

Closure 100 Days After

Category: Letting Go

written by Lien Phung | December 28, 2018

I was walking around the neighborhood with my mom as we discussed our plan to visit Grandma in Vietnam. My grandma was suffering from Alzheimer's, uncontrolled diabetes, and necrotizing skin lesions on her back. We decided to plan our visit in three months' time—knowing it would be a long, restless wait.

Me, thinking out loud: "Mom, do you think Grandma will recognize us?"

Mom: "Maybe. But even if she doesn't recognize me, I still want to see her again and hug her tightly."

To mentally prepare us, mom added, "Grandma is very sick, and hopefully she can get over this hump. If she is suffering too much, I hope God will gently guide her to the afterlife."

To which I quickly responded, "Even if so, she needs to wait for us!"

It wasn't until later that I realized how selfish and ignorant I was. Who am I to demand that she hold on for us? She would determine and do what was best for her, in life and in death.

Five days later, during a meeting, I received the news that Grandma had passed away in her sleep. Intense heartbreak ensued. Within a few days, my mom's health declined. I felt helpless watching her grief, half a world away from Grandma. Mom needed closure, and the only way I know how to help was to go with her on our trip as planned.

We could not get there for the funeral, but we were present at the final prayer ceremony on the 100th day anniversary of Grandma's death. Although Mom wasn't able to give Grandma a final hug, she was able to hold Grandma's photo, a symbol of Grandma's spirit, during the ceremony. Mom gripped the cloth bridge that symbolically took Grandma's spirit to what Buddhist teachings see at the next stage of the rebirth process. We ended that night by cremating Grandma's spirit house, much to Grandpa's dismay. The younger generation of the family felt it had to be done to release her spirit, giving her more freedom on the rebirth journey.

During our flight back to Boston, I turned to Mom and asked, "Does your heart feel a little better?"

With a smile, she said, "Not just a little. I feel completely better."

Grandma may have forgotten us and let go. We had to let go, too, but we will never forget her.

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