

CONTENTS

Web Exclusive: A Granddaughter's Eulogy

BY HEATHER VENRICK

Heather Venrick honors her grandmother.

Let me start by saying this is undeniably the hardest thing I've ever written, and for a third-year journalism student, that's really saying something. This isn't a perfectly written essay with on-point punctuation and top-notch vernacular—it's a story of pain and the loss of the greatest woman I've ever known and of the greatest pain my family has ever felt.

How can I explain my Nana? Where to begin? My Nana, Ms. Judy Ann Smith-Abernathy, was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer the summer before my senior year of high school in 2005.

She wasn't expected to make it to my graduation that next spring. She wasn't going to feel that surge of joy and pride watching her first grandchild walk across the stage to get her diploma.

She wasn't supposed to—but she did. In fact, she lived to see a number of things she wasn't supposed to.

She watched my little brother Ethan start kindergarten that fall. She watched my other brother Brandon graduate from sixth grade. She made it through two more rounds of holidays and birthdays that she wasn't supposed to see. She even got to meet her very first great grand-baby this past July.

She did all of these things because she wanted to. And her will was one of the strongest forces that kept her in our lives. The doctors gave her six months—she lived three years and three months. She didn't do anything the way she was expected to; she did it how she wanted to.

My Nana was loving, kind, generous, beautiful, and a million other wonderful things. To her grandchildren, she was oranges, apples, and nuts in our Christmas stockings. She was cheese popcorn and a movie in bed. She was cranberry and seafoam salad every Thanksgiving. She was coffee every time she could get her hands on it. She was every coloring book we wanted. She was bedtime prayers and keeper of the pajama pants. She was *Lonesome Dove* every day. She was the one who loved us too much, too much. She was wife. She was mom. She was Nana. She was everything.

Nana never had a lot, but that never stopped her from spoiling us rotten. She never made a trip to the store without coming home with a candy bar or a pack of

gum for everyone. The little money she had was put toward making sure we didn't want for anything.

She's the one who taught us that it's OK to love someone too much as long as they loved you too much right back. She always told me that it's not good to be afraid of something as good as love. Be careful, but not afraid.

She was the heart and soul of our family and still is, even though she is gone. Life revolved around her in our family; every holiday, every event was centered on Nana. Nana's death left me grandmotherless at the age of 20. My paternal grandmother died when I was 10 of a brain tumor. The doctors gave her months to live. Unlike Nan, they were right. You never really know how important grandmas are until they're all gone.

As the child of two very young parents, my grandmothers cared for me more than average. I lived with them, confided in them, and loved them with my whole heart. And I will miss them every day for the rest of my life.

For those of you out there in a similar situation, I wish I had some words of wisdom, some little nugget of truth to make it all easier for you—but I don't, because no such thing exists. All I can tell you is to cherish the time you have; cliché, I know, but still true.

Make a video. Take a million pictures. Have them write down recipes only they know how to make. Commit everything you can to memory, because when they're gone, that's all you'll have left.