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LA101H Section 007

I Believe in the Rhubarb

When I was a little girl, I had no idea what rhubarb was. I used to think of it as a type of wire, maybe because the sound reminded me of barbed wire. Who knows? I never thought of looking it up in a dictionary or asking what it meant because I don’t think I felt the need to know what it was. I already knew the answer to the question my grandfather always asked me. “Think the rain’ll ever hurt the rhubarb?”

I’ve probably been asked that question more times in my life than anyone else will ever be asked in his or hers. It was a ritual. It was part of visiting Pop. I would always answer with a slight bashful smile as I said, “No, Pop,” and he would always say, “That’s my girl,” as he put his stocky arm around my small, fragile shoulders.

Pop was a man who I admired for his resilience, wit, and courage. He was a marine. He raised a family with just a high-school education. He worked hard and would do anything to protect his family and make them happy. He helped one of his sons deal with alcoholism and helped the other adjust to living with diabetes. He tried all he could to help his daughter deal with the pain of infidelity in her marriage. He battled stage four cancer and lived cancer-free for ten years. He lived a life under stress, yet always managed to have a smile or joke to offer when the going got tough. It was his mission to never let the bad things in life get the best of anyone.

But I remember the day when we found out his cancer came back, and this time it was for the worst. Still, every time I saw him, he would ask me, “Think the rain’ll ever hurt the rhubarb?” “No, Pop.”

As his cancer started to progress, he kept asking me. Some days, his voice was a little tired. Some days it was a little bland. Some days, it came out as a whisper. Some days it had a surprising burst of energy. No matter how he felt or what was going on, the answer was always the same, and a smile was on his face.

After he passed, I was thinking of all the funny things he did and some of the quirky things he said, and I looked up what rhubarb was--finally. “Well,” I said to myself, “turns out it’s a red plant similar to celery with toxic leaves and some medicinal uses.” So, what Pop was telling me all those years was true.

The rain makes the rhubarb grow.

Coping with the death of someone I loved so much was the biggest challenge with which I have ever been presented. It broke my heart to see him go knowing he wanted to be there at least a little bit longer to reassure my mom she would be just fine at the end of her divorce. I knew felt powerless, even though he never let it show. But, at the same time, I too tried to be tough like he was.

I knew Pop wouldn’t have wanted me to dwell on the negative aspects. He would want me to be strong and watch out for my younger brother, my cousin, my nana, my uncles, and my grieving mother. Everyone wanted time to stop, but it couldn’t, so I had to be there to offer a smile when my family needed a break from the sadness. I had to accept Pop’s death as one of the hard things and realize that other times will be easier. We all cried and did our best to work though it together, and eventually adjusted. Though tumultuous at first, we toughened up and accepted something difficult that is bound to happen in life. Looking back on it, times can be tough, but will the rain ever hurt the rhubarb? No. I believe you Pop. It will only make it grow.