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A Beautiful Goodbye

Kristi A. Bradley
St. John Fisher College

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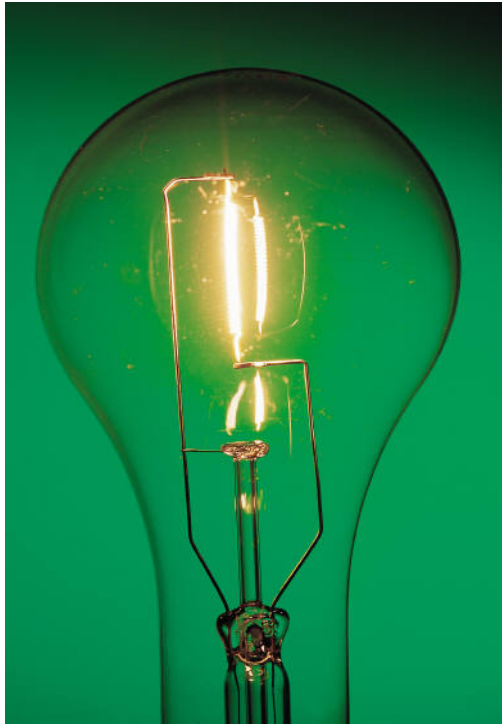
A Beautiful Goodbye

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I tip toed silently down the dim corridor, holding my father's clammy hand as tightly as I could. I was scared and I didn't know what to expect. We followed the nurse, who made me nervous because she gave me a sympathetic look. A look that told me everything was going to be okay when I didn't even know what was really wrong. When we turned the corner and walked into the small dark room, there she was ... my grandma. The one I played cards and spent endless hours with. She looked so fragile laying there by herself, hooked up to machines to help her breathe and regulate her precious heart. A heart that lived life the way it was meant to be lived."

Original Essay



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A Beautiful Goodbye

By: Kristi A. Bradley

I tip toed silently down the dim corridor, holding my father's clammy hand as tightly as I could. I was scared and I didn't know what to expect. We followed the nurse, who made me nervous because she gave me a sympathetic look. A look that told me everything was going to be okay when I didn't even know what was really wrong. When we turned the corner and walked into the small dark room, there she was...my grandma. The one I played cards and spent endless hours with. She looked so fragile laying there by herself, hooked up to machines to help her breathe and regulate her precious heart. A heart that lived life the way it was meant to be lived.

Three hours earlier, I was putting on my shiny new black shoes and a jumper, all the while preparing my songs for that night's Ellis B. Hyde Elementary School chorus concert. As I sat in front of the bathroom mirror, my mother brushed my shoulder length, shiny brown hair. I could hear my dad and little brother in the background getting themselves ready to head to the school. It was my last concert as an elementary school student and they were honoring the fifth graders who would be moving on to the middle school the following year. I was nervous, as were many of my fellow classmates. It was going to be a memorable night, as we had prepared a final song dedicated to our families and the ones we loved for being there for us throughout our lives. Little did I know that this memorable concert was going to be a blur for both myself and my entire family.

We were just getting ready to head out the back door, doing our usual last minute preparations and rushing around when the telephone rang. My dad wasn't going to answer it because we were already running late, but something in his mind must've told him to do so. He said hello in that telephone voice of his. He worked as a 911 Coordinator and always answered the phone with a clear, concise and bellowing tone. As we all waited in the shoe room that led to the door, we listened to the tone of his voice change. The person on the other line spoke for a few seconds and then he asked, "What happened?" Again the person at the other end of the line talked for a while, and I could tell my dad was really listening. He had completely forgotten that we were running late for what seemed like the most important event in my elementary school singing career? I knew that something was wrong because his eyes began to tear up and his voice became almost inaudible. "I'll be right there."

Tears were still rolling down his cheeks as he hung up the phone. Very quietly he squatted down to meet me at eye level. He explained to me that Grandma was very sick and he had to go and take care of her. He apologized and said that he would try his hardest to be to the school by the time my grade sang our dedication song. As he pulled me in for a hug, he squeezed tightly. I knew something wasn't right. My dad, the big tough police man, was crying and Grandma was "sick."

