

DOCTORS SAID SHE WOULD BE FINE

A daughter's journey

Sophia's 79-year-old mother died from internal bleeding in 2015

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Mom was a bundle of contradictions

My mother was born to a very poor farming family in upstate New York. She was the kid who literally got one pair of shoes a year and put cardboard in the bottom when the soles wore out. This led her to be determined that her children would never be without the desires of their hearts.

She was generous with those she loved to a fault. I used to say that I had to watch her finances because she would be the little old lady eating cat food while she paid for her children to dine on filet mignon.

My father worked for the U.S. government. We, my parents and four siblings, traveled the world and got to experience things that many dream of. I watched my mom entertain ambassadors and foreign dignitaries with an ease that would have put the finest event planner to shame.

She always reminded me of Jackie Kennedy Onassis. She dressed like her, had amazing poise and seemed to be flawless in her ability to make everything look easy. Memories of fine china and white linen are as ingrained in my childhood

recollections as Barbies and Match Box cars. Mom was simply magnificent when she was in her element.



My father died in 2001 from pharyngeal cancer. It was slow and ugly. My oldest sister and I made a pact during that time. Our motto was "no regrets." Looking back, I have none.

I was there constantly for my dad; my world stopped that year. When it was time to say goodbye, I was holding his hand and there was no doubt in my mind or in his how deep our love for the other was. In retrospect, I was afforded that

luxury because Mom was once again doing her Jackie Onassis impression and keeping everything running flawlessly. We supported her and dad, but she was definitely the backbone. I hated what happened that year, but I have no regrets. I wish I could say the same for my mom's passing.

People loved mom, but she never fully trusted their loyalty. She was always sure that she was not up to the standards of others. Her self-confidence was frighteningly low. She masked it well most of her life, but toward the end, as her filters began to fade, I saw how the fear of what she perceived others' opinions to be had removed much of the joy from her life. It was a shame because it was all self-induced.

In June 2014, I received a call from my oldest sister saying she thought mom had had a stroke. I threw some clothes into a suitcase and began the twelve-hour drive. It was the beginning of the longest seven months of my life. Mom indeed had a stroke and required extended hospital and post-hospital therapy to recover. Again, my sister and I made a pact, no regrets.

I can honestly say that from that point on, Mom was not alone for one single day until she died on January 21, 2015. We battled through stroke recovery, which is a story unto itself.

We were two weeks away from Mom being able to live independently when she took a small fall. Due to the blood thinner she was on, we went to the hospital for a precautionary check-up. They found lung cancer.

After consulting with specialists, looking at Mom's overall health and mental state, we decided to go with an intense five-day radiation plan known as CyberKnife. Mom did fantastic.

Although we would not be sure of the results for six months, we felt very confident and went into the holiday season with high hopes for the future.

Thanksgiving and Christmas went by with no glitches. We were happy and had a house full of children and grandchildren. It was a happy time.

My sister came to my home to stay with Mom so I could go on my annual family vacation between the week of Christmas and New Year's. We wanted Mom to go with us, but she was just not prepared as our family squeezes a lot into that week. When I got home from vacation, Mom came down with a cold which turned into pneumonia. It was time to go back to the hospital.

Mom was in the hospital for about ten days. She was released to a rehab hospital to regain strength and walking ability. I was confident she would overcome this as she had every other battle. I was wrong.

Monday, January 20, 2015. I was heading to the rehab. I was staying nearby so I could be close to Mom. I got a call saying she was being combative and disoriented. I got there and found her bed had been lowered to the floor so she



would not be able to fall out of it or to climb out as easily.

My guts screamed to get Mom to the ER, but the nurses assured me it was just digestive and they were taking care of it. After a half hour of watching Mom hurt, I looked her in the eyes and asked if she wanted to go to the hospital. She nodded yes. The nurses argued with me, and I ended up telling them that they could call the ambulance or I would.

Mom arrived at the hospital around 11 p.m. I remember thinking I should call my husband, my kids, someone. But I knew I needed to be alone through this. I didn't want to have to console anyone else.

Although the doctors kept telling me that my mom was going to be fine, one nurse was brutally honest. I looked at him and asked if I should call my siblings. He said it wouldn't be a bad idea. One of my brothers and one of my sisters made it in time. The other two did not. I hold guilt that I should have called sooner.

That night has some of the worst nightmares of my life. I can't tell anyone about them because I don't want them to have the same images in their mind that I hold in mine. It was not a peaceful passing.

I hate myself for some of the things I did. I excuse it by saying that I thought I was saving my mom's life and doing what the doctors said, but it does not change the fact that I participated in the pain and fear my mom felt before she died. No amount of self-talk takes away the pictures that are on a constant loop when I close my eyes.