



## 'I Thought I Would Be Feeling Grief After She Died, Not Before'

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Mum died in February 2009, aged 62, after a four year battle with ovarian cancer.

We think Mum was aware that she might die, but she didn't know when. She wasn't frightened. She was always hopeful that someone, somewhere could help her.

Several weeks before she died, I remember coming home from visiting her and Dad, realising that this was the end. I couldn't stop crying. The person I had just been to see wasn't "my Mum" anymore. She had turned into a very ill person, who couldn't concentrate, couldn't eat, and didn't have enough energy to be interested in me. I now understand the feelings I had that night were about premature grieving. It took me by surprise because I thought I would be feeling grief *after* she died, not before.

Around this time, Mum wrote a "Wish List", telling me to sort out her jewellery and pick one piece for each of her friends. She bought my brother's birthday present (she died on his birthday), and a Mother's Day gift for her Mum, and told Dad that she would give him eight weeks after she'd gone to find someone else! He just laughed and told her not be so silly.

Shortly before she died, Dad asked me, my husband, Dave, and my brother to come and see her. She had been having awful head pains, and I think Dad thought that she might die that night. But when we arrived she brightened up, and told Dave to make sure he and I bought a house. She also told us she wanted to go to the hospice where she had been a day patient. A few days later that's where Dad took her.

Her diary entry she made about this particular visit (she had kept a diary throughout her illness) was "Last Super??" It was as if she was using the opportunity to tie-up loose ends.

The time she spent in the hospice wasn't traumatic, but it was stressful. The staff are amazing, and made her very comfortable. She sent a couple of texts during the first few days, saying how nice the staff were, but these stopped as she became increasingly tired.

We come from a big family, so at first she had quite a few visitors. But as her health failed, the staff told us that it was too much for her, and to reduce visitors to her immediate family. That was quite hard, but Dad turned into an excellent gate-keeper.

I would often sit with Mum, and tell her about what I had been up to, or just hold her hand. Sitting with her was fine, but whenever I stood up to leave I cried. Every time, it felt as if I was saying goodbye to her.

Mum died within the week of being admitted into the hospice. She died in her sleep free from pain and fear, in the early hours with Dad by her side. When Dad rang, I was relieved that it was over. My brother felt the same, but Nana (Mum's Mum) was shocked. I think she thought Mum would get better.

Mum was ill for a long time. Although it was horrible for her, I felt that it helped me to let go. I was able to grieve a little more every time her health worsened. It also meant we as a family gradually got used to doing things

without her before she died. So her death didn't come as a terrible shock, and I haven't experience as much grief as I had expected to after she died.

The one thing that I found difficult was learning to accept that each one of us in the family dealt with her illness differently. For example, I wanted to know everything so that I could be prepared for all eventualities. But it seemed like my brother didn't want to know at all.

I thought he was wrong. But now I realise that was just *his* way. I have also had two sessions of counselling over the past year to help me through some low points. I tried to push other family members to do the same, but I have had to recognise that it's not for everyone.

Since Mum died, I have had two particularly powerful dreams about her.

The first dream concerned a large hotel venue. Everyone I knew was there, but I only remember seeing a friend and Mum. Mum was wearing an olive green outfit – the same suit she was wearing in the photograph on her funeral sheet.

As a rule, she didn't like late nights. But in the dream, she was saying, "I want to stay. Is everyone going? Oh! I'm not ready to go yet. Let's get another drink". As the dream moved on I saw that she was wearing a white outfit, with a pink flower print on the skirt. (She *never* wore white.) She didn't look as happy, and she was assertively telling Dad "Will you just get on with it. Stop worrying about it."

I interpreted the first part of the dream as Mum's funeral. She was saying she wasn't ready to go. But when her clothes changed to white, I took that to mean she had died. Her words to my father were particularly poignant as he was just starting out again on his own. When I woke up I was happy that I had seen her, and Dad was very relieved that he had Mum's blessing to move on in life.

The second dream was during the time Dave and I had been house-hunting – prompted by Mum's encouragement for us to buy a house shortly before she died. I had created a Little Book of Joy, which was a notebook given to me by a friend, in which I wrote down my feelings and thoughts about each house we looked at. Creating my Little Book of Joy felt as if Mum was accompanying me in our search.

In the dream, she came to look at a house with us, and started telling us how we could knock-through here, and put an en-suite in here. Again, when I woke up I felt really happy to have seen her.

Several months down the line, I'm still waiting for grief to hit me. I don't *want* to feel like this. Its as if I *should* be feeling grief for the Mum I loved so much. But I am getting on with life, and I often I look at photographs of her, which make me laugh and cry.