

Samantha Howard

Anna Anderson

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Flatline

A line is defined as “a straight or curved continuous extent of length without breadth.”

Lines are everywhere, and we use them without even thinking about it. We measure, draw, walk, run, and drive in lines. Lines can be short or long. Some are continuous and never-ending, and some have endpoints—a start and a stop.

Lines on a screen can mean life and look like mountains. And then, in the blink of an eye, those lines can change. Mountains become a straight, flat line—I mean flatline and mean death. It is an extent of length without breadth—I mean breath. This is the worst kind of line.

How do I know? I watched the screen as the mountains disappeared, as the last breath was breathed, as the last beat happened, as the line went flat. The disappearance of the mountains did not happen immediately, although that would have been better. No, it was a slow disappearance as if I was driving away watching the mountain range disappear in the rear-view mirror. It was a 5-hour kind of slow staring at the screen watching the change happen but unable to make it stop. All I really wanted to do was to turn the car around, so those mountains were in full view again, full of beauty and vitality. It was the worst day of my life, a day I want to forget, but a day that will not let me forget it. A day that happened twenty years ago but one that feels like yesterday.

It was just a simple procedure, so they said. It was a procedure she had had done many times before that day. I did not go with her, and I was not worried.

It was just another Friday. We spoke on the phone and said, “I love you.” I told her I would talk to her after the procedure. I went to school to register for fall classes, and she went to the hospital.

And then the phone call came—the call where the person on the other end said that I needed to hurry to the hospital because she might not make it. There was no explanation on the other end except that the procedure did not go as planned.

So, we drove that distance, my husband and I. The distance between point A and point B—the line that took us to the hospital, the line that took us from life to death. We walked the short distance to the ICU where the doctor said that there were complications. She would have to be transferred, *if* she ever stabilized.

I entered her room. There was no recognition or communication. Her eyes were closed, but my eyes found that screen. I saw the lines that looked like mountains. She had some life in her. However, as each hour passed, those mountains got smaller, and the lines were not as tall as they once were. I knew then I would only see the mountains from the rear view mirror as her life slipped away from my sight.

By the third hour, the bleeding had started. It seeped up the sheet. It dripped on the floor, It covered the leg of my pants. Her veins were collapsing from the complications and the stress on her body. Those blue lines that ran through her body were failing her, failing me.

Five hours passed. I looked at the screen one last time, and there was that line—the worst kind of line. She had breathed her last breath. She would never again tell me she loved me. She would never again hug me. She was gone. My best friend, my mama, was gone forever. All because of that line—that flatline.