

You Never Know How Much Time You Have, So Forgive While You Can



By Sarah Jeanne Browne | [Tiny Buddha](#)

“Forgiveness is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was you.” ~Corrie ten Boom

I sat next to my stepmother Elaine in her hospital room. I was thirteen. We’d met six years prior as she took a stepmother’s role and had a strained relationship and didn’t speak to each other for parts of it.

Elaine was facing terminal brain cancer. So far she had kept herself together and composed, remaining strong on the outside. I was trying my hardest to do the same for her.

It had all started back when I was seven and my dad took me to a carnival. My parents were still together at the time. It was there I first met Elaine and her son, four years my junior.

Her son and I played a many carnival games together and we bonded quickly. Even as we grew more competitive, I found myself continually distracted by Elaine's close presence and her friendliness with my dad. All I saw was that she was taking my dad away.

A year later, my father sat me down and told me he was leaving for a little while. This immediately caused an internal alarm to sound. A little while?

They didn't really expect me to believe that, did they? He must've thought I wouldn't understand. But deep down I knew this was only going to mean one thing: divorce.

I even told my best friend about it. "My parents are fighting a lot. I think they're getting a divorce."

"My parents fight too. It's fine," she said. But I thought to myself that it wasn't the same, that everything wasn't fine.

Elaine was a strong, independent businesswoman who thrived in her sales occupation and went for runs religiously every morning at five o'clock. She placed a lot of importance on eating right and an overall healthy lifestyle. The mere fact she would be the one of all people to end up with terminal cancer shocked everyone.

The cancer started in her stomach but soon afterward it rapidly began to metastasize and spread to her brain. It became brain cancer, something she strived to fight against. She still wound up staying in the hospital, defying her strong will and intent to get better.

Although I visited her in the hospital many times, we never grew as close as I felt we should have. It's one of my greatest regrets.

I resented the fact that Elaine took my dad away from my mom. Or at least, that was my perception of what happened. As the

resentment grew within me, so did the void between me and Elaine.

During the course of Elaine's relationship with my father, I fell under the impression that she was trying to buy my affection with [material things](#). She took me to the mall more than once to buy clothes, jewelry and other items for me—but why? On the inside, I refused to allow myself be bought.

Then one Christmas, she wrote a poem about our relationship and how it really wasn't where she hoped it would be. Upon reading this, I kept my head down and didn't respond. She also presented me with a number of certificates one day each month to go places and do things.

Such gifts included the spa, Barnes and Noble, the mall, various other stores and more. These acts of generosity were overwhelming me, and not in a good way. I was beginning to feel like being bought was entirely unforgivable.

One day, in a blaze of frustration, I asked Elaine if she knew my mother cried at night because of her. Elaine burst into tears. With my words, I'd stopped her in tracks in the middle of the many acts of generosity, but I felt it had to be said.

These events had fractured our relationship even further.

From that point on things didn't improve much, until one day when I'd been running around outside of our lake house in the woods and became lost. I wandered for hours, growing more hopeless by the moment, until I heard something in the distance. It was a bell, and by some miracle it seemed to be ringing for me!

Immediately I began sprinting in the direction of the sound. To my amazement it was Elaine. She'd rung the bell in an effort to guide me back.

I ran into her outstretched arms and collapsed into them while

crying. "Everything's okay now," she said, holding me tighter than ever before.

In this moment, something drastic happened. All of the previous animosity I had been holding onto began to melt away. She finally had me; she'd won.

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