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[RBREF=ODB](#) Forever In My Heart: An Ode to my Mother



She was the strongest woman I knew. There are no two ways about it.

Hours before she passed on that cold, early, January morning, I asked my family to leave the room so that I could say goodbye to my mother. She couldn't speak anymore but she did squeeze my hand a few times, none harder than when I cried. I did this because I knew that, despite all the grief and sadness I would feel in the weeks, months, and even years to come, I could always be comforted by this opportunity and take it with me for the rest of my life.

I took this opportunity to thank my mother for everything she ever did for me, for always leading the charge, so to speak, when my parents fought for me. This included extra medical attention after my breech birth, my cerebral palsy diagnosis a few years later, and for giving me a fighting chance in school despite growing up with a stutter and learning difficulties. Most of all, though, I thanked my mother for raising me into a loving, compassionate, and sensitive man.

I couldn't even find the time to think how I would have turned out, emotionally and physically, if it weren't for my mother. I just didn't care enough to. As heartbroken as I was that the end was near for my mother, I was blessed to know that she had a lasting impact on me during her time here. So, while she left us far too soon, if you were to measure the impact she had on her family, her friends, and even those she met briefly, the quality of my mother's life is likened to a hundred years.

Even saying goodbye to my mother as an adult, I couldn't help but go back to my early childhood. I fondly remembered the nights my mother would softly sing me to sleep with one of her lullabies or how she tucked my stuffed animals into my bed like they were waiting for

me to join them. Conversely, I remembered the times when my mother showed unconditional patience with me, whether it was finding a messy accident in my crib as a baby or talking back to her as an adolescent.

Weeks before she passed, I called my mother from work and broke down crying, apologizing for all the times I had hurt her. Suddenly, all of the memories of my mother during the holiday season tugged hard at my heartstrings: the memories of her taking me to the mall to meet Santa Claus, writing me thank you letters AS Santa Claus for the cookies and milk I left out, or just how happy she was on Christmas morning watching us opening our presents. Despite my plea, though, my mother had none of my apology as I, as far as she was concerned, had nothing to be sorry for, adding that I never did anything to hurt her; i irritate her, yes, but hurt her, no.

Over the course of my mother's illness, however, I took the opportunity to learn about ovarian cancer and even read about those affected by the disease. While there was definitely a fair deal of heartbreak that came with some stories, it paled in comparison to the amount of inspiration I felt from each of the women who shared their respective journeys. From championing the fight against the disease themselves to being loving mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters, the fight against ovarian cancer that has taken the lives of so many had left this writer inspired by the plethora of unconditional resiliency in the face of such adversity. My mother was one of those women and while she ultimately lost her battle, she did not leave this world without letting everyone know the type of fighter she really was.

It is said that a funeral is not a time to say goodbye but to celebrate a life, and that could not have more accurate in my mother's case.

In the difficult few days following my mother's passing, my family and I were overwhelmed by the amount of support we received as many who came out to the funeral home or attended her funeral had only met my mother either briefly or years earlier.

Teachers I had as a young child, old friends of any of her three sons, and even old neighbors from different cities, so many people came out to pay tribute to a woman whose impact was no less resonant during this time than it had been years, and even decades, earlier. As my mother's son, I could not have been more honored by this. Having recently returned from a family reunion, I couldn't help but feel sadness for my



mother's physical absence. In the same breath, though, the legacy my mother left as a caring, selfless woman had touched the lives of so many at the reunion that a celebration of life was far more than a cliché.

With that said, I continue to be selfish. I continue to wish my mother could have stayed with us for a few more years. I wish my mother could have won her battle with ovarian cancer and that we could have dined out to a few more breakfasts together, seen a few more movies together, taken a few more drives together, and had a few more talks together. But, I also know that when my mother passed, she was free of the pain, free of the suffering and that she reunited with, among others, her father, who I know she loved dearly.



Nearly 14 years after her passing, I find comfort in more aspects of my mother's life and my relationship with her than I did even just a few years ago.

There are more days where I remember her with a smile, where I reflect on memories of all the happy years, recalling everything she did for my brothers and I, for my father and for just about everyone in general. I can still hear the way my mother spoke, including when she countlessly insisted that my brother loved apple pie even though he always detested it, whether it was asking how my day was or calling out my name for dinner; I can picture the many letters she wrote to me at summer camp, telling me not to worry about a thing and that she loved me. Clear as a bell, I can still visualize her walk, her stance, the sound of her slippers when she walked into the kitchen on weekend mornings when my dad made us all breakfast. I even remember my little white dog waking her on those weekend mornings licking her sleepy face with his tail wagging in vigorous excitement.

Wherever I am, whether it's in a park on a beautiful autumn day or, my favorite place, on the deserted beaches of very northern California and Oregon, I close my eyes, take a deep breath, and visualize my mother there with me and I can tell her how happy I am to see her and how terribly I have missed her ever since that cold January day. Just one more moment, one more day; that's all I ever wanted. But for those autumn days in the park and on those days on those deserted beaches, I feel as though my mother is there, that having another day with her is possible, and I'm reminded of how much I love her and how much I appreciate her, whether I was a toddler just learning to walk or an adult still needing a shoulder to cry on.

Ovarian cancer may have taken my mother before her time, but my wish is that a cure can be found so that another child can enjoy more time with their mother, to create as many lasting memories or more, as I did with my mother. This can and will be achieved.

When she left this world, my mother left me with, among other things, a determination - a determination that pushes me to be like my mother; to be as good and as kind as I possibly can, so that I can, one day, meet her again.

About Ryan Cowley



Ryan Cowley is a writer, currently running his own blog, TheBigSalad.ca ([/TheBigSalad.ca](http://TheBigSalad.ca)). He was also a sports journalist having written for a number of publications, including his own site, MakeWayfortheKings.net ([/MakeWayfortheKings.net](http://MakeWayfortheKings.net)). Ryan has lived in Toronto, Ontario, since 2009.



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