

Harmony

at the end of life

Elena's Story



At the end of life, our sensory experiences can become heightened. They can help move us through the emotional, spiritual, and even physical pain, allowing us to experience life in a new way.

This is a story about Elena and how she was able to experience peace and life in her last days through her senses.



The heart monitor
beeped incessantly
and the TV of her
neighbor mumbled
along...

She looked slowly around
the sterile hospital room--the
artificial lights, the white walls,
the cheap ugly plastic privacy
curtains that hardly offered
any at all.

She groaned. The pain was
everywhere. It was a slow, dull
pain that morphed at every
moment. It stuck to every inch
of her body like tree sap.

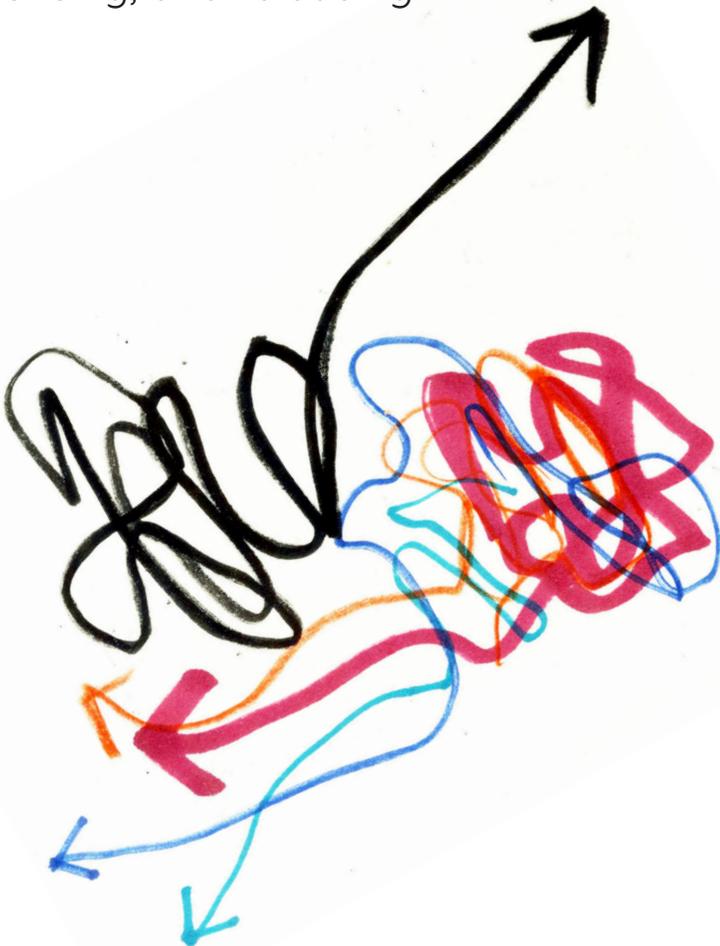
The medication clouded her
mind and made the world drift
around her like a fog, but at
least it made the pain more
tolerable.



Images and thoughts came and went without her consent. Friends and family came in and out with concerned, worried faces, worried motions, their bodies moving, inquiring, tensing, and releasing.

They were the energy of another world, one separate from her own. She didn't have the strength or interest to weave their stories together. Her mind and body were in a different place. Her chaos and their chaos swirled in different directions.

How do we move together?



The pain was that of her divorce, the echo of her daughter, Ana's, shout as she slammed the door for the last time and left for college. She never came back and she never called. Why now in the most painful and confusing times of her life was this happening? She had felt angry at Ana before, but now

her regret enveloped her whole body; it grew inside her along with the cancer.



All she wanted was to be with her daughter, face to face, and tell her the only truths that really mattered.



Ana.
I'm sorry.
I forgive you.
Thank you.
I love you,
Do you know?

in...

