

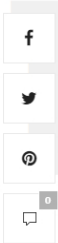


PERSPECTIVE

What Losing My Best Friend Taught Me About Living Life

FEBRUARY 22 by NATALIE ZISA

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I had experienced death when I lost my grandparents as a little girl. I was empathetic when I heard stories of others' tragedies. But I couldn't imagine losing my mom, my dad, or my brother. Even the thought of losing my best friends was unbearable. I didn't know what *that* kind of grief felt like. I didn't know how my life would continue...until it had to.

Kat was one of my closest friends. We met while dancing together in middle school. We lived forty minutes away from each other, but we were having sleepovers in the summer, writing long text messages filling in on each other's lives, and honestly there wasn't one thing I couldn't tell her. Even when we chose to go to different dance studios in high school, our friendship remained strong. We were now going to college in different states and she was still one of the people I thought of telling everything to.



I was studying abroad in December, spending one of the last weekends with relatives in Milan. As I lied in bed ready to call it a night, I got the notification that a past dance teacher had written on my wall on Facebook. That in it of itself was a little strange. I quickly changed tabs to find out what was going on. She wrote the words, "Did you hear what happened to Kat? I know you guys were close. Text me if you need me." I couldn't believe this was happening. It was my nightmare coming true.

Kat was special. There was no other person as positive, selfless, or loving as she was. But as she put it, she had always been "medically challenged". In middle school, she was diagnosed with Mixed Connective Tissue Disorder, which meant her hands lost feeling in the cold. In high school, I went to visit her in the hospital. In her first years of college, she had surgery on both of her hips. And this time, things just didn't go her way. Her mom kept updating Facebook day by day, telling us about Kat's condition. She was in the hospital for reasons I can't even begin to understand. The doctors didn't seem hopeful, but her mom believed that she would pull through. Her strength was admirable. But I was always scared that one day I would open Facebook and there it would be, a post about Kat passing away.



The night I found out I cried for hours. My body was so taken over by my emotions that my face hurt. I barely slept, knowing that when I woke up I would still be faced with the reality that Kat had passed away. I genuinely questioned why God would take her away so soon. I sent texts to my mom looking for comfort and I think it hurt her to see my faith so diminished - and we weren't even that religious. The hardest part was probably being so far away and not getting to say some sort of goodbye. It feels like it happened in an alternate world.

It still breaks my heart when I realize I'll never speak to her again. She'll never get to tell me about her dreams to work at Disney. I'll never get her opinion about the boy I'm



crushing on. We'll never get to obsess over our favorite celebrities and the newest dance videos. She has social media accounts as if she's still alive. Her picture pops up on my news feed and I have to remind myself she's not really out there.


When the new year was approaching, I thought if I could make one New Year's resolution and really stick to it, it would be to be more like Kat. I genuinely want to live my life the way she lived hers. She knew how to enjoy what was right in front of her, instead of wishing for things that weren't. She was always grateful for the people around her. She remained positive even through the hardest times. And she didn't let people pity her. In all honesty, the world would be a better place if it had more people like Kat.

I've realized I can't do anything about the fact that she's gone. Even as I continue with my daily life and find happiness in other things, it'll still hurt. I won't ever get over her death, but I know now that the best thing I can do is to learn from her. Losing her made me realize that getting upset over the little things is not worth it. It made me realize I should never take anyone or anything for granted again. I stress out when things don't go my way. I overanalyze people's reactions. And I get down in the dumps every time I compare myself to somebody else's accomplishments. But I no longer want those to be characteristics of mine. I have great people and amazing opportunities in my life that letting a day go by that I don't appreciate them is foolish. Every time I take a dance class and feel frustrated, I remember that Kat would want me to push through the disappointment. Instead of complaining about all of the qualities I was not gifted with, I remember that I have to keep dancing for all of the times she didn't get to. It's never easy losing a loved one; I still don't know how others cope. But one thing is for sure: Kat left this world an amazing person and the best way to remember her is by living my life the only way she knew how.




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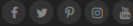
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