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The Service of Love

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Nearly two years ago, I underwent a sea change. I lost someone most precious to me, and in what seems now to be a sort of divine gift, gained a greater understanding of what it means to be of service — to believe in the service of love. But I didn't always.

When I was two months pregnant with my daughter, I found out that my mother Barbara had cancer. She was the family historian, and lived her life in the service of others. The service of love, you might say. She liked good wine, but never spent money on other material things. She wasn't rich, but she had abundant gifts of wisdom and the kind of love she taught me to pass on. She gave her nights, her weekends, and her holidays to her students and perfect strangers alike, counseling them on unwanted pregnancies, abuse, and much else of difficulty. Barbara, in the truest sense, paid it forward. I was annoyed by how much she freely gave others, but not herself.

Learning of her illness, I wondered when she would be paid back in the currency of love, which she [sic] expended so much of. She turned her helping heart and mind to me countless times throughout our time together, and tried when I was a journalist and producer in my 20s to tell me her family's stories.

Sadly, I did not listen; like some people that age, I was disinterested, focused on other things. Knowing about my mother's condition hit me like a Mack truck: I spent much of that year desperately trying to capture her thoughts, voice and face on different media before she died just six short months later. In the end, I failed. It became my greatest regret.

One wintry day, confounded by my loss, exhausted as a new mother, confused about what next to do with my life, I got an answer in the subtlest of ways. Walking down a frozen street, a friend shared a memory — told me of being sent to boarding school in Switzerland, away from an abusive and troubled family. I had never heard this story; I wondered if her three children had either, and then, it hit me. Mom gave me a shove towards the service of love. I knew what I should do.

Soon after, infant in arms, I founded my story-saving company to help others benefit from my mistake. Now, I am living the Native American conservation philosophy of the Seventh Generation (act in a way that will positively affect seven generations living after you) that inspired its name.

I believe in the service of love. I teach people how to do the work of saving stories themselves, and evangelize to audiences; implore them to care now, not later. Now, more people are honoring their elders in a way I learned the need for the hard way. It's my way of paying it forward, and hopefully, paying Mom back. At least, I like to think so.

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