



# Her Final Fight

By Nam Phi Dang

Everyday was a battle. Dinh Thi Thuan fought every morning and night with an illness that in the end would take life away. Her voice was fragile and her physical strength was already exhausted. She could only hope the next day would bring better news. And yet, in the back of her mind, the reality of life and death is what she faced. This is her story. This was her final fight.

My grandmother was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer in the middle of my summer break. While my grandma had already had breast cancer, the herbal medicine she had been taking in the meantime was suppose to be the best solution for it. But it had taken a turn for the worse and I was placed in what I felt was a awkward position. When the news broke out to my sister and I at the time, my views as a photojournalist and a family member clashed. I would either spend the possibly last time with her either with or without a camera. With a week before my flight to Hanoi, I had enough buffer time to come to a final conclusion. This was a story for others. This was something I could share to those who do not understand what it may be like to go through such a low point in life. And this was for her. She was a strong woman. She fought her way till the very end and I was not going to let it end with a simple goodbye. I wanted to visually document her strength during the highs and lows.

Within the one week I had to spend with my grandma, I could see a strong soul within a weak body. She did the best she could to be the same, healthy or not. Whether it was talking, walking or eating, she would do it as much as she could on her own. Day and night, our family surrounded her as if it was any other day. From when she woke up to when she would fall back asleep, our family's presence would be there for the whole journey.

As much as I and everyone in that small and cramped hospital room wanted to keep our hopes high, every day would only get worse and worse for her. The basic things she would do became almost impossible and sleep was the only option left. Rolling from one side of the bed to the other brought pain throughout her whole body. Any sort of pain relief became a joke to her, as it had no effect on her at all. That day was only getting closer and closer and harder for others to bear.

At the age of 70, my grandma passed away with her son and two daughters by her side. As much as it may have been difficult for me and everyone else to go through, we all know she was a beautiful person. And while she may be gone in person, the memories of her will never leave.



From top to bottom:

Dinh Thi Thuan is supported by her personal assistant so that she able to sit up properly to eat. Dinh was diagnosed with stage four breast cancer and was placed in hospital care.

Dinh Thi Thuan, 70, holds onto a pole as she struggles to lift herself up from her hospital bed.

Dinh Thi Thuan tears up when she sees her grandchildren for the first time in two years.

Dinh Minh, a doctor at Saint Paul Hospital in Hanoi, Viet Nam, checks up on Dinh Thi Thuan. Minh is also Thuan's son.

Valentina Dang, granddaughter of Dinh Thi Thuan, massages Thuan's arm as she struggles to speak.

The window view from Dinh Thi Thuan's hospital room.

