

When she was still alive, I listened to a podcast in which the host and guest were discussing “lasts” and reminding us that you never know when your “last time” will be. The last Christmas or Thanksgiving all together. Even though I tried to keep this in mind—to be present for every moment, to cherish it all because it could conceivably be your last—the sentiment was never fully there.

It’s a fleeting thought that allows for an infinitesimally small moment of gratitude.

But when you look back and the last time has in fact occurred, you know, without a doubt, that you completely took it for granted. You were not fully present. You did not cherish it as you should have.

We just “celebrated” Thanksgiving. Our first one without her.

In reflecting on our last Thanksgiving together, I realized it wasn’t 2023 or 2022, but in fact 2021 when my favorite people were last all together. Thanksgiving was one of my favorite holidays because my husband is there. We usually celebrate Christmas separately, relegating Thanksgiving to the one holiday without competing demands. He was sick Thanksgiving 2022.

She learned the cancer returned just before Thanksgiving 2023. Nearly 14 years earlier, her doctors told her this would not be the death of her. Despite her Olympian discipline when it came to diet and supplements, the devil returned. With fear, sadness, and trepidation, she traveled to Arizona before Thanksgiving for treatment. My husband and I traveled on Thanksgiving to visit her, but my sister couldn’t arrive until Friday and my brother-in-law had to stay with their puppy.

Ergo 2021 was our last real Thanksgiving. The last one that I took for granted.

She cooked endlessly—empanadas, sausage balls, bacon-wrapped dates—just for starters. Gravy, stuffing, and rolls from scratch; multiple pies and cheesecake for dessert. Was she feeding an army? No. Our group had dwindled to just six. But that couldn’t stop her from celebrating to the nines. Her velvet pumpkins, glittered leaves, and gold-plated dinnerware adorned the dining room table. Even though the winter cold would just be setting in, there was a golden glow and warmth throughout the home. All of which is to say, it was magical. She made it magical.