

Losing my mom was the toughest thing I have ever had to face. Not a day goes by where I don't think about all of the sacrifices that she underwent to help shape me into the person that I am today. It is never easy to say goodbye, but what I found the most peaceful, was the fact that I was able to spend time with my mom in her last moments. I believe that saying goodbye with love is taking the time to sit and pray with a loved one, to listen to their stories, to spend quality time with them in their dying moments but to honor their wishes and embrace their lives.

My mom was and is the strongest person I know. At twenty years old she accomplished what many people would pray to never encounter. Born in Vietnam during the time of the Vietnam War, my mom lived in a city filled with turmoil, constantly fearful of life ending around her. As a teenager, my mom tried multiple times to escape Vietnam by boat, and two times was caught and thrown in jail. After several failed attempts, my mom was able to escape as a refugee to Paris, France. While in France my mom did not speak any other languages, outside of Chinese, Vietnamese, and her native dialect of Tieu-chiu, but nevertheless persevered. Every day she worked at getting a little bit better at French and every day she got a little bit better. After a year of perseverance, my aunt was able to sponsor my mom to come to the United States. She spent a year in France never losing sight of the hope of a better future.

When my mom came to the States, she did not speak English, and instead told me about the many times she walked around with a pocket English-Chinese dictionary and translated words to be able to speak in broken sentences. It was not easy, but my mom never gave up hope. She continued to strive, to better herself, to accomplish the

American Dream. Eventually being able to commit a couple of words to memory, my mom was able to graduate with her bachelor's degree from Cal State LA, again elucidating her courage and strength and her determination.

My mom's life was never easy, and was constantly filled with many obstacles as if someone were constantly testing her perseverance. I will never forget the day in March 2013 when my mom and I got the news from her oncologist that she had stage iiiic ovarian cancer. We were both incredibly disheartened, and did not know why she was chosen to have to fight the arduous battle with cancer. But even as we received this news, in light of all of the pain and suffering, it allowed my mom and me to mend our relationship. We spent hours together, driving from treatment to treatment, eating Pizza Hut pizza because nothing else tasted good with chemo and wig-shopping; whatever we could do to help support one another, we did.

As I reflect back on my mom's battle with cancer, perhaps the thing that brought me the most peace, was the fact that my mom was not shy about what she expected *if* her battle with cancer were to take a turn for the worse. With the help and support of our family members, I was able to learn about what my mom expected with end of life care, what she expected with regards to treatment. Although these conversations would often bring tears to my eyes, they were definitely necessary ones, and conversations that ultimately would help me make the difficult decisions when my mom fell out of remission in 2015.

The cancer was back. It was in her liver and spreading fast. After several procedures and the need for a biliary tube wrapped around her leg to drain her bile, my mom and I had to make some tough decisions about living versus quality of life.

Although determined to die fighting, I knew from our previous discussions that my mom valued the quality of her life over living in with limited abilities. Because we had had previous conversations, I was properly equipped to make tough decisions and able to be more fully present, instead of arguing over trying more procedures. After spending a month in the hospital in July, we decided it was time for hospice, one of the best decisions of our lives.

My mom lost her battle with cancer on August 4, 2015 and passed away peacefully in her sleep, in the comfort of her own home, the way she had said that she had hoped for. Because my mom was clear about what she had hoped for, we were able to honor my mom's choices. Death is never easy, but with my mom it came with a certain serenity. I didn't have to worry about whether or not I was making the right decision, all of the previous planning allowed the pressure, guilt and regret to be taken away. The burden was no longer on me and instead I could focus my efforts on being present with my mom. Saying goodbye with love is taking the time to genuinely get to know your loved one, to treat them as if they were who they were before their illness, to embrace the moments that we are able to have with them. I will forever cherish the moments I was able to have with my mom. If not for the time I had with my mom, this incredible journey of grit, tenacity and determination would not exist. Through her story, I now have a deeper appreciation of all of the sacrifices that she made for me. I have a deeper understanding of how I came to be, of who I am because of her. I have a way to know that my mom is and always will be a part of who I am.

