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## Miscellaneous Musings by FunGirlDi

### My Mother's Hands...

I was fortunate to spend the last two and half days of my mother's life by her side. She was 89 and had gone through breast cancer surgery about three years before it came back metastasized in her lungs.

In May 2014, my mom was complaining about having trouble catching her breath and she would get winded very quickly. After a few trips to the ER, she was diagnosed that cancer was in her lungs and her life was soon to be over.

When she got the news, it was delivered by a doctor, who was from India. He went to college and medical school in the United States but spoke with a strong Indian accent. After he delivered her fatal diagnosis, he swiftly left the room, and a young female physician's assistant came in.

Mom looked at me and she said, "I didn't understand a word that man just said." I told her to hang on for a minute as I began to question the PA. They tested the two liters of fluid that filled her lungs and the sac around them. I asked the PA if there were a lot of cancer cells or just a few?

She said it didn't matter how many cells they found – it was basically a positive/negative test and cancer was present in the fluid. I asked her, "So, it's just like a pregnancy test – you are either pregnant or not, right?"

Mom spoke up and said, "What?" I looked at her and with a serious face, I said, "Mom, you're pregnant." We all had a big laugh, and I asked the PA to explain to my mother what was going on because she couldn't understand the doctor.

The PA spent a good amount of time explaining the situation, what would happen next, and then departed. I looked at Mom and was waiting for sadness or a meltdown. I was shocked there was none of



Diana's mother tending to her after a bath. There is a cloth diaper by Diana's head that was one of thousands Julia changed. Notice the rough walls under construction. Julia used the kitchen sink since they did not have a tub until Diana was about three.

at the Dairy Queen.

She had left her five-dollar room, so I handed her a money-in-heller bill. I laughingly said, "Don't spend it all at one time," which was reminiscent of what we were told when we were small.

Before she boarded the bus for the field trip, she started talking to other residents. She loved to tell everyone she was from Ely. There was a cranky, cantankerous old gentleman in the lobby picking up his mail. Mom greeted him and asked him what his name was. He quickly said, "Toby," and turned to walk away.

Mom kept on talking to him trying to engage him in more conversation. She told him she just moved in from Ely. He turned around and said to her, "Who gives a sh\*t?" Mom didn't miss a beat as all four feet eight inches of her

the doctor's thermometer, which stopped at 107 degrees.

She said she got to meet Jesus and he didn't look like his pictures. He looked similar, but his eyes were filled with love that she never felt before. The lights and the music were warm and inviting and she saw people she knew that had passed before. She met her grandparents she never knew, her older brother and a childhood friend that passed from pneumonia a year earlier. God told her that it wasn't her time – she had more work to do on earth and she had to go back.

My mother's teeth were severely pitted, and she always said it was from a very high fever when she was a child. Her baby teeth were fine, but the fever had been so high that it damaged the enamel on her permanent teeth that were rudimentary under her gums.

I asked her why she never told us about this before and she simply replied, "I didn't think anyone would believe me and would think I was crazy." She also assured me there was zero chance she wanted to hang around any longer than she had to as she had been pining her whole life to go back.

When we talked about her funeral, and she asked me if I would fix her hair because she loved the way I did it. I told her I didn't know if I could do that. She brushed it off and said she was sure the funeral home had someone to do it.

I told her what a beautiful job she and dad had done with raising the four of us kids. We all were successful people that each had two children that were doing well, too. None of us had ever gotten in trouble. She said she was very proud of all of us, and she and dad taught us what was right, and it was up to us to continue without them.

My mother was a devout Catholic and a fan of the TV channel EWTN. We didn't understand why she watched it more than anything else on TV. After our conversation, she was in a lot of pain, so I called the nurse, and she gave Mom another dose of morphine. As I watched her drift into la-la land, EWTN was playing a Gregorian chant.

