
WHAT NOBODY TELLS YOU ABOUT YOUR MOM'S BREAST CANCER

Nobody tells you that at first your mom will laugh along when you tease her after finding a strand of her hair in the food she cooked because the chemo is making it fall out, but after a while it upsets her and humor loses its comfort.

Nobody tells you how to—or whether you should—tell your friends that she's sick. How hard it is to comfort them, because you feel like you deserve the comfort. If they're too sad, how it is awkward and makes you uncomfortable, and deep down it worries you because should I be more upset? Or if they're not sad enough, how you get angry for their lack of care and understanding. And then you have to do it again when the doctors have decided she's dying.

Nobody tells you that during her last days, your mom isn't your mom anymore. The painkillers have knocked her unconscious, or worse, sleepless and hallucinating. When you realize it's the end, it's too late, because she's been transformed into an incoherent, unrecognizable woman, not the woman who pushed you on the swings or wiped away your tears. The movies show dramatic last words, but you can't remember hers because they didn't make sense or didn't seem like they'd be her last.

Nobody tells you how hard it is to watch your aunt with Breast Cancer at your mom's funeral; you can't even tell her that everything will be okay anymore because it may not be.

Nobody teaches you dead-mom etiquette. What's the correct response to a boy who jokes, "You must not care about Breast Cancer," because you forget to wear pink to an October football game? Some things you can awkwardly laugh off but some leave you angry. Like the classmate who argues that free health care isn't necessary, who obviously has never had a parent die of cancer, so he doesn't know medical bills cost over \$1 million. Or a stranger who comments that fundraisers should focus on other types of cancer, because he's "pretty sure Breast Cancer isn't even that deadly anymore."

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No one tells you how to control your angry, bitter jealousy. You find yourself heatedly commenting on a Her Campus article titled “My Brave Survivor” because being brave doesn’t always lead to survival, because your mom was the bravest person you’d ever seen and she didn’t survive. You find yourself comparing your tragedy to hers, and you decide yours is more tragic. No one tells you not to compare your pain to others. No one tells you that people handle pain differently, so you can’t compare even if you wanted to, because comparing doesn’t even help you.

But most of all, no one tells you about the love you’ll find yourself surrounded by, the selfless things people will do for you, who then reject your thank you’s. No one could prepare you for when your neighbors and friends coordinated a dinner schedule so your family doesn’t have to cook. Or when you were at the mall or at a restaurant or a park with her when she was sick but still alive, and strangers introduced themselves as survivors, or offered prayers of healing and strength, and even though you’re not religious you appreciated it. Or when after her funeral, cards arrived in the mail from classmates you didn’t know existed, offering condolences or sharing that they’ve been through the same. Or when your friends’ moms offered to take you prom dress shopping, then later shopping for college.

And no one tells you about the feeling of peace that finally comes when you realize how much you look like her in pictures, and you’re proud instead of spooked, or when you hear her favorite band on the radio and you sing along instead of tear up, or when you watch those videos of her that you replayed at night when you couldn’t sleep because you needed to hear her voice but now how they comfort you instead of make you feel worse, and when all the things that made you miss her still make you miss her, but they don’t make you sad anymore.