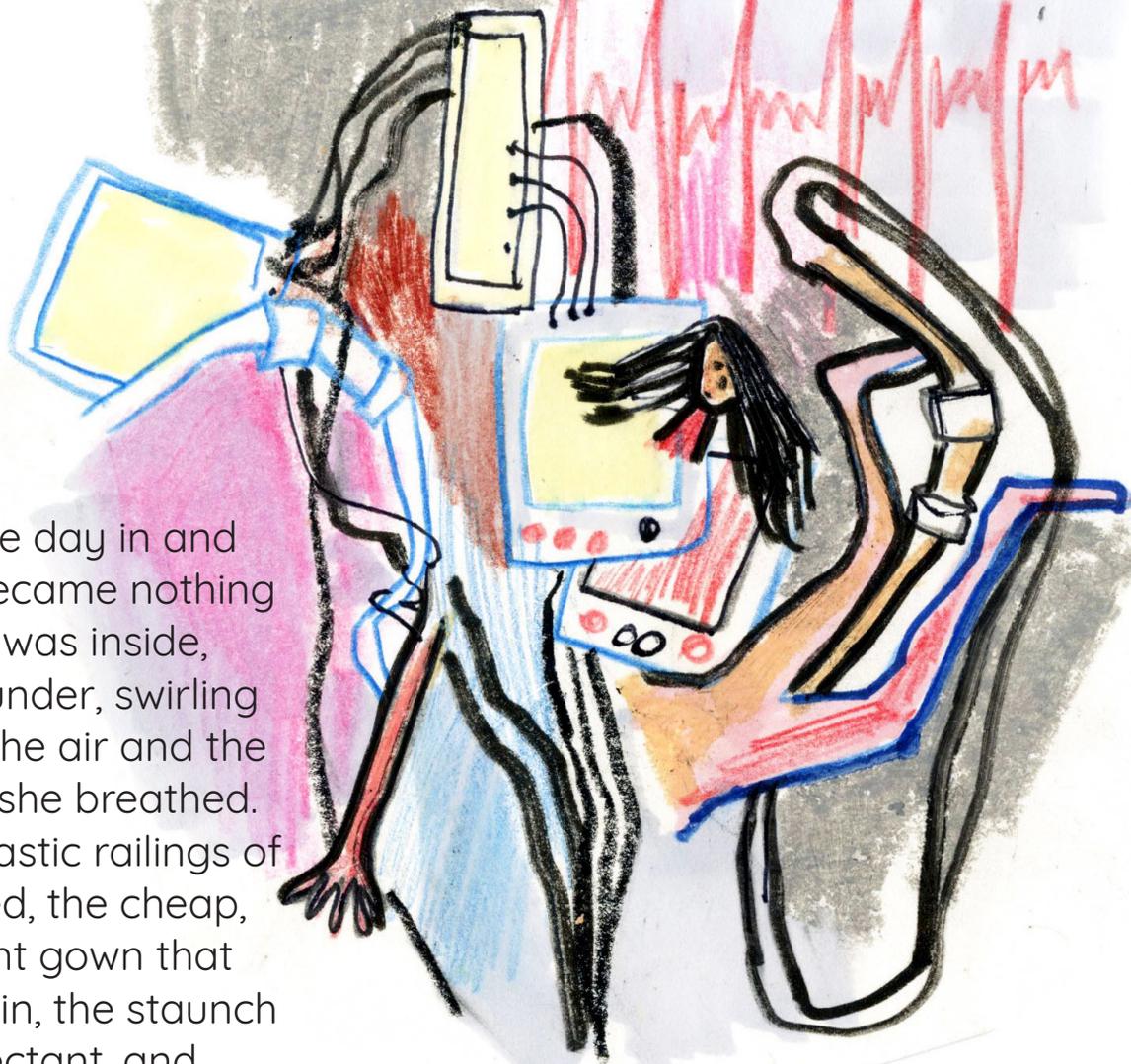
out....

in...

out....

in...

As she lay there day in and day out, she became nothing but the pain. It was inside, outside, over, under, swirling around her in the air and the materials that she breathed. It was in the plastic railings of her hospital bed, the cheap, 50-thread count gown that touched her skin, the staunch smell of disinfectant, and the shallow whispers of her breath. In and out, in and out, in and out.



The machines and their chatter didn't help.

The constant soft blips rung in her ears, each beep penetrating deeper into her awareness.

They spoke a language that was foreign to her.

She was
alone.

Elena was very sick.

Her doctor told her that morning that the treatment had stopped working. She could choose a more aggressive, experimental treatment with little proof of effectiveness or come to terms with her situation.

She was lost and shrinking as she melted into that ugly, plastic curtain that stared back at her.

Who was she
before this
pain?



Then one night, in the middle of a couple hours of an unusual silence, she heard a soft whisper of music.

She slipped into another world.



Maybe it was a mixture of medicine, lower than average pain, and a bit of chance, but

Elena swears it was the music.

The harmony weaved the madness together and supported her journey to this strange, soft space.

Here, her aura had room to breathe and the things around her listened to and understood her.

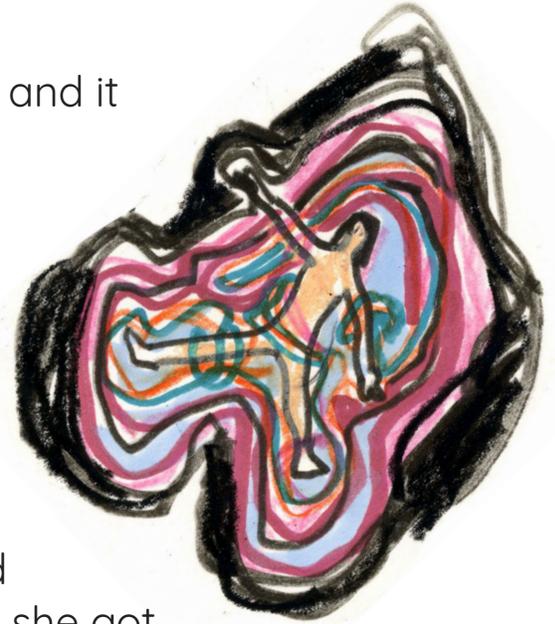
She understood them too.

The curtains around her were like a familiar faded blanket. The one she used to care for Ana as an infant.

