

Maggie - Audio Transcript

KIM: My mother called herself Maggie. I kind of relate to her as Marjorie, but she called herself Maggie.

COURTNEY: Sometimes when I went there, I'd like read to her and bring chips, because she loved having a bag of chips.

KIM: My mom was born in 1929 in Toronto. My grandfather was from Trinidad and my grandmother was from Jamaica. And they came to Toronto. Then they bought a house that they had for like 40 years. I went to the same public school and high school as my mom.

COURTNEY: From when I was little, if I was having a bad day, and my mom was like are you going to go see grandma? I'm like yeah... As soon as I hung out with grandma, it was okay.

KIM: My mom become a secretary after high school. She married my father and ended that relationship just a few months before I was born.

COURTNEY: I'll never forget my 10th birthday. There was a blizzard. And I just remember my grandma going to pick up all my friends so I would have a birthday.

KIM: My family and her siblings experienced a fair amount of racism and discrimination growing up in Toronto at that time. My mother was an interesting person because she could very accepting of the things that you were going through, but just challenging to deal with.

COURTNEY: When my mom and my grandma didn't get along. And my mom said "You can't go see Grandma," I snuck out of the house and went to go see Grandma. We went to Subway. My mom was like, "Oh where were you?" "Oh I went to Riverdale farm"

KIM: I said to my mom: you are a member of the older Women's Network. Get on the waitlist for this housing co-op that they're building down in St. Lawrence area. She enjoyed it. She had a community doing volunteer work and meeting people. She had 16 years or so living in that co-op that were probably among the happier years of her life.

But then as she was getting older, starting to really struggle with dementia. She wasn't eating and she lost like 60 pounds in about two years. I convinced her to try a retirement home.

COURTNEY: I liked the setup they had at New Horizons. It was more of an apartment. You walked in and it felt like, you knew this was Grandma's home. And I found that at Wellesley Central Place was more of like a hospital room. I walked in and "Wow this is depressing." Her apartment on the Esplanade - her walls painted bright red. And it just brought so much joy. She wasn't really eating but if I took her out I'd be like, "Do you want to choose a donut?" And they were the most insane elaborate doughnuts you've ever seen. And she'd like "Really?" She'd get all excited and... She never passed on dessert. She was big on dessert.

COURTNEY: We were going to go and see her and that's when they shut everything down. "No ins, no outs." "COVID is really getting out of control." So the last time I saw her was 10th of March.

KIM: I thought that she was safe, because they were restricting visitors. Clearly not, right? Where can COVID come from? People that work there. People that live there. I didn't, I didn't see that coming. Not at all. Getting a phone call, "Oh hi." "Your mother's temperatures elevated we want to do a COVID test." "Oh, OK." "Your mom's positive."

COURTNEY: I thought she was going to beat it. She was so upbeat. She'd always give a thumbs up. And unfortunately she got pneumonia.

KIM: At first it was all hopeful stuff, right? But realistically. She was pretty frail. Ah so, yeah.

COURTNEY: They were limiting the video chats. My mom was like, "This is ridiculous." My mom hired a personal support worker to go in. And he suited himself up with almost like a hazmat suit. And then I remember the Wednesday and she was just lying there, not even... And I was kind of scared.

KIM: My mom looks so bad. I was like wondering if she actually alive, or has she died? She looked like she was struggling to breathe, which she probably was. We didn't have contact with her, as she was dying. Six in the morning, the nurse she said, "Your mom has died." And I felt initially a sense of relief that she had just been released from this, because it had to be horrendous, right? It had to be horrendous to die from COVID like that.

COURTNEY: And I saw a phone notification. It was my mom, "Call me." "Grandma died." Sitting on my bed shaking from head to toe. We didn't even get to say goodbye. I miss her every day.

Kim: At the time, I really felt like I was ready to let go of my mother. At ninety years old with dementia, and she was frail and, really, I think kind of enjoying life maybe but maybe not really. But when this thing happened it was just the hardest thing I've ever gone through. Yeah.

COURTNEY: This virus is so unfair. You let me know how it is when you lose somebody that is so close to you, that I feel like a part of me has died. Because she was such a big part of my life. I knew her my entire life. She named me.