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Memoir
English 2010/ Section 70
9/10/12

It was several years ago that I witnessed an experience that positively changed my outlook on life. This experience took place while visiting a hospital where I waited for my grandpa as he underwent extensive open heart surgery. The procedure was done to remove plaque buildup from the inner walls of his major coronary arteries. On a variety of occasions I have found myself in a hospital. Some of these visits included spending time with family members and friends who welcomed new babies into their families. Other times it was a trip to the emergency room when my sister cracked her head open on a metal bar at the public swimming pool, and then my own surgery to fix a tear in my lower abdominal wall. However, none of my experiences, whether positive or negative, affected me as deeply as this specific visit to the hospital. The experience with my grandfather helped me gain greater compassion for those around me, knowledge of the importance of living a healthy lifestyle, and greater understanding of the fragility of life.

My grandpa is a remarkable individual. I admire his sense of humor and love for Perry Mason episodes. You can often find him seated on the front porch watching jets from the military base fly over head. In the last decade my grandpa's health declined when he was diagnosed with diabetes. Because of his diabetes and lack of healthy eating habits, plaque buildup resulted in my grandpa going in for open heart surgery.

It was a cold beautiful morning when my mother and I made the drive from West Jordan, Utah to the hospital in Clearfield. The roads looked like they had been covered with a thin sheet of glass after the morning rain. The sun was just peering over the mountain tops and the world

dazzled as tiny drops of rain glistened on the car windows. It seemed like the perfect morning and the start of a perfect day, except for the fact that I was going to the hospital. Something about going to the hospital today made me feel uneasy. I did not know what to expect.

We finally reached the hospital and my mother made her way through the crowded parking lot. We quickly found a parking spot and headed inside. As I entered through the large glass doors I immediately remembered why I disliked coming to the hospital. It was the smell. It was a rather sickly and clean smell combination of latex gloves, hand sanitizer, and blood – scents that made me feel nauseous. I tried to hold my breath as my mother and I made our way to the information desk in search directions to the waiting area for post surgery patients. The lady at the front desk kindly pointed us in the right direction and we continued down a large hallway. We passed a few hospital patients walking down the hall. All were dressed in the same blue hospital gown. Some were seated in wheel chairs and others were walking down the hall with IV bags and oxygen tanks strolling behind them. I felt sad for these individuals. I thought to myself what it might be like to live in a hospital, not able to leave because you are too sick. These thoughts filled my mind as we entered through another set of doors into a large waiting area. I looked around and scanned my surroundings. I noticed a few other people scattered about the room seated in chairs along the walls. My eyes rested on a woman reading a magazine in the corner of the large room. It was my grandma. I could not help but notice the weariness in her eyes and the worried look on her face. At that moment she looked up at us and a warm smile quickly spread across her face. The tired and worried expression disappeared. I walked forward as she stood to envelope me in a hug.

After three hours a nurse came out from behind another set of white doors letting us know that my grandpa had just come out of surgery and we could see him for a few minutes. She

directed us through several hallways and into another large room where my grandpa lay almost motionless.

I watched as my grandpa slowly opened his eyes. Another nurse was trying to position him comfortably on the bed, while another was holding a type of compressor up to his mouth. The special instrument was used specifically for open heart patients, to fill their lungs with air and cause them to cough up any extra fluid. The procedure was obviously a painful one, as my grandpa groaned and writhed in discomfort.

I felt sick and light headed. "*Come on Deanna, get a hold of yourself*" I thought. The nurse continued and I physically began to hurt. In that moment I felt like I was stepping into my grandfather's shoes, feeling what he was feeling, struggling myself to breathe normally as he gasped for air. Tears came to my eyes as I realized how helpless I was to take away my grandpa's pain. I couldn't stand being there anymore. I needed to leave. Seeing someone in pain (especially a loved one) was too much to bear and I quickly exited the room.

Entering the hallway I sat down in the nearest chair. The image of my grandpa in pain flashed over and over in my mind. I began to think about all the times I had witnessed someone in terrible pain. I couldn't think of anything that compared to what I had just seen. I wanted to do something; I wanted to help, but I knew that physical pain was something only the individual experiencing it could fully appreciate.

Throughout the day, I reflected on the things I saw – from sick patients wandering the halls to my grandpa in the recovery room – and I remembered from each encounter I learned an important life lesson and developed greater understanding. The patients from the hallways left a lasting impression upon me. I felt a deep compassion for each of them as I thought of what they

might be feeling in their varied circumstances. I wanted to help them even though they were only strangers to me.

My grandpa's health history greatly contributed to his eventual open heart surgery, a surgery that I never want to experience. From watching my grandpa's struggle with his health, I learned the importance of living a healthy lifestyle. By starting to develop healthy habits now I am taking preventive measures to stay healthy in the future. An important and final lesson I gained is an appreciation for life. Although my grandpa did recover, I realized how fragile life is. We never know when our life will end and I need to live my life in a way that if I die tomorrow, I can say that I lived my life to its fullest.