

# Her Voicemails

Category: Dementia

written by Saachi Jhandi | March 23, 2025

I can't delete her voicemails. They span over a decade of my life and offer a lifeline to a woman who shaped it.

My grandma wasn't related to me; she was a customer at the bank where my mom worked in Las Vegas. She chose to love my mom and, eventually, my brother and me.

I spent my childhood chasing her cat, Marmalade, around the house and telling stories with a flashlight under my chin. She taught me to knit using a mirror—because “lefties knit, too.” She made sure my brother and I learned to play the piano, like all her grandchildren.

When we moved to Vermont and later to California, she called my mom every day. Pictures of us, two brown children, sat beside photos of her own grandchildren on her nightstand.

Only as a teenager did I realize how iconic she was: a single mom raising boys on her own when that wasn't considered proper; a woman who drove all of Route 66 alone, who swam five miles a day into her seventies. She pronounced my name with a soft “shi” and always pressed for details of what I'd won at the science fair so she could brag properly. She pushed me to learn as much as I could and to share it with her. She challenged her memory constantly, recalling things we hadn't discussed just to prove she could.

When I went to college, she called me every week before my film studies class. During that first term, she had her first fall. Her phone calls, once so steady, spaced out. Her memories started to do the same.

It began with repeating questions. Sometimes she thought I was applying to college again. Eventually, she told me she wasn't sure who I was. I cried the entire walk to class, not just because she couldn't remember me, but because I knew how much she would've hated that.

Now I'm in my second year of medical school. She passed away six months before I got in.

After a long shift, I still want to call her to tell her about it, to hear the pride in her voice. Sometimes I'll scroll through the list of her old voicemails. I can almost hear her giggle, hear that soft “shi.”

But I never press play.

For now, I just keep them—little pieces of a love that never forgot me, even when she did.

*Saachi Jhandi  
Chico, California*