

Mom's Bright Light Still Shines

I was seven when my mother was first diagnosed with cancer, and eleven when it came back. Gran encouraged my mom to attend programs at Doane House Hospice. Mom went reluctantly at first, but soon saw the benefits of being with others who understood her journey. Knowing that I would have to deal with anticipatory grief, my parents suggested art therapy. I started 1:1 weekly sessions with Jennifer, the art therapist. My family also accessed programs and services as they coped with Mom's declining health.

I didn't understand what was happening. The idea of chemotherapy scared me. We made a plan for me to go with my mom. Jennifer recommended that I draw what I thought chemotherapy would look like; I drew a dark, scary picture. After the appointment, Jennifer asked me to draw what it actually looked like; it was definitely less scary than what I had anticipated.

DHH was always a safe space where I could fully express myself. I could share anything and be understood and supported. It was okay to break down and cry, because they knew how to console me.

Mom's bright light was definitely her unwavering strength. She didn't let me see the bad... she stayed bright and happy. She involved me by asking my opinion about what she would wear. "Should I wear the bandana with happy faces today?" My mom loved bright colours. I remember drawing a card with bright flowers for DHH, dedicated to her memory.

As Mom's condition progressed, Jennifer was honest. She didn't give me false hope. Acting on my family's wishes, she helped me prepare. At that

time, it was hard to think about Mom's mortality. It helped me to make plans.

I was thirteen when Mom passed away. I stood up at my mom's funeral to give the eulogy. She was a strong woman and I knew I could stay strong too. After Mom's death, I continued to receive bereavement support from DHH; I went to groups with other girls who had lost a family member. It was important for me to be with people who "got it."

Today, I believe this experience has influenced my life. In my work, I help children going through bad situations, or who have lost a parent like I have. People were there for me, so I want to be there for others. It's been eight years since I last visited Doane House Hospice. It feels the same: safe and welcoming.



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