

This is a story mostly for my friends and family since I do not have the words to eloquently express it for the world. But before I begin, I wanted to say thanks to all of my friends and family who have stood by my side in support over this last year. A very special thanks goes to my Aunt Philis, who generously gave so much of herself, her time, her strength and her love this past year. I love you.

The last day I had with my Mom started off in such an ordinary way – if ordinary can somehow encompass a hospital room. When I arrived, I had to wait outside the door overhearing her cheerfully boss the orderly around as he mopped the sticky floor. I came in bearing gifts – Mom gifts – which included every tabloid I could find at the grocery store, a copy of the book [Flags of Our Fathers](#) (since she wasn't going to be able to see the movie for awhile), chapstick (if you know anyone who is stuck in the hospital, always bring this along), a stuffed animal and other assorted treats. Mom was thrilled – finally, after two weeks of not being able to hold down food she was getting the attention she needed. “I had breakfast! Do you want to see what I ate?” She proudly showed me the list. “I even slept through the night, although the sound of the elevator bothered me at first. I decided to pretend it was the gusting wind.” We listened quietly as the elevators whooshed up and down.

Mom told me that after various tests they'd finally determined that she'd had a heart attack on Halloween – the night she fainted in her closet. “Well, it's a good thing we got you here when we did.” She explained that on Monday they were going to check her arteries to see if there were any blockages and wanted to know if I thought that was ok. “I think so.” At 58, her youngest sister had died a year and a half before from a massive heart attack and they'd just found a 95% blockage of her other sister's carotid artery just the month before.

Mom asked for a popsicle, because this eating thing was GREAT and we continued talking about the things we always talked about – family, movies, the Wizard of Oz (because she could always work that in) – and I got to see her give the pharmacist a particularly hard time over her anxiety medicine. She explained to her that she was feeling very anxious and needed the medication to be given to her in a particular way. There was much back and forth and they agreed to call her doctor.

“I feel dizzy.”

That was the last thing my Mom said to me and my world turned upside down. I dragged the hospital staff behind me and ran them back to her room where Mom was having what I can only describe as a seizure. I stood in that room as it filled with more and more people and then a crash cart, then I backed out to the elevators.

Someone finally led me to the staff break room where I tried to call my father. But anyone who has ever been around a hospital (or where I've noticed it – a TV station) knows that getting a signal on your cell phone can be a chore. I heard the phone answer “hello? HELLO?” but no one could hear me. I tried information for my aunt, but didn't realize they had changed the name the phone number was listed under so I was told “no

ma'am, we don't have anyone by that name in Austin". Thank God for my cousin in Dallas who I finally reached and he then became responsible for contacting everyone else.

I felt so alone hunkering down in that break room.

Some crotchety nurse walked in, "why are YOU in here?"
I sneered at her through tears, "My mother is dying."
"Oh... I'm sorry" and she turned around and ignored me.

When they brought the minister in to talk to me, he handed me a brochure. "Have you thought about where you want her buried?"
I blinked. I didn't understand. Why would I have thought of that?
"Well, look this over and let us know."

I stood looking at her on the bed, a tube in her mouth, her eyes half opened.
"The tube is there in case you want to have an autopsy."
"I don't want an autopsy. It's just going to tell me she's dead."
The minister asked, "do you want me to pray with you?"
"No."
I just want you to disappear.
I just want to smooth back her hair.
I just want to laugh with her about what just happened and how scary that was, but how she's ok. How that was a close one.

My aunt and my cousin Kim finally arrived at the hospital and what wasn't real was suddenly more real than I wanted it to be.
"Have you all decided on a funeral home?"
They've got to be kidding. How many minutes have passed by?
The nurse finally came in and asked for an answer because if they didn't know, they were going to transport her body to a different hospital.
I think my aunt might have slapped her had the minister not started acting as our advocate, "they don't need to decide right now – I will talk to your supervisor."

We collected all the presents, the clothes and the flowers and left her laying there.

Afterwards we threw one hell of a funeral.

My afterthoughts for those with a stronger stomach:
There was some confusion about how I felt about being there for my mother. I will never regret being there for my mom. Had I not been there, she wouldn't have been discovered until the staff made their next rounds. (Why someone who they now knew had a heart attack was not hooked up to a monitor, I will never know.) I regret seeing my mother die in the way that she did. If some people slip peacefully away and gently tip toe to the great beyond, then my mother clutched at the void tearing at the edges trying to find purchase screaming inwardly while desperately trying not to be sucked down. People

who believe I should find some measure of comfort in baring witness to the event are mistaken. Again, I was glad that I was there, that she knew I was there and that she knew I was doing everything I knew to do to throw her a life line, to catch her hands and get her back, but I do regret seeing her die in the way that she did.

Another comment that has sort of bothered me: people were impressed with how I acted, how I dressed and what I said on my blog. Frankly, I'm insulted and I probably shouldn't be because these people don't know me, but it does make me wonder about who these people thought I was. Had I been barefoot and hosted a magic show amidst reading dirty limericks, would that have been more in keeping with what they expected versus what they got?

Most days are typical days, but I find some days are harder. Driving down one of our cities major arteries to home late a night bothers me – not always, but on occasion. I can't ask Mom questions about our family's history any more; she was the keeper of that lore and it's gone. I can't ask her about events in history and what she thought at the time.

I can only stare at her picture.