

Remember

PERSONAL ESSAY & MEMOIR

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I sit at the edge of my bed, holding the only photograph of her that I have. I study it, I'm trying to memorize everything, her face, that day, the way she was smiling at me. I convince myself that if I can't remember her now, how will I when she's gone. I know that's not a good way to think, that I should stay positive but I know better. She's sick, she's been sick, but it's just gotten worse. Alzheimer's is a scary thing, it's like a black hole that slowly takes your memories, till you know nothing, remember no one. Or at least that's what I always thought.

According to the Oxford dictionary Alzheimer's is the: progressive mental deterioration that can occur in middle or old age, due to generalized degeneration of the brain. It is the most common cause of premature senility. I wish I could find a cure, a way to stop this from happening to her but I can't. Remembering seems easy, I could look at something, analyze it for hours and eventually I'll memorize it. Though that isn't the case with her, my Nonni. I always thought I'd be prepared for the day when she no longer knew me, but when that day did come, it broke me. I mean, how could she forget me? From the moment I was born she knew me as her granddaughter, but now she knows me as no one. Just a familiar face that she can't quite place a name on.

Deep down I did know this would eventually happen but nothing could have truly prepared me for when it did happen. Walking into the hospital room part of me held onto hope, hope that she still knew me but when I looked at her, my Nonni, I didn't see the loving eyes that had met me many times before, in their place were scared eyes. She was scared of me. But how? How could she be scared of me, I'm just her little girl, the same girl I've been to her,

the same girl I will continue to be forever. I knew though, no matter what I said to her, she wouldn't remember. The feeling of defeat I felt walking out of the hospital room sticks with me today. The denial I'm still in, the grief I still feel. From that day on, I knew it was up to me to hold on to our memories because they are the only ones I'll get, no more future ones, this is it, this is the end. I promised myself I would visit her again, I would keep trying, but I never did, I gave up, I gave up on us. It hurts to admit that it was my fault, that the last time I ever saw her I made her feel scared, I did, her little girl.

Depression consumed me, or at least that's what I blame for keeping me from her. The pain I felt that day hurt me, I was scared to feel it again. My fear cost me my goodbye to her, my Nonni.

Death gives no warning, it waits for no one. Getting the call that she was gone, might have killed me the most. I hid my feelings, I laughed, laughed to mask the pain, to conceal the feelings I never wanted others to see. I needed to stay strong, strong for my mom, but really all I wanted to do was cry. Cry because I would never see her again, cry because I scared her, cry because there would be no goodbye. She was just gone.

I stood by her casket, looking at her, but it wasn't her, that couldn't be my Nonni. My Nonni was always smiling and singing. This couldn't be her. I stayed there, looking at her, I wanted her to look back and tell me everything was ok, but she didn't. She didn't move, she didn't tell me everything would be ok, she just laid there, unmoving, dead.

I lived in denial, and I still am in denial. Loss is

hard, nothing could have prepared me for losing her. I feel angry a lot, angry at the world, because how is it fair that I'll never see her again, how is it fair I never got to say goodbye? But then again life isn't fair, and my Nonni wouldn't want me to feel angry, she would want me to keep living life. But it's hard and I think it will continue to be hard. I carry the weight of remembering, remembering everything, her voice, the way she looked, the love she showed me. The love I won't find anywhere else. The love I took for granted.

That was almost three weeks ago, three long, hard weeks. I'd like to say she stayed on my mind all of the time, but the truth is she didn't. I find myself forgetting, letting the memories slip from me. But I can't let them. I will always have to remember, because if I don't, no one will.

Today, I find myself back on the edge of my bed, holding the same photo. Sometimes I still forget that she's gone, that my Nonni is gone, and she's never coming back. I think back on that memory a lot, I try to not forget her, forget the way her voice sounds or how she looked, smiling at me. And for some reason that photo always stays in my head. I remember it, or it feels like I do. Outside of my old apartment, after my ballet recital, she was alive, she was happy, and she remembered me. On the days I find myself letting my Nonni slip away, I'll read this, and I'll know just how much she did love me.

I love you back Nonni, more than I ever got to tell you. ■