

# Cancer during COVID

Category: Coping

written by Ray Zhang | August 26, 2022

The sky darkens outside my window in Shanghai. My grandma used to call this plum rain: rains during the hot months, when plums wither away, turning juice to clouds, waiting to flood the dry land.

In the spring, my grandma tasted blood in her mouth. A week later, she was diagnosed with oral cancer. Doctors said it was merely a benign tumor, a natural part of aging. But within weeks, her body had shrunk like a deflated balloon and eating was painful. A few months later, the tumor had metastasized, spreading into her lymph nodes.

This occurred as COVID continued to ravage China. A zero-case policy transformed metropolitan streets into deserted wastelands; test sites dotted the streets but were the only evidence of life. By the time Shanghai locked down, my grandma was already on medication. Despite her fragility, she still had to climb down her apartment building's stairs for mandated twice-a-day COVID testing. After restrictions were loosened, her visits to the hospital became more frequent. Masks and isolation defined her life.

I don't know what will happen to my grandma. Lately, I've been pushing away any thoughts on the matter. But it's hard *not* to think about something so all-consuming.

The smell of rain leaking through my window reminds me of summers next to the Huangpu River, where the water grew plump whenever it drizzled. Although I'm now thousands of miles away from my grandma, each raindrop helps me cope, beating out the rhythm of her voice and soothing my nerves.

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