

THE NOVEL CORONAVIRUS,

THE GLOBAL PANDEMIC,

THE ONCE-IN-A-CENTURY PLAGUE,

IT'S AFFECTED US ALL IN WAYS LARGE AND SMALL.

IT'S HARD TO COMPREHEND THE ENORMOUS SCALE OF THE DISASTER.

OVER ONE MILLION GLOBAL DEATHS

EVEN IF IT HITS CLOSE TO HOME, TAKING ACCOUNT OF THE REAL HUMAN SUFFERING OF THOSE IT IMPACTS CAN BE HARD.

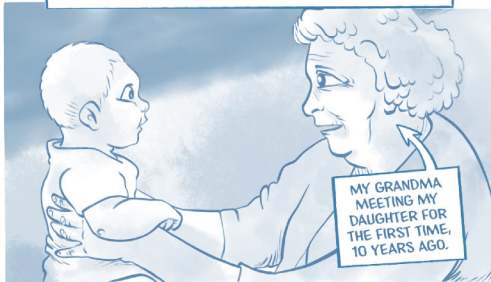
AT LEAST IT WAS FOR ME, SITTING IN MY STUDIO IN BEACON, WHEN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC BECAME VERY PERSONAL FOR ME AND MY FAMILY.

BZZZZZ

by Benjamin Lybrand

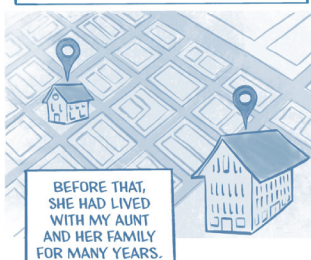
HI BEN- SHE DIED AFTER MIDNIGHT THIS MORNING. I WAS ABLE TO STAY WITH HER FOR THE LAST 12 HOURS AND KEEP HER COMFORTABLE, SO THAT WAS GOOD. BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC, THERE WILL BE NO FUNERAL UNTIL IT'S OVER. SHE WANTED TO BE BURIED BACK IN ARKANSAS WITH DAD.

IN LATE JUNE, MY GRANDMA DIED AT AGE 93 IN PHILADELPHIA DUE TO COMPLICATIONS FROM COVID-19



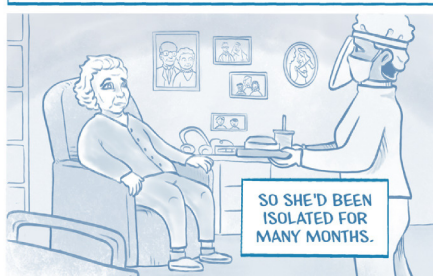
MY GRANDMA MEETING MY DAUGHTER FOR THE FIRST TIME, 10 YEARS AGO.

FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS, SHE HAD BEEN LIVING IN A NURSING HOME NOT FAR FROM MY AUNT'S HOUSE.



BEFORE THAT, SHE HAD LIVED WITH MY AUNT AND HER FAMILY FOR MANY YEARS.

THE NURSING HOME HAD BEEN ON LOCK-DOWN SINCE MID-MARCH. NOT EVEN FAMILY COULD VISIT.



SO SHE'D BEEN ISOLATED FOR MANY MONTHS.

BEFORE LOCK-DOWN, GRANDMA HAD BEEN A REAL GET UP AND GO KIND OF GAL.



PASS.

PLAYING BRIDGE WITH FRIENDS IN BETTER DAYS.

SHE ATTENDED EVERY SOCIAL EVENT ON OFFER: BINGO, CARDS, FITNESS, ANYTHING.

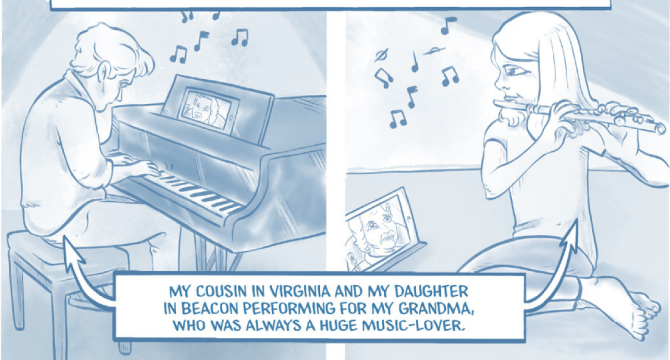
SO THE ISOLATION REALLY STARTED TO TAKE ITS TOLL. EACH TIME I'D CALL, HER SPIRITS SEEMED TO DIMINISH.



HOW ARE YOU HOLDING UP?

WELL, I CAN'T LEAVE MY ROOM. I'M VERY BORED, BUT THE DIRECTOR SAID SHE'D BRING ME NEW BOOKS-ON-TAPE TOMORROW.

WE ALL DID WHAT WE COULD TO KEEP HER SPIRITS UP, BUT OF COURSE THERE'S A LIMIT TO WHAT YOU CAN DO REMOTELY.



MY COUSIN IN VIRGINIA AND MY DAUGHTER IN BEACON PERFORMING FOR MY GRANDMA, WHO WAS ALWAYS A HUGE MUSIC-LOVER.

