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Memoir Rough Draft

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Life is Good

We all have regrets throughout our life, especially the older we get. Most of these regrets we can chalk up to life lessons, however what do we do with those regrets that are unbearable to live with? I am talking about those regrets that rip your heart out, make you want to crawl into bed crying, and never come back out of your room. On July 11th, 2021, I would experience one of those types of regrets with the passing of my mom.

Back during this time, we had a weekly tradition at our house on Sundays. All three of my kids still lived at home, along with my girlfriend Angel. Every week we would all cozy up in the living room with blankets, popcorn, and snacks to watch movies together all day. While watching the first movie I would normally have something cooking in the oven as the movie played. Smells from the food cooking in the kitchen would make us all hungry by the time the movie was over. Once that movie ended, we would then grab our food and settle back in for the start of the next movie. Of course, in between the second and the final movie we usually would load up on some kinds of dessert even though we have been eating all day. On this day during the third movie, however, I received a phone call that would change the rest of my life.

I looked at my phone and saw that it was my dad calling. He had been at the Menorah Medical Center in Overland Park for several days with my mom. I had just talked to both of them on the phone a few hours prior, so I figured he just needed to tell me something. Instead, I received the worst phone call I have ever had in my life.

“Hey, what’s up,” I said. As he started talking, I could hear the pain and trembling in his voice. I immediately knew this wasn’t going to be a good conversation.

“I really hate to tell you this over the phone, but you mom is gone” my dad said as I could tell he was holding back the tears so he could talk.

“WHAT? What happened?” I said as my eyes started to fill up with tears and my heart started pounding. I looked over at my oldest son and he could deduce what was going on just by looking at me. As he started to cry my heart pounded even heavier in response to his pain.

“She was doing ok when I left, but they called me on my way home,” my dad said.

Even though it only took me a few seconds to respond after that, in my mind there was an eternity worth of thoughts going on inside my head. However, the biggest thing going through my head was incredible guilt and a gut-wrenching desire to hear her voice. Why didn’t I go see her at the hospital while she was there? She was there for several days, and I couldn’t go see her… WHAT KIND OF CHILD DOES THAT!

To even begin to try and justify my actions, you must look back at the history of my mom being in the hospital throughout my life. The first two times that I can remember my mom being in the hospital I was very young. The incidents were a few years apart, but both times were due to having a late-stage miscarriage where she had to give birth each time. I remember walking into the hospital room both times and seeing the devastation in my parents’ faces. I don’t’ remember any more details about those two events, but I do remember the horrible feeling that was in the room while there.

The next time my mom was in the hospital would be in 1996 right after my high school graduation. She went to Lawrence Memorial Hospital but after having to be revived, they ended up moving her to KU Medical Center. This time her pancreas duct clogged with stones and erupted bile into her body. The first time I went to go see her she was still in critical condition and her body was completely yellow. This time she ended up spending six months at KU Medical Center. My dad spent every day by her side, past visiting hours each day for the entire six months. I remember going up to see her several times a week although at this point, I started having a hatred of being there. I still hate driving by Rainbow Blvd. when I’m in Kansas City to this day. Seeing my mom who I loved very much hooked up to machines, pain medication, and still looking deathly ill was devastating. She was bandaged on her abdomen and only stitched on the inside so they could repeatedly have emergency surgeries on her. Even though we later found out in her charts that they were not expecting her to live, and told the staff to just keep her comfortable, she did end up making it through this horrific time. Since then, she has had several other occasions where she had to stay at the hospital for several days. On some of those occasions I would go visit her during her stay, but other times I would just call her daily. On this last occasion she went into the hospital after getting extremely sick, and they did say that she had an infection somewhere. Her passing was a complete surprise to us, and since I didn’t think this was going to be one of her more serious visits I didn’t go to Overland Park to see her. The kids and I would call her every day to talk to her, and there was no indication that this was going to end this way. I know none of this justifies me not being there that day, and I do feel like a coward for letting my feelings get in the way of being there for someone I love very much.

I used the title “Life is Good” on this memoir because it was my mom’s favorite saying. Throughout all this pain my mom still cherished life. Every holiday she would go above and beyond. On Halloween the outside of the house had to be fully decorated with orange lights, ghosts, spider webs, and witches hanging about for the neighbor kids to enjoy. On Christmas the inside of her house would look like a winter wonderland. The stairway going upstairs was covered in garland, bows, and lights. My dad had to build stands for all her extravagant tiny Christmas house villages throughout the house. Evey holiday where we ate as a family the dining table had to be perfect, and every tradition had to be done. She would run around exhausted and hurting, making sure everything was perfect and everyone was happy. When you would ask her why, she would simply say “because this could be my last (insert holiday).” She believed that life is good and would tell me that whenever I was going through something tough. Her passwords would always be “LifeisGood”, and she even bought a Jepp because “Life is Good” was on the cover for the spare tire in the back. She laughed and said it was a sign that it was meant for her. She spent every day appreciating a life that most people would have given up halfway through it.

I will regret not seeing her that day for the rest of my life, and I would give anything to have one more hug from my mom. When my mom was alive, she would frequently text me every day to the point where I sometimes would get annoyed with her. Right after she died and I would receive a text notification, I would have this small moment where I would expect it to be my mom. Once my brain remembered she was gone again, I would have this profound sadness knowing that it would never be her. Luckily that only lasted a few weeks, but it taught me never to take for granted someone reaching out just to talk. Since the day my mom died, I have learned to not take anything for granted. I cherish my time with the people I care about, and we have started new traditions to make sure we continue to be there for each other. I still have a hatred for being in a hospital, but I will never let my insignificant feelings about past pain get in the way of being there for someone. Life is good so don’t ever take it for granted and have regrets you can’t take back!