

The Thing a Band Aid Can't Fix

In the United States of America, one in three men and one in two women will develop cancer in their lifetime. That's a broad statistic of people who are burdened with this terrible disease. It doesn't even start to cover the millions torn apart by the loss of a loved one from cancer. My name is Isabella Gagliano and I am one of the many who have lost their loved ones to one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Cancer.

My mother, Meighan Coughlin, was diagnosed with Metastatic Breast Cancer when I was three years old. In the beginning I probably had no idea what was happening. When my parents sat me down one day after preschool to say "mommys really sick", it went over my head. I probably thought she needed a bandaid. When you're that young it's hard or almost impossible to understand. Until you start to wonder why mommy can't come to your figure skating recitals? Or why there's a box of wigs in the closet when you sneak in her room to play dressup. Then, you start to see that somethings really wrong. Fast forward to June of my fourth year of preschool, and all the other kids can think of is the rainbow ceremony, which is the celebration marking the end of preschool and venturing onto grade school. As my class members were worrying about yellow coming before or after green in the rainbow, I was wondering why my mom was living in a hospital bed in the middle of the dining room. A few short weeks later filled with moving her back to the hospital, many visits from family and friends, and lots of food dropped off by people I had never seen or heard of before, I had my last hospital visit. I'm not sure if I really remember it, I'd like to think I do. However, at the same time it could be my brain combining hundreds of hospital visits trying to repress such a traumatic memory. My sister and I each got to pick a gift from the gift shop while leaving, , in hope to brighten our spirits after seeing our mother for the last time. The stuffed animal still sits on the top of my closet. In the hospital she died at there

was an age restriction, so I didn't see her the day of. When my dad came home we sat in the living room and cried, for what felt like days. It was the strangest type of hurt I had ever experienced. There were no bandaids that could be used to stop it. No waking up from the bad dream that had become my life. I had never sat still for so long, I felt like never moving again. My heart was broken and bleeding on the floor, no stitches ever being able to hold it together.

I used to question how valid my feelings are. Downplaying it in my head, questioning if a four year old could really experience those emotions. Then I realized grief has no age limit and no set definition; it is ever changing throughout different experiences. This is even evident in my family. My sister keeps it bottled up inside, silently battling her tears anytime my mom is mentioned. My dad pours himself into his work for distraction. I seek out any miniscule connection I could have with her and hopelessly try to incorporate it into my life in a desperate attempt for any type of relation between us. The way grief changes a person is also very fluid. Throughout my entire life I have gotten comments from teachers, bosses, and friends' parents on how mature I am. How they would've never guessed I am only fifteen. I express my grief through the constant validation I seek from adults to try to fill the gaping hole my mom left in my heart. However, I've learned there are more beneficial ways of expression. I do this through writing and painting. The saying "there is always a brightside" sounded like the biggest lie I had ever been told. There could never be a bright side of losing my mother. However, I had been looking at it wrong the whole time. It doesn't mean that the "brightside" is something equal that will make you feel just as good as you did bad, or even that life will just hand you really good outcomes after going through something hard. You have to take control and make your own brightside, through your experiences in dark times. Nothing will automatically fix what happened, but you can express your emotions in a way that will bring a little more joy into your

life. My brightside relates back to the way I express my grief through writing and painting. I learned how to take something so dark and painful, and turn it into something very therapeutic.

There will never be a day that goes by where the thought of my mom doesn't cross my mind. Losing her will always be hallowing. But, through the overwhelming amount of people she affected and the stories I get to hear, I feel so lucky to be connected to such an amazing person. No one should have to experience the loss of a loved one to cancer. So cheers to the fight against stories of loved ones lost.