

Every year when my parents traveled to China and we visited my grandparents, I would always want to see my grandpa's treasures. Each treasure, made from precious metals such as silver and jade, were shaped into different figures such as a Buddha and a fish. I felt like a royal touching something so prized and inestimable. I would spend hours looking through the unlocked drawer that contained so many different treasures. I would always ask "how much is this one worth?" My grandpa would explain to me that it is the experience that matters, not the price of the item. Grandpa would always tell me the story of how he bought, received, or earned each gem. Each gem signified a different experience or place around the world that he had traveled to.

When my grandpa was diagnosed with Stage 4 lung cancer, it changed my view of how I saw his valuables. The pieces were extremely expensive but the loss of my grandpa showed me how important family was in comparison to those valuables. It was not the valuables that mattered, but it was the everlasting experiences I made with my family that were truly memorable. The pain of his passing left an indelible mark on me that will never be erased.

I was in fourth grade when my mom found out about the diagnosis in April 2014. I looked up from my tablet, game theme music playing in the background, as her loud shout "NOOO" reverberated around the room. Tears streamed down my mom's face as she ended the phone call, her body frozen in place. Watching this unfold, I tensed up as nervousness and fear enveloped me. I sat down next to her, trying not to vex her and hoping for the best. Gradually, her sobs reduced to a mere snuffle. I asked her what had just occurred. "Grandpa has cancer and the doctor says he has only a few years left," she said hopelessly.

Suddenly, my head flooded with the memories of the commercials and videos I had seen about cancer. While I realized it is the second leading cause of death, I refused to believe that one of my own family members had it. Having hundreds of questions and not knowing what to do, I headed upstairs. My mind rushed back to the old memories of my grandpa and me playing together. Would he be a skeleton of the man I once knew? I had never seen someone with cancer in real life. The thought made me so afraid to go back to China; I did not want to see a ghost in the physical, a husk of my old grandpa. I tried to remove that thought from my head, distracting myself with different thoughts while trying to crowd out feelings of disbelief. Still, as I slowly crawled into bed in the back of my head, I knew that my grandpa was dying.

Growing up I always looked forward to the one month of each year when we would fly to Beijing, China to visit my grandparents. There were constantly memories made. To start every day on a good note, each morning my grandpa would regularly buy sesame bread and soy milk from the local store. The sesame bread dipped into the soymilk was absolutely delicious, a taste that I still remember to this day. In 2011 our family went to Xi'an, where we visited the Terracotta Warriors. My grandpa taught me that the meaning of the soldiers was to guard the king who was in the center of the enclave. My grandpa was constantly by my side, treating me like a king that he would always protect. At home, my grandpa would tutor me in Chinese pronunciation, showing me how to correctly pronounce each phonetic and write Chinese words in pinyin. Each year my grandpa would also bring me to the Beijing Science and Technology Museum. I loved exploring the vast complex perplexed by the gadgets and inventions and awed by the sculptures and fossils. On the way out my grandpa would always buy me a new dinosaur

to add to my collection. When he was diagnosed, I started to value those memories even more. Each one was a priceless treasure that I could not lose. Every souvenir to postcard represented a distinct experience that I had with my grandpa.

In July 2016 we went back to China to visit my grandpa. When I arrived at my grandparents' house I was greeted with the same hugs and kisses. I thought my grandpa would be different, yet he was exactly the same as before. Each morning he would still buy me my favorite sesame seed bread and soymilk, and he would still bring me to the Museum- as if nothing had happened. Thinking back to that moment, I appreciate the gift that my family gave me: the gift of not having to worry about something we all knew. A gift that made everyone forget about the diagnosis and enjoy the life that was given to us. I now learn to enjoy the brief moments of joy in life and to treasure it because those too are priceless.

At the beginning of 2017, the doctors stated that chemotherapy would not work anymore since it was doing too much damage to not only his cancer cells but to many of his red blood cells. Suddenly the dreadful memories materialized again. In response to his health deteriorating, I focused my attention on school, tennis, debate--anything other than him. Too afraid to fully face the problem this illness had caused my mind to run away from it. The pictures and reports and words and rumors, my mind refused, it was an exaggeration, a hyperbole there was no way that my grandpa would die! Because he was not able to receive any more treatment, my grandpa's health increasingly deteriorated. On July 20, 2017, my grandpa passed away due to stage 4 lung cancer.

When we flew back to China the next month, it felt as if there was an empty hole in the house. While my grandpa's bed was neatly made and had all of his treasures on it, it still felt incomplete. The price of the gems did not matter anymore, as there was no one to tell me the stories that made the treasures rich. We did our yearly traditions, but now there was no one to take me to the Science Museum, no one to cheer me on in soccer games, no one to help me with my Chinese pronunciation, no one to describe to me his prized belongings, no grandpa anymore.

The burial ceremony occurred one week after we arrived. I cannot remember the drive up to the cemetery due to the heavy sadness that weighed upon my heart. My mind was deep inside, reliving the memories that I had with him. As we finally reached the parking lot, my heart started beating slightly faster than normal. Mixed feelings overflowed my head, from sorrow to resentment. Walking up the mountain, we passed hundreds of graves. Roses, fruits, and incenses separated each grave, some covered and decorated, others blank. When we reached my grandpa's tomb, I saw three words sketched on it: his name. I looked around, fully absorbing the environment that I was in, realizing how beautiful the cemetery was--such a fascinating setting for such a somber occasion.

Lifting up the tombstone, my grandma started to give her prayers while my uncle took out the urn. As each family member followed tradition and gave a speech about their personal experiences with him, I realized that I finally had to accept his death. When it came to my turn, I said, "Grandpa, you helped me so much throughout your life. Your kindness and compassion

have not been overtly direct, but your actions, words, and the ways you have helped me with life have profoundly impacted me. I hope you have a safe journey to heaven and may you live a happy rest of your life.” As my grandma lit incense and we finished our prayers, we headed back home.

My grandpa’s cancer threw me into a dark place, a place of the unknown. Not knowing what would happen, I felt lost in a world that I didn’t fully comprehend. Coming home from the burial, I went to the drawer with all the valuables that I treasured when I was young. It was locked. At that time I was mad that my grandpa had locked it up before he died because those were memories of him that I wanted to cherish. Looking back I realize that there are so many other treasures that we had other than the ones he had from his own experiences. My grandpa’s cancer and passing showed me the importance of family and how it is worth more than all the valuables in the world: from simple things such as a dinosaur that he bought for me to the treasures that had exciting stories that I loved. I will forever cherish the impact he had on me as a person and experiences that we had together more than all of those expensive valuables combined. Treasures can always be bought with money and can always be replaced. What my grandpa’s cancer taught me was that among them all, family is the most important treasure, for it is truly priceless.