He hugged my brother and then my mom. The two of them spoke for a minute. I tried hard to listen as I always needed to know what was going on. They were talking very quietly, and all I could get out of the conversation was the word, "hospital." I tried to question them but was rushed out the door by both parents. My mom buckled my

brother and me into the car while my dad climbed into our truck and we drove our separate ways.

After a five minute drive across town to the school, I got out of the car anxious to see my friends and get to the chorus room. I quickly pushed aside the feeling that something was wrong. I was with my friends who were all excited about the performance and that feeling rubbed off on me. We sat in the chorus room warming up with the high school music teacher as the third and fourth grade chorus sang their pieces to the audience. Then it came time for the fifth grade to line up according to our assigned spots on the risers. The excitement and anticipation could be felt in the pit of my stomach as I filed behind my classmates. The buzz of eagerness could be heard in all of our voices until we were quieted down and led down the hall toward the auditorium.

As we entered the auditorium, everyone excitedly looked around for their parents and grandparents to wave to. I found my mom and brother and noticed that my dad still hadn't arrived yet. I became worried of his whereabouts but the show had started. We sang our first two songs, both receiving applause from the crowded room. "Where is he?" I wanted him to hear the last song that was to be dedicated to him, the song we all were excited about and had worked so hard on.

Finally, half way through the concert I saw my dad creep in through the back doors and take the seat that my mother had saved for him. The bewildered look on his face made my stomach drop. You know that empty feeling when all your insides fall to your gut? That one. I forgot the words to the song for a moment and tried to get his attention but he was whispering something to my mom. This wasn't right, something was unquestionably wrong. They always had their eyes fixed upon me during a concert

as we had been through these many times before. This time though, they exchanged worrisome looks. Once they finally glanced up at me, I observed deeply saddened gazes.

After the concert ended and much applause was given, I was eager to meet my parents to figure out what was going on. We exchanged hugs and my dad pulled me off to the side so we could talk privately. He explained to me, “Grandma Bradley, my mother, is very sick. She is in the hospital.” Immediately I asked if I could go see her. This is the woman who looked after me when my parents went to work, who baked for my whole family on holidays, who bought me that grey jumpsuit with the flower buckles I wore on school picture day that I loved. We would sit at the kitchen table playing cards or watching her favorite New York Mets play baseball on television while my dad mowed the lawn out back. We even played this game where I would sit on the floor by the vent and place a card on it. Grandma would then turn on the air full blast and we’d watch the card shoot up in the air and then flutter back down. We would do this over and over again until we finished the whole deck. We would laugh and giggle and see how far up in the air we could blast them.

Now, that laughter had turned into tears as I leaned over the cold hospital bed to say goodbye. I quietly told her that I loved her and that she was the best grandma ever. My dad explained to me that she couldn’t reply but she undoubtedly heard me and was thinking that she loved me too. The pain and emptiness that I felt was something that I had never felt before. The pain in my stomach was noticeably agitating and suddenly the hospital was no longer a place that I would go to and have lunch with my mom, who works in the laboratory, but it was a cold and unwelcoming place. I just wanted to take Grandma home with us that night so she wouldn’t have to be alone.

After my dad and I said our last goodbyes, we left the room and made the turn around the dark corner. The Intensive Care Unit was completely silent. All I could hear were my own quiet sobs that grew louder as my dad knelt down again to hug me. He put me on his knee and told me that he and Grandma loved me very much. My stomach was tied in knots, I didn't know what my brain or heart was feeling at that moment in time. I just got lost in my father's arms as he carried me to the car and up to my bed to tuck me in, just as he had done every night before that.

The next morning I awoke to the same gentle face that had tucked me in. He was gazing at me with very sad eyes. I sat up, trying to figure out why he was sitting on the end of my bed so early in the morning when I recalled the events of the night before. Once I was awake enough, I shimmied toward my dad to give him a good-morning hug. He became teary eyed, looked down at the floor, and very quietly in a quivering voice told me that Grandma had passed away. "She's in a better place now." The hot tears dripped out of both my eyes and rolled down my cheeks onto my pajamas. Emptiness crept down my spine to my fingers and toes and once again I found myself lost in the arms of my father as I searched for comfort.

