

My STORY - Part 1: That moment, when you don't recognize yourself anymore.

This month marks the 5 year anniversary of my moment. It was July 2011. I was vacationing in Oregon, specifically to celebrate my grandfather's 86th Birthday. I knew in my heart this would be his last birthday with us. My grandpa and I shared a special bond and I wanted to make this birthday special. I baked him an Oreo birthday cake. I gave him Tasmanian devil pajama bottoms and told him I knew he was dancing around and partying when no one else was looking. We played poker and he told us stories; we made memories that I will carry with me for the rest of my life. It was a wonderful time. My grandpa passed away on Labor Day 2011.

I downloaded the photos from our trip, and here is what I saw:



I honestly didn't even recognize myself. All of my emotions welled up inside of me and I knew I needed to take action. I joined the gym as soon as I got home. I made a commitment to myself. My grandpa lived a long, full life and I want to do the same. He once complimented me for taking such good care of everyone else and said, "It's important that you take care of yourself too." At the time, I brushed off his comment.

It wasn't until after he passed that I gave more thought to that conversation. In hindsight, I think his words sparked my desire for change. I will never know if he knew what he was doing when he said it, but because of my love and respect for him, receiving permission to take care of myself was life-changing. I didn't realize it at first, but his encouragement gave me the strength to question what was once a deeply held belief, "**Taking care of yourself is selfish.**"

This destructive belief seems to be implied throughout our culture. How many of us have felt guilty for taking "ME" time, making ourselves a priority, or doing things we love? I've come a long way in these past five years, and I'm here to share my story, pay it forward, and help others find their joy along the way. Thank you for listening and feel free to leave questions or comments below.