As my mother lay dying a few feet away from me, I realized the power in the chanting. I felt a huge sense of peace and tranquility as the monks delivered their gift. I was moved as never before. Before this time, that music irritated me. Who knew it was so comforting?

Once it hit me that I probably just had the last conversation I would ever have with my mother, I experienced so many emotions. Sadness and despair came with a happiness I was feeling for her as she was on her way to be in paradise. I really couldn't fall asleep as I relived all that my mother shared with me.

I got up and went to her bed, grabbed her hands, and studied them to burn into my memory. The skin was so soft and velvety on the top, but her palms were more hardened. Her nails were beautiful as she always had a file close by and kept a nice point on them. The veins were prominent – blue and stood up above the skin.

My mother loved to say the rosary and her beads were always near her. I grabbed it from her nightstand and put them in her hands. I told her what I was doing, and she moaned softly. I rubbed her hands, arms, legs, and feet with lotion while I talked to her about things I remembered as a child. I kept looking at her hands and wondered how many loads of

laundry, dishes, meals and cleaning these hands did.

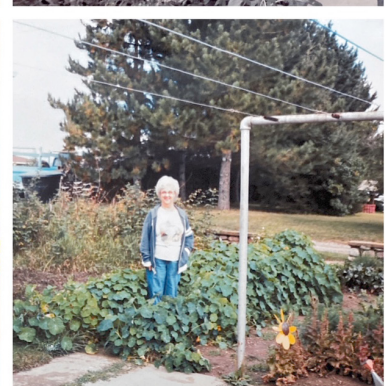
From the day of her diagnosis on June 10, she lasted 16 days and passed away on June 26. I wasn't there when she passed, but my siblings were. I had to go home to get clean sheets for her bed and take a shower. While I was gone, she left this world and went back to the place she visited 84 years earlier. I was devastated that I missed her death, but I think she couldn't wait any longer and she already told me all she needed to.

Since her funeral was planned as she wanted, my siblings and I didn't have much to do except wait for the day to come. I told Jim Woods from Kerntz Funeral Home about my mother's hope that I would fix her hair and he reassured me that they have someone who does hair. The day before my mom's funeral, Jim called saying

I put on the jewelry she chose along with her blessed prayer shawl she used throughout her cancer surgery and recovery. I entwined her rosary in her hands as she would have liked. She loved this rosary, and I wondered how many rosaries she had prayed with it.

As I performed these loving acts for the final time, I kept looking at her hands. They looked the same as always and I kept waiting for her to move them. I asked to have a few minutes alone with her and couldn't help but apologize for all the times I made her cry. We had our disagreements as she would always tell me I was the one that caused her hair to turn white.

Looking at her hands I thought about how many times I took for granted the things she did. Her hands were small, but the tasks she completed were many. Her laundry prowess was unequalled



Julia Mavetz tending to her organic gardens. She never met a planter she didn't reuse from year to year.

that the woman who does hair for the funeral home had a family emergency and couldn't do it.

I immediately knew what I had to do so shortly after his call I showed up at the funeral home with all my hair equipment and was ready to do as my mother had asked of me. Jim spent a few minutes explaining the difficulty I might have with fulfilling my mother's request, but I knew I would have no problem.

We went into the next room where my mother's body lay. Jim gingerly removed the sheet that covered her. I touched her cheek

as she could get any stain out of anything. When she mended our clothes, you could hardly tell they ever had a hole or tear. She changed thousands of cloth diapers and suffered through washing, drying, and folding them for all four of her children. She gardened and pulled a million weeds in a garden that never saw a pesticide or weed killer.

I remember her fingers in the wintertime would get deep cuts and cracks from being in water constantly, but that never stopped her from washing dishes or clothes and cleaning. These were all healed now on her still hands. Her aged, twisted, and wrinkled hands were perfect. Time, arthritis, and pain left their mark on them. Scars from cuts were healed on hands that never stopped moving.

