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Below are my remarks on the death of my mom. For context, Mom's death comes at the age of 63, two and a half years after being diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, and one year after her brother's death from the same disease. My mom and her brother (her only sibling) shared a genetic mutation known to be linked to pancreatic cancer where a missing base pair yields an early stop codon in a gene that defines a protein involved in DNA repair. Of their five direct descendants, only I inherited the mutation. Their parents were refugees from the Judeo-Spanish-speaking community of Thessaloniki. My maternal grandparents were each their families' only survivor of the Holocaust.

The portion of my mom's life during which she was alive has ended. She is not and never was her body, she is certainly not the final arrangement of matter that happened to constitute her body, and she hasn't gone anywhere. Now she is what she has affected, which includes my memories of her and everything that I learned from her. She is present in my vocabulary, mannerisms, humor, intuition, and values. I will open and close with a request. My opening request is that you help me experience my mom's presence by sharing your memories of her with me, and by letting me know when you spot characteristics of her in me.

I will not say that her life was cut short; it was complete, though I would have liked it to go on much longer. Some dances are shorter than others. Mom had a great relationship with death, having grown up surrounded by its legacy. She lived her life with intentional enjoyment, knowing and not fearing that it could end at any time. She was also intentional about its end, choosing when to stop treatment and where and how to spend her last days. That she shared this fate—a final special connection—with her beloved brother was, somehow, extremely important to her.

In part because she grew up with no extended family, Mom cared a lot that our family stay close. A few weeks before her death I asked her if she had any wishes. "What do you mean?" she asked. "Well if someone asks what your final wishes were, what should I say?" "What would yours be?" she asked. Mine were mostly about land use reforms. She asked if it would be okay for her to take a day to think about it. Of course it would be okay. The next day she said her wishes were just for us to stay close as a family. "Is it okay that my wishes aren't like yours?" she asked. Of course it was okay. "Those aren't my wishes because they're my plans," I told her.

Shortly before Mom's cancer was diagnosed in 2018, a new friend joined my morning running crew. The first run after I told the group about the diagnosis, she offered her sympathy and said, "I know we've only run together a few times but it's clear that you and your mom are really close." I didn't even recall having talked about Mom on our previous runs, but I was thrilled to hear that our closeness was apparent to outsiders. We were particularly close.

Mom had a slightly different relationship with each of her children, and I think she genuinely had no favorite. She and I had a special bond. I called her often, though not as often as my sisters did. Mom got me. We were different, but she understood me, and made me feel valued for who I was, and gave me space to be my own person.

Mom could spar with my market-oriented attitude but still trusted that she had instilled me with purer motives. In fourth grade I learned that one of my classmates got twenty dollars for every A she brought home on her report card. I reported this to Mom and requested a similar arrangement. “No!” she said. “Get Cs!” Our banter went both ways. A few months ago I walked into the kitchen to find Mom painting. On her palette were only various blues and oranges. “I’m doing an experiment,” she told me. “What’s the hypothesis?” I asked. She burst out laughing. There was no hypothesis. She thought it was so funny. She even reported the conversation to some of her painting friends, and they thought it was funny too.

I know for sure that Mom loved me, and that it was important to her that I knew. We always exchanged “I loved you”s, but towards the end I established a routine of responding to her “I love you too” with “I know”. She liked that. Mom extended unconditional love to kin, and generous and forgiving love to others. She gave everyone space to make their own mistakes, and I think my friends knew that, or at least intuited it, and they appreciated her for it. I was never “not allowed” to do anything. If a friend said their parents didn’t let them do something, I just couldn’t comprehend it. “What does that even mean, you’re ‘not allowed’? How are they gonna stop you?” The summer before tenth grade I went to a three-week sleepaway nerd camp while a bunch of my friends took a summer school class at Lower Merion to make room for extra electives in their schedules during the following school year. They brought over a GameCube console and set it up in our basement, and came over every day after summer school to play videogames and hang out even though I wasn’t there. Mom welcomed them and served them snacks.

I have felt five distinct types of grief throughout this ordeal. The first was the sudden realization that the future I had always envisioned was not going to happen. I had actually encountered that feeling before, when I realized I would not be falling in love with and marrying a woman. In that case I eventually came to cherish my reality. In the current case I would prefer that it weren’t this way, but I have at least accepted it, and I don’t feel this type of grief anymore.

The second grief was a persistent anxiety. About the progress of the disease, about whether various treatments would be available or effective, about the results of various scans. Mom relieved me, and I believe herself too, of this anxiety by choosing to stop treatment.

Third was the pain of seeing Mom suffer. She has relief now, so I do too. But I have some memories that I would prefer to forget. For this reason I repeat my request that you share your memories of Mom with me, so that I can crowd out memories of disease's indignity. One lesson I'll take away from all of this is to be more deliberate about which memories I create and avoid creating.

The fourth grief was a dread of major lifecycle events, because they will all always have something very appreciably missing. I told Mom: "I have a hard time envisioning life events without you there." "I'll be there," she said. Oh yeah, I knew that. I was embarrassed to have forgotten it. Having seen how our family has responded to Mom's death, I no longer feel this dread. But I will still need help experiencing Mom's presence, and for that reason I repeat my initial request.

We had two and a half years to prepare for Mom's death. I had assumed I was ready. But already since she died, I have experienced a fifth grief that I didn't anticipate, when I perceive Mom's absence. I knew I would miss her, but this is a new, heavy sadness that I didn't know before. Though I often sought out her advice, I nearly always already knew what she would say, what bespoke advice she would give me, specially tailored to the ways she knew I need guidance. I don't always follow it, but I probably should: Prioritize fulfilling work and good friends over lucrative work and prestige. Be nice. Material objects are replaceable. Always write a thank-you note. Admit your mistakes and figure out how to not make them again. Consume inconspicuously. Know what your weaknesses are and push yourself to get better at them. Don't take stupid risks. Be diligent, but don't work too hard. Don't talk about a party if you aren't sure everyone in earshot was invited. Wait until you aren't angry before communicating. Allow yourself to have fun. For every pot there is a lid. This too shall pass. I'm trying to remember that Mom is present in my internalization of these lessons of hers, and for that reason I repeat my initial request, that you tell me whenever you spot that of Tilda within me.

I want to acknowledge that, given Mom's diagnosis, our family has had every imaginable advantage of circumstance, despite our society's pathological individualism. Dad is a surgeon with decades of experience operating on cancers of the digestive system. Mom's care was provided by his colleagues and friends of twenty-plus years. We have health insurance, and this process did not impose a financial hardship on us. From the start, our employers were all accommodating of us visiting Mom frequently to be with her during her treatments. Then our whole society shut down, enabling us to move home for much of Mom's final year. We had the resources to book short-term rental accommodations whenever we needed to quarantine. The society-wide shutdown also limited the amount that Mom was missing out on when she couldn't leave the house, and that the rest of us would be missing out on by staying at her side. Mom's treasured art group and book group both went fully remote, facilitating her participation well past when she would otherwise have had to withdraw. A vaccine was created and made available to

many of Mom's friends just in time to facilitate some final in-person visits. I am grateful for all of these things.

I am also extremely grateful for all the selfless acts of support that our family has received over the past two and a half years from our partners, friends, and caregivers. Meals, childcare, advice, companionship, and love. Thank you for everything.

My closing request, by far my most important concern, is that you continue to care for my dad, Mom's widower, who is left worst off by her death. Please call and visit him often, throughout the coming days and decades, and keep him engaged with his projects and with his communities.