

Thanksgiving
November 25th

Yesterday was Thanksgiving, one of my favorite holidays, but it was tough to feel happy or excited this year.

Here's how we've celebrated Thanksgiving my whole life growing up...

Every year, Grammy flies down from Rhode Island a few days early to come and celebrate Thanksgiving with us. She, my mom, Ruby, and I make a big trip to the grocery store and buy ham, turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, green beans, potatoes, extra spices, and ingredients for various dishes.

We go up and down the aisles, my mom pushes the cart and reads things off her list, and Ruby and I find them on the shelves and then place them into the grocery cart. Grammy happily shuffles alongside, commenting on how quick and smart we are.

When we get home, my brothers and dad help unload everything. Ty always tries to sneak away with the sweet ingredients. (BAD!) My dad and Grant are in charge of cooking the turkey, and the team of girls pretty much does everything else.

On Thanksgiving, the kitchen fills with amazing smells as pies, vegetables, and meat dishes rotate in and out of the oven. Fudge hangs around, hoping for handouts.

The room is always noisy but happy as my mom chops vegetables, Grammy washes dishes, I mash the potatoes, and Ruby hangs around dancing, singing, and getting in my way.

Then, after a whole morning and afternoon of stirring, mashing, cutting, and mixing, it's almost time to eat. The last thing to do is set the table. And, of course, we have a special tradition for that!

Ruby, Grammy, and I go outside and walk down the sidewalk, collecting the most colorful Fall leaves. We each only pick a few vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows that Grammy says look like the colors in a sunset.

Then we place them on the table as a bright and festive decoration between the steaming dishes of food my mother lays out.

Our family sits together. We eat, laugh, watch football, list the things we're thankful for, and enjoy a day that reminds us to be grateful.

But that's not how this year went. In fact, this Thanksgiving, I was very worried.

The day before Grammy was supposed to fly down to see us, she called my mom to tell her some scary news.

My mom seemed very concerned on the phone and would ask a question, nod, and listen for a long time. I watched from the hallway and tried my best to hear what Grammy said.

I snuck closer to hear, hiding behind the door. Grammy recalled that the doctor said she was a very happy and healthy old woman...but he noticed something strange during their check-up. It was a lump on her shoulder that he thought could be cancer.

My stomach felt like it was twisting.

Cancer?

Grammy couldn't have cancer, I thought.

It seemed too big, scary, and dangerous for someone I loved so much and knew so well to have cancer.

My mom continued talking to her, and I snuck away and went up to my room to think about what I'd just heard. I got into my bed and pulled the covers over my head. Under the blanket, it felt like I had my own little cave. And in this cave, I allowed myself to feel sad.

I thought about Grammy taking me to do special things every time she visited. I thought about how, like my mom, she also smelled like lemon. I thought about how every year on my birthday she'd send me a special present in a special package. I thought about how she had the softest hands and loved my art.

And my face started to feel hot, my lips trembled, and eyes watered, and I began to cry. I felt scared and hugged my pillow, wishing it was all a dream. I lay there for a long time, only thinking, "I don't want my Grammy to die."

I heard my mom yell that it was dinner time, but I didn't feel hungry, so I stayed in bed in my little blanket cave. After a little while, I heard a knock on my door, and my mom entered.

"Joanie?" she softly asked when she saw I was hiding under the covers. I heard her walk over to my bed and felt her sit down next to me. She lifted a corner of the blanket, and cool air and light came into my little cave.

"What's wrong, sweetheart?" She asked when she saw my face.

I hugged her and began to cry again, "I heard everything. On the phone. With Grammy. About the Cancer." I said in short sentences as I tried to catch my breath.

“Ohh, sweetheart, is that why you’re so worried?” My mom asked.

As I nodded, she said, “Oh no, no, no, it’s alright, everything’s going to be alright.” And she used her fingers to comb my hair as she began to explain...

“Listen, I don’t know how much of our conversation you heard, but please don’t worry. Grammy’s going to be alright. We’re all going to be alright. The doctor said it’s very common, especially for someone of Grammy’s age, and they will take care of it. She’ll have to do a little surgery, but they think it will be no problem at all after that.”

I leaned against my mom’s shoulder. I felt horrible in my stomach. But hearing this made me feel a little calmer. I rubbed my eyes, and they felt puffy. “Is she going to be okay?” I asked shakily.

“We definitely think so,” My mom answered. She gave me one more big hug and said, “Let’s go downstairs and get some food, and tomorrow on Thanksgiving, we can call her on the phone.”

I crawled out of bed, glad Grammy was getting surgery and thankful my mom was with me, but still feeling a little sad and worried about the whole thing.

Your Friend,
Joanie