THEN IN MAY, SHE CONTRACTED COVID.



THEY'VE MOVED ME TO THE COVID WARD.

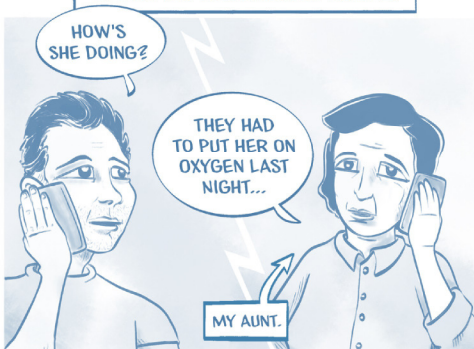
HER NURSING HOME HAD SET UP A NEW COVID WARD TO ISOLATE INFECTED PATIENTS.



IT MAKES SENSE THAT THEY DID,

BUT THE HUMAN COST WAS IMMENSE.

WITH HER ISOLATION AND THE COVID, HER HEALTH DETERIORATED RAPIDLY.



HOW'S SHE DOING?

THEY HAD TO PUT HER ON OXYGEN LAST NIGHT...

MY AUNT.

I STEELED MYSELF FOR THE WORST AND DID MY BEST TO PREPARE MY FAMILY.



SHE HAS IT.

BUT THEN SHE SEEMED TO IMPROVE.



I'M MUCH BETTER, THOUGH THEY HAVEN'T LET ME OUT OF THE COVID WARD YET.

I WAS SO HAPPY, TELLING FRIENDS IF ANY 93 YEAR-OLD COULD BEAT COVID IT WOULD BE MY GRANDMA! SHE WOULD OUTLIVE US ALL!



HAVE I TOLD YOU HOW SHE LEARNED TO DRIVE WITH ONLY HER HANDS IN HER 70S?

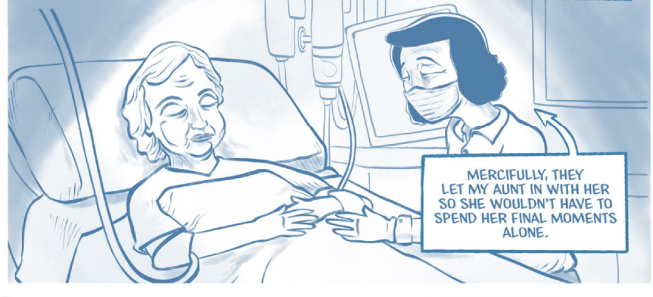
MY AUNT, A MEDICAL DOCTOR, DOING HER BEST TO REMOTELY GIVE CARE TO HER MOM, WARNED ME THAT IT'S OFTEN THE CASE WITH THIS DISEASE THAT PEOPLE CAN SEEM LIKE THEY'VE RECOVERED BEFORE THEY GET EVEN SICKER.



IT CAN CAUSE A HYPERACTIVE IMMUNE RESPONSE, WHICH CAN HAVE A NEGATIVE EFFECT OVERALL.

MY AUNT WAS RIGHT. AFTER INITIALLY FEELING BETTER, GRANDMA'S HEALTH GOT WORSE AND WORSE OVER THE NEXT WEEKS.

AFTER A FINAL HEART ATTACK, THEY TRANSFERRED HER TO THE HOSPITAL.

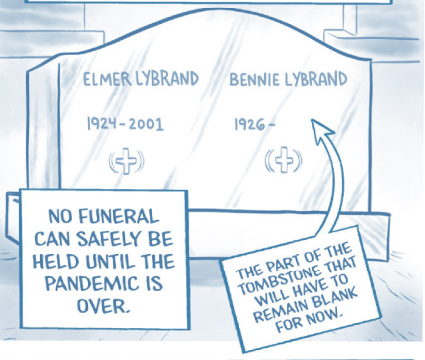


MERCIFULLY, THEY LET MY AUNT IN WITH HER SO SHE WOULDN'T HAVE TO SPEND HER FINAL MOMENTS ALONE.

ANY SENSE OF CLOSURE FOR MY FAMILY IS INDEFINITELY ON PAUSE.

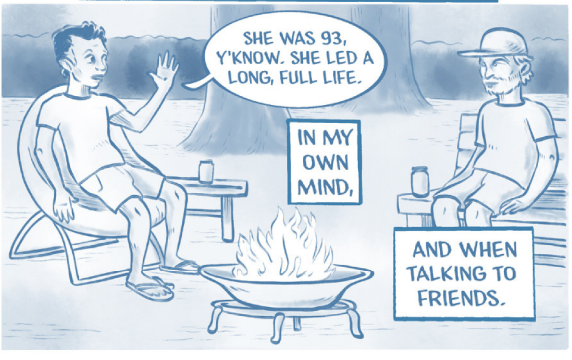
AT FIRST, I LARGELY WOULD DIMINISH THE IMPORTANCE OF HER DEATH,

BUT THE TRUTH IS, SHE COULD HAVE EASILY LIVED MANY YEARS MORE.



NO FUNERAL CAN SAFELY BE HELD UNTIL THE PANDEMIC IS OVER.

