

The Letter I Wish I Had Received
An Essay by: Nicole Sica

My Dearest Daughter:

In the event of my death, which I fear will be any day now, I have instructed that this letter be forwarded to you. I would tell you myself, however the chemotherapy and radiation make me so violently ill and weak, I fear I do not have the strength to do so.

Lately, I fear so many things. I fear that when I am gone, you will not have a place to come home to, and that after a long, dreary day your suffering will be twofold when you will not be able to walk through a door and find comfort in my quiet acceptance and simple love. It's horrifying to know that I will never see you graduate, drive a car or witness the bloom of first love on your cheeks. My heart breaks in two to know that soon you will go to live with strangers – so young and so very afraid.

I know now what courage is. It is not the selfless disregard for your own body when a loved one is in harm's way. It is not the mother who frantically leaps in front of the moving car to save her child, or the husband who madly rushes into a burning building to save his screaming wife. No, my dearest, what those people do is easy – acting upon the mindless instinct to protect the people that they cherish. But the true heroes in this world are not the martyrs, but the survivors. The child that was pushed out of harms way and saved from death, must now suffer a motherless existence. The wife who was pushed out of the window of the burning building only to watch her husband die in its fiery collapse must spend the rest of her days in agonizing guilt. But they do go on. They somehow manage to face each day, put on their pants one leg at a time and walk out of the front door each morning. How gallant.

That, my darling, is *real* courage. Every poet systematically ignores this gritty, monotonous valor, but it is the stuff that life is made of.

Have courage, my daughter. Know that the way you see yourself should have nothing to do with how a man sees you. Know that money without education is like pudding without a spoon – you simply have to have the necessary utensils for a lifetime of enjoyment. You must go to college and earn your pride; no one and no one thing can make you a person to be proud of – only you can do that. Please know that independence is priceless.

And know this: our time on this earth together is short; but I will be watching over you. I pray you do not make my same mistakes; but instead make the hard choices that your mind tries to rationalize away but that your heart quietly acknowledges as right. I wish you a healthy, self-sufficient and strong life.

Let my words be your guide when your strength fails you.

My Love Forever,

Mom