Spending the time to take care of my mother for one last time gave me a joy and peace that is hard to describe. When I have read about closure, I never understood what that meant, but I did at that moment. I was not gross or morbid, but a final act of love to the one that gave me my life. It was a final thank you to the one who loved me the longest.

My mother has been gone for over eight years. I visit my parent's graves and am thankful for what they gave to us. When I was younger, I didn't realize that the lack of material things was made up for in spades by life lessons, teachings, faith, and unconditional love. I've never won much of anything in life except realizing that I won the life lottery of wonderful parents who gave us everything they had. In death, they keep giving, but only if we listen to what's hidden in our memories.



and wasn't freaked out by the coldness I felt. My mother's spirit and soul were gone, and I know the body is just a reservoir left behind. I touched her hair and asked Jim if we could wash it, which he did.

When he returned with her body, I gently blew dry her soft, white hair and lost myself in this loving act that would be the last time I would ever have the honor of doing. I used my curling irons and fixed her hair like I had done dozens of times after she moved to Minneapolis. Each time I did, she would look in the mirror and smile back at her reflection. I felt her smile upon me as I performed this loving act.

I helped get her dressed. She picked out the dress I had bought her for my son's wedding two years before. When we asked what she wanted to be buried in, she told me she wanted this dress because when she wore it, she felt, "like a princess".

I helped place her in the pink coffin she picked out. Pink was her favorite color. My mother loved to dress in bright colors, which made it easy to pick her out in a crowd of old people who wore nothing but black, grey or navy blue.



Since Mom always wore her watch, we sent it with her to her final resting place. She would have wanted one of us to have it, but it quit working. She was wrapped in her prayer shawl, prayer book and rosary.



Busy hands all the time. Diana's mother busy with laundry, dishes and cooking.

that, rather she laid back in her hospital bed with a look of peace and contentment on her face. I didn't understand how she could not be sad at this news, but in a few weeks I would understand why.

We moved our mother down to the Twin Cities when she was 87 years old. She was happy as a lark to move to the Twin Cities where all her chickens lived (her four kids, grandchildren, and great granddaughter). There were no tears or talk of missing Ely, as we assured her that we would not do anything with her house until we had a reason to do so. We left everything as it was the day she left in October of 2012. I made her a promise I would bring her home again, which I did – three weeks before she passed.

We let mom pick her assisted



Diana's mother's beautiful hands...

living facility after she toured a few. She best liked Catholic Elder Care in Northeast Minneapolis as it was connected to St. Anthony's of Padua Catholic Church, which was the same name as her lifelong church in Ely.

We moved her down on a beautiful, golden, and sunny early October day. After we moved her in, she was invited on a field trip, which was a fall leaf tour and a stop

proudly stood up a little taller, and said, "Minneapolis or St. Paul, Ely Minnesota beats them all!"

As her time was coming to an end, I volunteered to stay with her for her last few days as I had a flexible schedule. This was the biggest gift as we engaged in wonderful conversations. I asked her many questions and we had open, beautiful, in-depth talks about many subjects from how she felt when she lost a pregnancy, motherhood, her childhood, and her desires for her funeral.

Mom had her funeral all planned out and paid for. She had her casket and vault chosen, the songs she wanted at her funeral, her favorite New Testament, Old Testament and Gospel readings jotted down on a little piece of paper in her wallet. She said she knew we were all so busy and she wanted to make it easier for us.

The day before she passed away, I sat on the bed with her, and she wanted to have her bed propped up as it helped her breathe easier. We were told we shouldn't tell her we didn't want her to die because the dying would "hang on longer." I couldn't help it and I had to tell her how much I was going to miss her.

She said she would miss me, too, but I didn't need to worry because we would see each other again. I asked her how she knew that for sure and she told me she had been there.

Many times, she told us that she was very sick when she was about five years old and almost died. She expounded on her story that she had gotten rheumatic fever and her temp was so high that it went over the top of the highest reading on