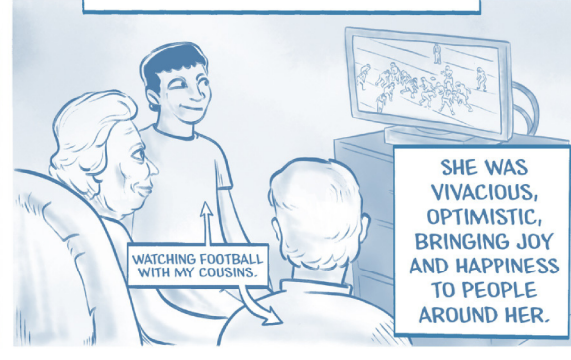
THE PART OF THE TOMBSTONE THAT WILL HAVE TO REMAIN BLANK FOR NOW.



SHE WAS 93, Y'KNOW. SHE LED A LONG, FULL LIFE.

IN MY OWN MIND,

AND WHEN TALKING TO FRIENDS.



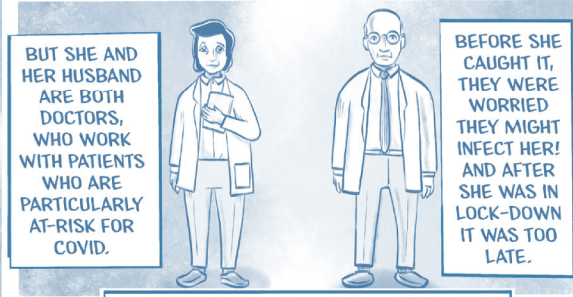
WATCHING FOOTBALL WITH MY COUSINS.

SHE WAS VIVACIOUS, OPTIMISTIC, BRINGING JOY AND HAPPINESS TO PEOPLE AROUND HER.

I TRULY THINK THAT THE EFFECT OF ISOLATION FOR SO LONG LED TO MORE MENTAL SUFFERING, WHICH MADE THE COVID WORSE.

MY AUNT IS WRACKED WITH GUILT FOR NOT BRINGING GRANDMA BACK TO LIVE WITH HER.

THERE ISN'T ANYONE TO BLAME, ALTHOUGH THE MESSAGE ON MANY FRONTS HAS BEEN THAT ONLY THE SICK, THE WEAK AND THE OLD ARE GETTING SICK, SO WHO CARES?



BUT SHE AND HER HUSBAND ARE BOTH DOCTORS, WHO WORK WITH PATIENTS WHO ARE PARTICULARLY AT-RISK FOR COVID.

BEFORE SHE CAUGHT IT, THEY WERE WORRIED THEY MIGHT INFECT HER! AND AFTER SHE WAS IN LOCK-DOWN IT WAS TOO LATE.

AND OF COURSE IT ISN'T THEIR FAULT AT ALL!



I THINK I HAD SUBCONSCIOUSLY INTERNALIZED THAT MESSAGE.

I HARDLY EVEN TOOK ANY TIME OFF OF WORK TO GRIEVE,

I THOUGHT I WAS OK UNTIL MY BIRTHDAY CAME.

THAT'S WHEN I FOUND MYSELF COLLAPSING TO THE KITCHEN FLOOR, SOBBING.



ARE YOU SURE?

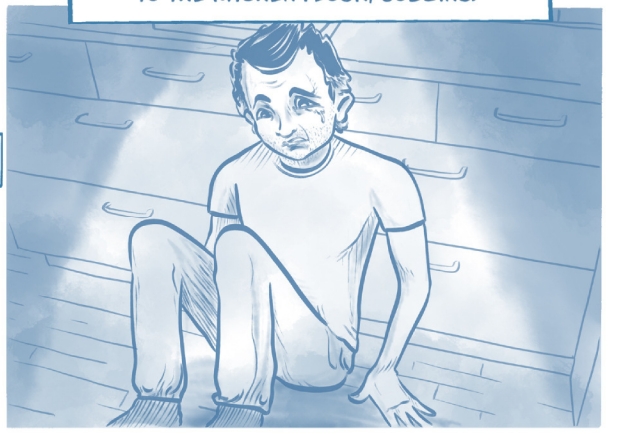
I'D RATHER STAY BUSY.

EVEN THOUGH MY BOSS ENCOURAGED ME TO TAKE MORE TIME.



WITHOUT FAIL, EVERY YEAR MY GRANDMA WOULD SEND ME THESE HOKEY CARDS.

I REALIZED, THIS YEAR I WOULDN'T GET ONE.



BEFORE THAT, I'D STIFLED MY OWN FEELINGS.

I MEAN, I'M A PRIVILEGED GUY

LOADS MORE PEOPLE THAN ME HAVE SUFFERED FROM THIS PANDEMIC.

BUT IT'S NOT A COMPETITION.

THE PANDEMIC HAS HIT US ALL IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

AND LET'S NOT FORGET THOSE WE'VE LOST;

SO LET'S ALL GO EASY ON EACH OTHER IN THESE TRYING TIMES, ESPECIALLY OURSELVES.

THEY ALL DESERVED MORE TIME HERE WITH THOSE THEY LEFT BEHIND.

END