I got ready for school just as I had done the day before. I made my bed, got dressed, ate breakfast with my family and then instead of riding the bus to school, my dad drove me. I had always been taught that school is one of the most important aspects of life. I had never missed a day in my life before that. I remembered how my grandmother would cut out the honor roll and perfect attendance lists from the newspaper, highlight my name, and put them on her fridge for the world to see. She often told me that she was very proud of me and that I was a good girl. As I went into school that day I thought of

her, and knew that she would've wanted me to go. I told my teacher Mrs. Mapes what had happened and she gave me a hug and told me to be strong and that everything was going to be okay. She had known my grandma and said that she would've been very proud of me.

Two days later, calling hours were held for Virginia A. Bradley, mother of five, grandmother of fifteen, great-grandmother to three, and dear friend to many. The family was allowed to visit first. I put on the outfit that my grandma had given me for my birthday that my mom suggested I wear. As we were driving, a new kind of feeling rushed over my body, a feeling of uncertainty. It dawned on me that I had never been to a funeral home before. I didn't understand how I was supposed to act or what I was supposed to do. Again, I followed my father's lead with my mom and young brother trailing behind us. The funeral home director shook my hand and told me I was a very beautiful young girl and to be strong. As we walked around the bottom floor of this huge house filled with old fashioned furniture, I looked around at the pictures of my grandma that had been placed on tables, doing the things she loved to do. There was one in particular that stood out. It was a picture of the whole family camping together, gathered around our cottage, and we all had smiles on our faces. I wondered if things were ever going to turn back into the way they used to be.

My dad led me through the rooms to the back. There she was, placed in a beautiful oak casket. So many questions ran through my head but somehow I just knew to be silent. My body felt heavy as I slowly walked toward her. She looked so much more peaceful than she did in the hospital. The silence pierced my ears and I could only hear my heavy breathing and thoughts racing through my mind. I felt my dad's gentle

hand on my shoulder. I looked up at him and we both knelt down to talk to her. I said hello as I would've any other time, but this time it was a hello-goodbye. I asked my dad if I could touch her and he told me it was okay. I leaned over and put my hand on hers. It was so cold, and her bony fingers felt like glass. Her glossy silver hair was done up just as it usually was. The way she lay peacefully there on the white pillows calmed me. She looked comfortable, content, and not worried or scared. She was at peace.

The day of the funeral arrived and the young and old took their seats facing my grandma. As the funeral director began to pray I took in my surroundings. The room was warm and the sun filtered in from outside as it was a beautiful spring day. I recalled the times that Grandma would sit in her window and watch the birds pick at the nuts she had in her birdfeeder. I looked up again at the casket surrounded by the most beautiful array of potent flowers. They smelled new and fresh, like a spring morning after a light rain the night before. An Eden of reds, pinks, purples, and yellows brightened the room and coupled with the sun made many people emotional. They knew that she was in God's hands and that the sun was shining because she wanted her remembrance to be a happy one.

As the funeral director said prayers, he told us to never forget the memories made with her, the lessons learned, and the love she gave to each and every individual she encountered. He announced that this day should be a celebration of her life and of her journey to God. It was also declared that it was my parents' wedding anniversary and she loved the two of them very much and would want them to celebrate not only their love for her, but their love for each other.

It was then time for my cousin Linsey and me to say a prayer in honor of our grandmother. We had been given a book of prayers and poems about love, life, and God, and picked out our favorite passage. We had the whole family sign their names in the small rose colored book as we planned on passing it on with Grandma to heaven. The director called us up to the front of the room and allowed us to read. We both took turns reciting every other passage slowly, for the reading was hard and the emotions running through our bodies were agonizing. As we finished our reading, we sobbed together, hugged each other and placed the book of beautiful poems in the casket with Grandma. We figured that whenever she was lonely and needed something to read, she would have that to remember the ones who loved her. We returned to our seats, hugged our families and proceeded to the cemetery where we laid her to rest next to Grandpa.

When the last prayer was recited, we lowered her into her final resting place. The air was fresh and the breeze carried a feeling of new beginning and reassurance that she was at peace. The harmony of the birds around us and the sun shining through the big oak tree, that provided shade, had her spirit in them. I knew that from that moment on, she would be watching over me and that I still had to make her proud just as I had done every day she was with me on earth.