

Thirteen Steps

Walking into the house I grew up in, my 16 month old, Cassie Sue, started yelling for her Grandma Sue. I automatically looked up the steps almost expecting to see my mother come racing down to scoop Cassie up in her arms. Then I remembered why I was here. I was here to take care of my mother who was dying of cancer.

Shaking my head back to reality, I heard Cassie making her way up the steps. She knew exactly where she'd find her Grandma. The same place she had been after her last chemo treatment.

Looking around the big comfortable kitchen, I could picture my mom with her big smile making breakfast for my three brothers, three sisters and myself. Then my eyes started to focus on what was really in the kitchen. From the crumbs on the counter and the cup on the table, I could see that dad had his usual toast and coffee for breakfast. Seeing that there dishes to be done and the floor needed to be swept, I decided the kitchen would be my first room to clean. First, I would have to give mom her pills and of course, our morning chat.

Grabbing mom's many pills, I started up the steps, automatically counting each one till I reached the top on thirteen. Thinking back, I couldn't remember not counting the steps as I climbed them. As I took the first right into the big bedroom mom and dad had shared since my oldest brother moved away. I stopped and just watched as my small blonde baby girl curled up in my dying mother's arms.

My mind flashed back to my life as a little girl. There were many memories of lying in my mother's arms, full of love and happiness. That was always the place I knew I was safe and secure, covered in a blanket of love.

After a few moments, Cassie sat up and said, "I wuv ya!" With tears in my mother's eyes, she choked out, "I will always love you my little Cassie".

As Cassie crawled out of my mother's arms and headed down the steps to play, I went to my mother's bedside. Knowing we were asked not to talk about dying I could not stop myself the forbidden question. "Aren't you afraid to die", I asked with tears in my eyes.

Mom squeezed my hand and then looked at me with little fear in her eyes and explained, "I have had sixty beautiful years. I was raised by a couple who loved me. Then I married the man of my dreams and had seven wonderful kids, more than I dreamed for", she said with a laugh. "And now I have thirteen grandchildren. I have been loved, what more could I ask for".

She went on. "I've had friends who had a rough life and it seemed they just started being happy with their lives and they died. Think how lucky I've been. I've had a very happy life. Not a lot of people can say that", she said with love and faith in her eyes.

I looked at mom, thinking, "Here's a woman whose mom passed away when mom was four and then was raised by an aunt and uncle. A woman who's twenty four year old daughter was killed in an automobile accident and left behind three small children. A woman who was loved because of the love she gave others.

Mother wrapped her arms around me as we cried together. Then, mother sat up and looked into my eyes, and said, "That's the last time we talk about that. From now on it's just happy things we talk about, like Cassie". Mom proceeded to tell me all the new words that Cassie shared with her.

It's been four long years since my mom passed away from Cancer, but Cassie remember Grandma Sue. Not so much from memory as much as from the stories and pictures I have shared with her and her two brothers.

I am lucky enough to have purchased the home I spent eighteen years of my life in. There are many times I think of mom as I hold Cassie in my arms, remembering the warm feelings I had when my mother held me.

"I love you mom". Cassie says as she kisses me goodnight. I have to smile as I hear her counting as she goes up the steps, until she reaches thirteen.

Lisa Welsh