he loved them, so I always made sure he didn't run out. My father always felt like Pop and I were a tag team; making sure that the other was being taken care of.

Pop was very healthy. He walked about 2 miles a day, and aside from the Spaghetti O's, he ate meals that looked like they had been taken from a food pyramid poster. He always had a piece of fruit and a salad with every meal. He went to bed and got just the right amount of sleep. He could've been on a poster for perfect health. I was paralyzed when my father called me at work to tell me that Pop was in the hospital. He had a stroke, bumped his head on a door on his way down to the floor. I knew I had to leave work to go check on him myself. I stood there in the middle of the office, my knees were so weak. They felt like they each weighed a hundred pounds. I tried to take a step, but they were just too heavy. I had to sit for a minute, while my body adjusted to the shock. Eventually, I knew I had to go, so I told myself to pull it together. I was able to get up and make the drive to the hospital. The doctor had encouraging news that he was very strong and healthy. I felt this stroke was a minute avalanche upon

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this giant mountain that was Pop. They told us they would adjust his blood thinning medicine and he would go home in a few days.

I visited him daily, and the first week he seemed like himself, just tired. One day I made my usual stop to see him, but he was different. He was refusing to eat or drink, and he wasn't talking to anyone. He saw me come into the room and with a weak smile on his face, he said, "Lis". That was how he always pronounced Liz with his German accent. It was at that moment I knew he was going to leave me, but he wanted me to know how much I meant to him. He allowed me to feed him his dinner. After he finished eating, he looked into my eyes and said, "Why do I have to lose you?" I distinctly remember sitting next to him thinking WHAT?...I'm the one losing here! He was leaving me here without my newly found best friend. But I knew I couldn't say that. I buried my real feelings down under my lap and I told him that he was going to be alright, that he would be back together with Granny. He was like a child at that moment. He heard the answer and believed it. I could tell by the expression on his face and the sadness in his eyes, he had questions but was afraid to ask them. That was the last day that he would eat any food, and I was the last person he spoke to, as himself. I know that he knew I needed that.

The next day when I went to visit him, he didn't even turn my way. He would just stare off, as if he could see something I couldn't. This was the first time I had been alone with Pop. I bent down and gave him a kiss and told him that I understood and that I would be ok. I told him that I wanted him to go and be with Granny. I felt like my lungs were shrinking as I spoke, but I knew that he needed to hear that. He never acknowledged that he heard my words, he just laid there like a leaf peacefully floating in the water. I was fine with that because I knew Pop was already on a new journey, the one that would lead him to his long lost love.

I wish I could say that was the last day I had with him, but it wasn't. Sometime within the next week, my mom and I went to visit him together. The Pop that I had grown to love so much was gone. It was as though someone else had jumped inside his soulless body and taken over. I had never seen him

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this way before and I was terrified. He began yelling at us and begging us to get him a gun so that we could just end this. "Kill me, please, get a gun and kill me!" His words pierced my skin like sharp knives. I remember yelling back at him, "We would never do that!" We begged, "Please stop saying that", but this monster just kept on. After listening to his pleas and knowing there was nothing we could say to calm this beast inside of him, we decided that this wasn't him. We just had to leave, and maybe he would stop. "Goodbye, we love you!" Those were the only words we could muster up as we pushed ourselves out of that hospital room, with tears streaming down our cheeks. We hated to have to leave him in the state that he was in, but we knew it would be best for all of us. It was on that evening I knew that I would never want for another living being to suffer.

When a person knows that it is time for them to leave this earth, I cannot be selfish and want them to stay for me. I knew that if I were ever in the position to help someone ease the pain of dying I would do whatever possible to help them. I am not saying that I would ever kill someone or help them kill themselves, but I would help them to relieve the pain and anxiety. I would let them know that it is all right for them to go. These are just a few of the things that I did for my mother, when it was her time to leave this earth. I feel very strongly about not asking someone to stay here in pain so that I won't have to be alone without them. I have come face to face with having to let someone or something go with pets and other family members since, but I know that this was the door that opened up my mind to the idea that I could never be selfish to a dying soul.