

My mother being diagnosed with and dying from breast cancer was a pivotal point in my life. She had been extremely healthy, active, and even vivacious, and her contracting cancer was inconceivable to me. Her first diagnosis occurred when I was in 7th grade and she battled it for three years. We became hopeful when she went into remission, but unfortunately, it returned. The cancer gradually began to break her down. Despite this difficulty she never showed weakness to my brother and me. Even when her symptoms were evident, she took one day at a time, putting her full trust and belief in the man above. It still amazes me how positive she was until the very end.

Even with her cancer, my mother was always...my mother. She would cook dinner, make sure our dinner conversation was interesting, we went to movies together and she helped me with my school work. She took me to football practice, yelled encouragement, and always stayed positive. She didn't want me to see her suffer, and did a good job of keeping her cancer hidden for as long as possible. She talked about her faith, went to church every Sunday and impressed upon me the strength that I can get from God and the importance of maintaining my faith, no matter what. She also stressed the importance of family.

Toward the end, my mother traveled to Maryland to receive specialized medical attention and to be closer to her extended family. When we heard that things were near the end, my father, brother and I jumped on a plane from Los Angeles. I never got to see her again. My mother passed away while we were in flight, on February 7, 2015. I was 15 and was part of a family of 3; my father, my older brother, Lenny, and me.

Certainly, I was devastated, but I felt it important to follow the example that my mother had modeled for me. Frankly, it was difficult for me to keep my faith in God following her death, but I knew that the best way to honor her memory was to somehow maintain my faith and to be positive, just like she had been to the end. With the help of our Pastor, I became convinced that, although she was physically gone, my mother's spirit is watching over me and leading me in a positive direction. Suddenly, her insistence that I work hard, and that I believe in myself and persevere through obstacles became crystal clear. Despite my sadness, I believe even more in the importance of my education and the fact that I am the one responsible for myself and for my future. I believe that I am more mature, accordingly. I now wash my own clothes, clean the house and make sure I get to places on time. Nobody is there to push me; I push myself.

My mother was fond of the word, "chivalry," and what it represents. I have taken that to heart and find myself on the lookout for how I can be helpful to others; everything from opening a car door to asking if I can help an elderly person in a grocery store. Good manners matter and I believe that they represent who I am and who my mother would have wanted me to be. I have remained on my high school's honor roll every semester, and maintain my additional responsibilities at home. I do my best to take on a leadership role with our football team, helping younger players on the field and in the weight room. I am proud to continue to grow and believe that I am an extension of my mother's spirit. I intend to continue to be positive and to insist on self-improvement as I enter college and throughout my life. I can feel my mother's smile every single day.