

Through my eyes

■ Cite as: *CMAJ* 2022 January 17;194:E56. doi: 10.1503/cmaj.211724

When I first saw you, I thought of the colour grey. Grey walls, grey bed, grey skin. I was afraid. I felt small and powerless before you — you, whose eyes looked as though they had seen beyond the edge of the universe. I was trembling, my skin clammy. I felt naive, like a child to whom Death was a stranger. My heart was heavy.

Your room in the hospital was dim and quiet, a small refuge from all the bright lights and noise. And there you lay, as still as a lake at twilight, as your shining eyes met mine.

“Palliative care,” I was told about you. Many months ago, a great and horrible disease had emerged in your body and had spread to your bones, with no chance of cure. Although I had seen, even considered, the possibility of dying before, never did it stare at me so vividly in the face.

ii.

“How are you?” was all I could utter, helpless. You gestured one hand toward me and welcomed me into your space with an unexpected warmth.

What was your life like before this?

You had lived in a lovely house in a small town, you told me in a soft voice. The fields there were much more beautiful than here, and at night, one could see the stars. But during the day, the sky was just as blue.

You had raised three incredible kids of whom you were so proud, and you now had eight grandchildren that made your heart swell with love. I could see the joy erupt in your thin pale face when you spoke of them, a radiant sun.

What was it like to be you?

You had been in so much pain. You had felt so helpless, too. You told me you had cried. You told me you had tried, you had tried everything to fight it: the surgery, the radiation, the drugs. At some point, though, between when you lost all your hair and when your favourite food no

longer tasted good, you realized that life was not about winning.

Life had dealt you this particular hand, yet you still had the strength to hold your head high. You chose peace, and over a number of weeks, the war that had been waging inside of you came to a halt. Angry molecular weapons and prospects of being put to sleep and cut open were replaced with soothing remedies that took away pain and anxiety. In turn, you felt in control again. This was a victory of your own; “palliative care” could not be a sad phrase when it brought you such hope.

Though the cancer had taken so much from you, it did not take away your light.

iii.

The sun rose, a new day. Your husband was there, and you looked perfectly calm. Golden rays were shining through the small window and the TV was on. You had just eaten a little.

“How do you feel?”

“Tired,” you said, “but comfortable.”

“Are you in pain?”

“No. The medicine and radiation are doing their jobs.”

I looked at you there, bathed in light. I wish I could have said more then. I wish I could have asked what it was that you had still hoped to do. I wish I had asked if you were satisfied with what you had accomplished in your life. But my throat ran dry and all I could do was smile.

iv.

The last time I saw you, you had just completed a dose of palliative radiation.

Someone had brought you flowers — bright pink daisies sat quietly by your window. I could smell their sweet fragrance in the air of your small room. I looked at you, and then told you that it was my last day here.

You took my hand and clasped it for a moment. “Study hard,” you said to me. “It was wonderful meeting you.”

I wished you well and closed the hospital door — your door. I wanted to cry, but my heart was filled with hope.

v.

That was five months ago. I still wonder, where are you now? How is your family doing? Is your house still as beautiful as you described? Did you truly find peace?

At night, there are no stars here; the sky is pitch black. I guess that’s what it takes to live in a big city.

Now, I am seeing my own grandmother in a decline. I am brought back to the time when I first saw you — when I felt helpless. I know our time together was short, and I am sure to you it was simply a blink of an eye, but did it matter when I was there? Did our conversations make a difference?

Because for me, the answer is yes. I pray that I will see my grandmother’s face and will be filled with the same hope that I had for you.

When I close my eyes and think of you, I see the colours of a great rainbow, stretched wide across the sky, welcoming me into its light.

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This article has been peer reviewed.

This essay won the 2021 Undergraduate Narrative Award for Palliative Medicine administered by the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians. This is fiction.

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