She sunk into it and it sunk into her.

It smelled like home.

On the bedside lay a rosary that her mother had given her when she got married. Elena never considered herself a religious person, but for some strange reason it made her connected and safe.

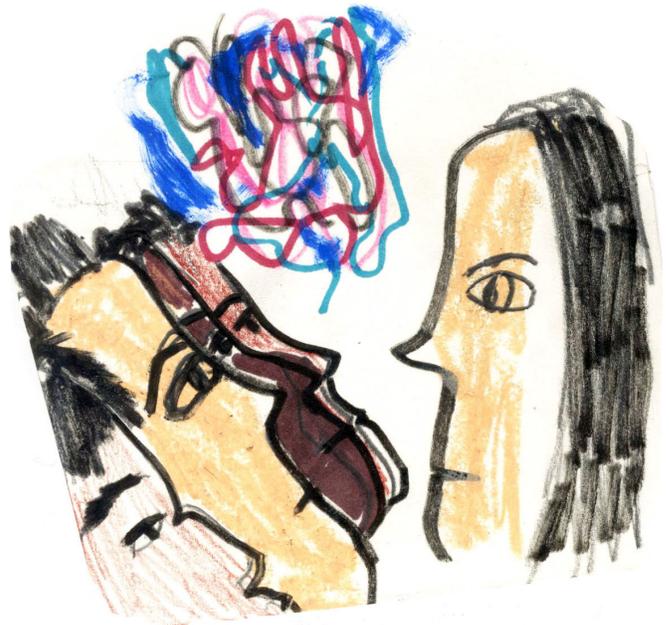


Behind the music was laughter, familiar voices, touching, and being together. They were with her, yet kept their distance. Somehow, they knew she wanted more than anything to be alone. Things were changing and she needed space.

The people were like stones that were shaped by her chaotic change.

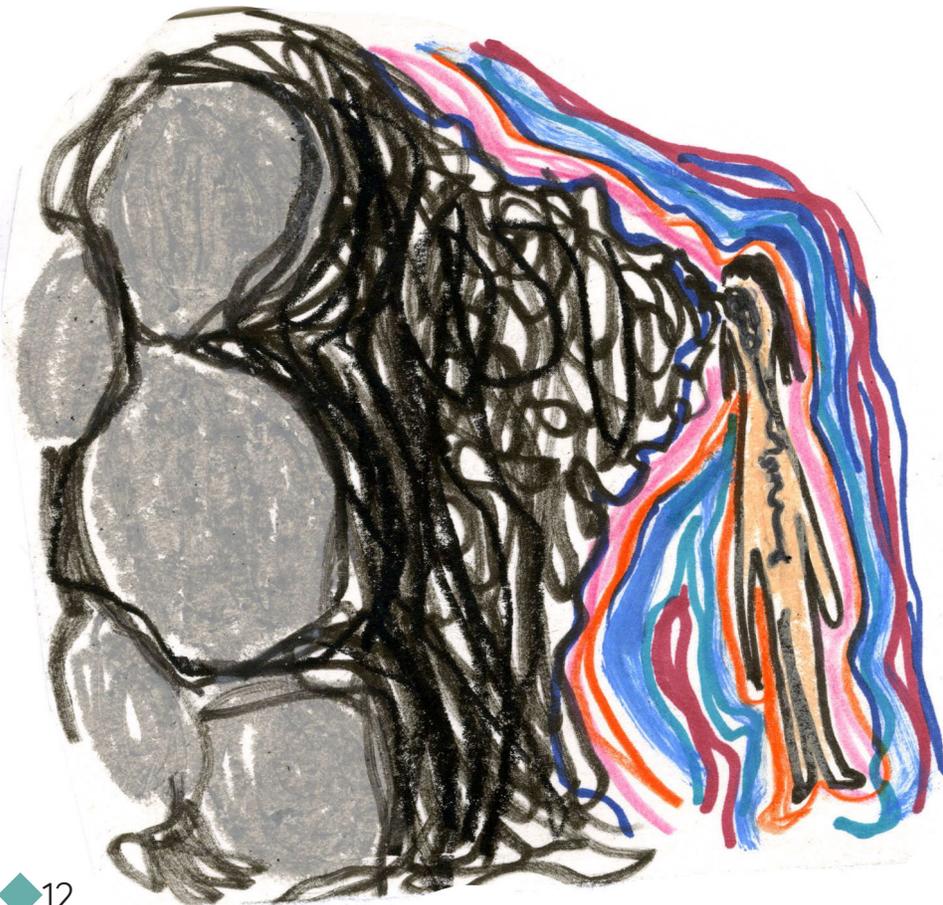
This chaos that she didn't understand within herself, they took in, absorbed and allowed it to change them.

Then they just looked at the things left in the space between them.



They sat present in the
middle of swirling minds and
worlds, and

Elena felt alive.



I'm sorry.
I forgive you.
Thank you.
I love you.

How does our sensory experience affect pain at the end of life?

How might you change your environment and presence to create a space of sanctuary for you and your loved one?

Use this booklet to get started.

