

# Family vows to replace grandmother's vandalized memorial tree

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"April is Cancer Awareness Month and given how my mother suffered and died, I, along with our children, are especially aware and deeply hurt by this selfish, abhorrent act."

Aziz said her husband purchased the tree for her on Mother's Day 2012, the first Mother's Day after Mandalfino's death.

Aziz's family made arrangements with the Town for the tree to be planted in Esplanade Park and for a plaque to be added bearing Mandalfino's name.

Aziz said that plaque identifying the tree as a memorial tree was clearly visible when she found the branches had been cut off the tree.

What bothers Aziz most is how much effort appears to have gone into the vandalism.

She said the branches were not simply broken off in a spur of the moment action.

Instead someone sawed off nearly all the tree's branches leaving only what amounts to one long stick in the ground.

Aziz said her mother has no grave and as such the tree has become a place where her family can go and remember her.



From left, Emily Aziz, Halle Mandalfino, 12, Lauren Mandalfino, 14, Charlotte Aziz, 16, Anne Aziz, Tina Mandalfino, and Jonathon Mandalfino, 12, are upset after someone vandalized their grandmother's memorial tree in Esplanade Park.

photo by Nikki Wesley - Oakville Beaver

## To the person responsible...

To the person (s) responsible for the destruction of the branches our grandmother's memorial tree:

We would like to tell you a little about her. Bernadette Mandalfino (née Quinn) was a vibrant, beautiful, much-loved mother of six and grandmother of 16 when she was stricken with advanced lymphoma at the young age of 77.

Like all challenges in her life, Nana met her final and biggest one with great dignity. She lived out each of her days with laughter and enthusiasm and endless hope, and surrendered with grace to God's will in the end.

Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Nana emigrated on her own at the age of 21, enthusiastic to start her new life in Canada. A classically-trained ballroom dancer, she met Anthony Mandalfino at The Palais Royale in Toronto.

They were married in 1958 and filled the modest house they built in Burlington with love, laughter, and six children. Nana raised a doctor, a teacher, a designer, a horse trainer and two custom builders and she was enormously proud of each of them.

*Sadly, and suddenly, our grandfather died in 1997. At that time, they already had nine grandchildren. Seven more followed.*

*Nana dedicated her life to her family and was able to enjoy a special relationship with each of her 16 grandchildren individually. She travelled with us, cheered our accomplishments, attended all of our dance and music recitals, hockey and football games as well as a great number of school events. She never missed. She could always be counted on.*

*Nana knew all the words to the songs of the Disney musicals and sang them with unyielding enthusiasm. She never learned how to read music, but could play pretty well anything by ear on the piano. She was a proud Canadian, honest, true and ethical beyond reproach. She was adored by many and much loved by us. We miss her everyday.*

*For Mother's Day our father presented our mother with the gift of a memorial tree dedicated to Nana.*

*Mom was deeply touched and so pleased that we could see new life spring from our great loss.*

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Last Christmas, Aziz said, she and her family walked to the tree, hung small photos of each of them on the branches and said a prayer.

In their grief, Mandalfino's grandchildren have wrote a letter to the vandal.

In it, they note their grandmother immigrated to Canada from Northern Ireland at age 21, that she was a classically-trained ballroom dancer and that she met her husband Anthony Mandalfino at the Palais Royale in Toronto.

"She knew all the words to the songs of the Disney musicals and sang them with unyielding enthusiasm. She never learned how to read music, but could play pretty well anything by ear on the piano. She was a proud Canadian, honest, true and ethical beyond reproach. She was adored by many and much loved by us. We miss her every day," the grandchildren wrote.

"What once helped to ease our suffering now stands stripped of any side branches... a single

stick in the air. We simply cannot fathom how anyone could do this to our grandmother's tree. Our hearts are broken and we thought you should know about our Nana and the love she so abundantly shared."

The Town of Oakville's Director of Parks and Open Space Chris Mark confirmed the removal of the branches was not routine pruning undertaken by Town employees and was done without the consent of the Town.

"The Town continues to investigate the incident to ensure the family's concerns are addressed in preserving the memory of their loved one," said Mark.

According to the grandchildren's letter, the family intends to have the tree replaced.

The grandchildren are calling on whoever cut the branches to take responsibility for their actions and donate to the Canadian Cancer Society.

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