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### My Mom Passed Away During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Deonne Gray

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# My Mom Passed Away During the Covid 19 Pandemic

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The morning of April 2, 2020, I called my elderly parents at 11:45am for my daily check in. Dad answered and said that mom had had a rough night and was still sleeping. I thought that was odd and worried that she caught the new coronavirus. Stay at Home orders had just been given by the Governor of MN two weeks prior. Dad said, "Maybe YOU can wake her." He put the phone to her ear and I said, "Mom, mom, it's me." I could hear her heavy breathing, but no answer. Dad took back the phone. I asked, "Dad, is she ok?" He said, "Let me investigate and get back to you."

In 15 minutes, I got a call from the staff at their senior living community. Dad had pushed the red emergency button in the living room. The one I hoped they would never use. An ambulance came to take her across the street to the hospital ER. She was breathing, but unresponsive and presumed to have had a stroke. Dad said her eyes looked crossed. I was scared. I called my brother to notify my other two siblings, living in three different states. Entrance into the hospitals were limited because of the virus. But we were told to come in, use hand sanitizer, wear masks, and then go directly inside a room to meet with the ER Doctor. They already performed a CT scan which showed that the left side of her brain was filled with blood. I explained her medical history, that she was on a blood thinner from heart valve surgery about 5 years earlier. He asked what her wishes were. I looked to dad, though I knew the answer. They had just signed health care directives a month before, after they moved to MN to live near me. They sold their home in OH of 31 years in December. Here was my ultimate test, as I was supposed to take care of them. My dad said, "No heroic measures." "But do what you can if there's any hope," I said. The doctor suggested flying her to Minneapolis by helicopter so that neuro surgeons could see her. She was now on a ventilator. Dad and I drove back to their apartment, although the "sentry" at their senior living building only let me inside because of our special circumstance. They took my temperature and had me sign an employee sickness waiver.

Once in their apartment, it smelled like my mom. I hadn't been inside for two weeks. Stepping out on their balcony, we watched the helicopter land and fly away again. "Take good care of her," I whispered. Mom had no idea she'd be riding in a helicopter today. I turned around, started washing loads of laundry, fed my dad some lunch, and ran the dishwasher. I had zero appetite.

We received the dreaded phone call from the neurologist. There was nothing we could do and she wouldn't live more than a few more hours, certainly not long enough for one brother to arrive from Chicago. My dad and I drove to Minneapolis. That hour long drive was long and excruciating.

Mom had been so alive and full of vitality right up until last night, when she complained of a headache and went to bed early. The weather had just turned nice that week with temps in the 40s. So I had ridden my bike over to their balcony about 3 different days that week. We took pictures of me in the grass below and my parents standing above. We had to keep 6 feet distance between us. Another day, I brought them chocolate chip cookies, her favorite. Then the final day, mom made us hot tea to drink. It was delicious. Perfectly brewed and hot while we stood out in the cold wind. For the past year, dad and I had been dreaming about having tea on the balcony together. To think mom finally made that happen as one of her last acts. Could she have known she would die? She didn't stay outside very long because it was too chilly for her. She stood inside the sliding door. I noticed some blood from her nose. I mouthed from outside, "Mom, your nose is bleeding." Her eyes opened wide and disappeared into the apartment. That was the last time I saw her alive and well.

So dad and I are approaching the Minneapolis hospital. Dad is silent. I'm wondering how he's holding up inside. This is his wife of nearly 60 years in June! They were the perfect team. Where one was deficient, the other picked up. One without the other was absolutely unthinkable. But here we were, preparing for the unthinkable. Saying goodbye is so final.

Took us a while to figure out where to enter the hospital. It was usually filled with people coming and going, but now was desolate, waiting for the onslaught of Covid 19 cases to come. A guard out front let us in where two employees in scrubs and masks behind a plexiglass shield were expecting us, asked health questions, then gave us hand sanitizer and masks. They assured my dad's nosepiece was snug, but not mine. We took an elevator to the 6th floor and walked what seemed like miles through empty corridors of ICU beds, perhaps soon to be filled with Covid 19 patients. Finally reaching the end of the hallway, the staff ushered us into mom's room.

There she lay, lifeless except for the ventilator lifting her chest just enough to keep her alive. We touched her, held her hand, spoke to her, and cried. I FaceTimed my three siblings all at once so that we could all be together to say our goodbyes. My brothers were red-faced and crying. My sister read scripture and smiled. Dad apologized for if he ever failed her as her husband. "Forgive me," he said. Maybe 15 minutes later, as my phone battery was low, we left as a pool of blood quietly filled mom's mouth. And behind us, the kind nurse and respiratory therapist awaited the doctor to pull out her ventilator tube.

Back at the apartment, we packed dad's suitcase to come stay with us. "Clothes for 5 days," I said. "4 days," corrected dad. The ICU nurse called to say mom passed away peacefully about 30 minutes after they removed the vent. Dad and I stood together and cried. We said our silent goodbyes to that apartment, which still held all of my mom's belongings...her tennis shoes by the side of the treadmill just where she stepped off the day before.

One month later, dad is still living with me. I'm not allowed into their building; and dad really can't take care of himself. He would have had to self quarantine for two weeks alone in their apartment upon returning. Now we can grieve together and learn this new way of life minus a deeply loved, profoundly special mother and wife.