

Love's Light In Dark Days

Death reared its ugly head when I was nineteen years old. I watched my grandmother suffering through a heart attack, struggling to breathe, and fighting for her life. Death's day finally came, and we got word that she had passed away.

She died at her home, but not without a 2+-year fight for life. A massive heart attack had first confined her to her deathbed. I was seventeen, scared of sick people, hospitals, and death. I wasn't scared of the people, but I was scared of the sickness and death. I did not know how to act around people that were suffering. There was nothing I could do to make them better.

So you can imagine how quietly I sat in the corner of the hospital room, while the other family talked with grandmother. I would only walk forward to take her hand and say hello, and again to say goodbye. Her eyes are burned into my memory. They had so much life in them. They cried out in protest against her dying body, "I am alive, I am here, do not look at me as one who is sick or dead!"

I did not realize it at the time, but that was certainly the message that was in her eyes. For just a moment when I shook her hand, and she smiled in greeting or in farewell, I saw my grandmother as the person she was, and not as the "dying grandmother" that struck fear in my heart.

Eventually she was released from the hospital and allowed to return home. I would visit only when required or suggested by my family. But gradually something changed. Somewhere along the way my visits increased, and I went alone. Without anyone else to talk, but the two of us, awkward silence sometimes kept us company. Yet as time went on there was more to talk about than the pictures she had on the wall, the flowers that were in her room, and the great number of well-wishing cards strung up for her to view. We talked about my days at work, we talked about the work she used to do on the farm. We talked about church, her experience in the Amish church, and her

dad's decision to split with them on the issue of shunning. We talked about family history, and about the stories that she had published. I was amazed to learn how sharp her mind was on remembering dates and events

in our family's distant history. We laughed together. We prayed together. She always thanked me for leading in prayer before we said goodbye. She usually cried.

One day I held her hand and prayed for her, doubting if she could hear a word. Her heart was failing again, and my eyes poured out a steady stream as I pleaded with

God for mercy and comfort as she walked through the valley of the shadow of death. I left after seeing grandpa sitting beside her, holding her hand, as she struggled to breathe. That picture is burned deep into my soul, and the caption reads "A Love that Endures."

Imagine the hour of death—Satan's time to muster all the despair, fear, and loneliness he can and sweep in like a flood against the afflicted. Imagine the power of love—someone is with you, you are not alone, you are cared for, you are prayed for, the angels of heaven are ready to welcome you.

When the news came that grandma had died, I had no regrets. Every hour that I spent with her became a cherished memory. My heart was full with love for her, and this caused deep pain, but the pain was worth the friendship. Love is knowing that you are not alone, and that someone wants to be with you, and I had a chance to share that with my grandmother in her last years of life.

If you know someone suffering or limited near the end of their life, go spend some time with them. Let them know the love of Christ in their darkest days, and you will find that your own heart will be brighter from the experience. **BB**

TEEN TALK

WITH GUEST WRITER
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