

A Time to Grow

I lay stretched out on the dock feeling the warmth of the sun scorch my body. Thankfully, there was a slight breeze sending a mist from the lake to cool me down. I looked as relaxed as any suntan lotion-nosed vacationer could be. This week in Hayward, Wisconsin, had been as relaxing and enjoyable as ever; however, today there was what felt like a tug of war game going on in my stomach, for something just didn't feel right. Suddenly my cell phone rang, and it was as eerie as a dark Halloween night, sending a shock through my entire body.

"Get home now. Your dad is about to go in for surgery, and it doesn't look good," said my mom in such an uneasy tone that I could hear the tears in her voice. My mom told me he had developed an infection in his lungs from an unknown source. The doctors had already tried to go in between his lungs with a syringe to get some of the fluid out, but one of his lungs collapsed. I felt my head start to spin with questions. My dad had never been sick in his life, and I had just seen him before I had left to come up here. How on earth could he go from being perfectly healthy to lying on his death bed in such a short period of time?

She also told me that my dad wanted more than anything to see me before he went under the knife, but I was three hours away, and he had to go in now. Sitting in the truck on the way home was a daze. Looking out the window, I saw everything whizzing by. I felt like I was on a merry-go-round and there was no stopping the ride. I felt trapped in a steel-framed, leather-seated, four wheeled cell. My stomach felt even worse now, like it does after eating too much on Thanksgiving Day. My palms were sweaty and my body was trembling with fear. I was a prisoner of my own thoughts. What would I do without him? I'm only a child. I need him to be there for me whenever I'm feeling lost, filling me with words of wisdom. I need him to protect me, watch out for me, and guide me through this crazy road we call life. I'm not ready to do it on my own.

Upon my arrival at the hospital, I felt like I was walking into a war zone. The automatic doors quickly swooshed open, pulling me in without will and closing behind me as if I couldn't escape my fate. The stale, sickly smell of the building was nauseating. I walked alone through the hallway, and it seemed as bustling with activity as a New York sidewalk. I reached the elevators only to have them open and what seemed like a thousand people flood out. I shuffled in, and it was as cramped as a can of sardines. No where to go, no where to hide. The movement of the elevator was quick as lightning, for I only had to go to the second floor, and the sudden halt made my heart skip a beat. The doors opened once again, and I pushed my way through the crowd and then stood alone in the hallway as the elevator moved to the next floor without me.

Alone, confused, and scared, I followed the signs to the waiting room. As I inched closer and closer, I could faintly begin to hear my family member's voices. I peaked my head around the corner, almost like a spy, and I could see my dad's parents, his sister, my mom and my little sister. They were all apprehensively chatting in a corner. I took a deep breath, fought back the flood of emotions going on behind my eyes, and stepped in. One by one they turned their heads toward me and the chatting gradually quieted. Instantly, I felt like I was on center stage with nothing on but my underwear. After the brief pause, which seemed to last an eternity, my mom came up to me and hugged me. Soon after, my entire family was as busy as traffic during rush hour filling me in on the details of the terrifying day.

The main narrator of the day's events was my Aunt Carol. She talked as fast as a tornado sweeping up a town. I couldn't focus in on what she was saying. I felt overwhelmed with information. I did however, learn that he was still in surgery and the last update they had received was that he was doing fine, but the doctors couldn't assure them he was going to make it through.

I felt a bit relieved sitting there in the cramped room with my family. There were people everywhere fighting for chairs. There was a desk in the far corner of the room and a nurse was stationed here. She sat there patiently, waiting for the phone to ring. Whenever it did the room would grow silent, and she would talk in a whisper to the doctor on the other end. She would then walk over to the family of the patient the call was about and give them an update.

There was a clock on the wall just above the nurse's desk. I sat there sharing a chair with my little sister, and we watched the sluggish hand of the clock. Just then the nurse's phone rang and an overwhelming sense came over me. This time the call must be about my dad. My sister must have had the same feeling because her cold, shaky hand reached out and grabbed a hold of mine. I looked over at my fifteen year old sister. Her mascara was smeared all over her face and down her red button nose. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the wrinkly, hunched over nurse walking our way. As she drew closer and closer, my heart began to flutter. The rapid beating of my heart caused my hands to tremble with anxiousness. My cheeks were growing warmer and warmer as if I were sitting in an oven. A cool drop of sweat began to dribble down my forehead.

As she made the last few steps toward us, the tension started to grow thick like the jungle greens. She began to speak, and her voice was as sweet as a morning dove's song. Her words sung of rejoicing news. Dad had made it through the surgery and was in the recovery room, so we could go and see him in an hour. It was like the clouds had opened up on a stormy day to make way for the rejuvenating sun. I didn't know whether or not to cry, but I couldn't control the tears any longer. The tears started to flood my face and began to cool it down completely. I was tense and thrilled at the same time, as if it were the first day of the school year.

An hour later, my family and I walked hastily through the hallway making our way to his room. The hospital's policy was to go in groups of three to see him, so my mom, my little sister, and I went first. Holding hands we staggered through the door, and we saw the once big, strong, teddy bear of a dad connected to a fury of tubes. He was as fragile and dependent as a baby, for he needed a machine to fill his own lungs in and out with air. As frightening as it should have been, there was a different atmosphere in the dark room, for it was an atmosphere of joy and love. He had made it. His immune system and the surgery had defeated the infection in his lungs.

An overwhelming feeling came upon me like the wind filling a ship's sails. My mind began to process all of the day's events as quickly as a race car speeding around a track. I reached through the mess of wires, and I held his cold lifeless hand. This was supposed to be my protector from things like the boogie man and boys, but here he was in a drug induced coma, unable to protect me and comfort me through my pain. It was then that I came to the realization that it was time for me to grow up. For once in my life, I had to be my dad's supporter, encourager, and source of guidance and comfort. Our roles of parent and child were unquestionably changed, but in a good way. He needed me now more than ever, so there I was holding his hand and telling him everything would be ok. I was finally giving back and not receiving, something every parent tries to teach their child. I was beginning to learn a life lesson that I would undoubtedly carry with me forever.

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