

NIGHTINGALE SONGS

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He Touched Me

There was so much pain in his face as he sat there waiting for the results of his chest x-ray. I asked him if I could get him some water for his cough and the tickle in his throat. He said, "No"...that "it wouldn't help." After a few moments of silence he told me that he had AIDS and was worried about having pneumonia.

The tickle in his throat became a lump in mine! We were two strangers who suddenly would share some precious time together. As we waited for the results, we talked of matters so personal — so important — so intimate — so real. It was as if he knew that I would understand, no matter what he told me.

We talked about things that people who have known each other for some time have difficulty talking about. In today's world it is sometimes easier to talk about sexual activity than it is to share feelings about true intimacy — cuddling — holding on to each other — fears of suffering — and the very real fright of imminent death. We talked about being there as a support for someone else — and how at times we had to stop that other-mindedness and find ourselves.

He had been in a support group because he believed that he had much to give others. His confrontation with AIDS led him through the various stages — denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. The acceptance seems to have lasted and has permeated all his relationships — including those with family and friends. Once they could get over the shedding of tears and their fear of talking about that killer virus, then they could get on with living. Oh, there would always be moments when he needed to be held or to have a shoulder on which to cry — but those were now only a part of his life — not the entire focus.

So, that evening, behind the closed door of an

emergency room, we held each other! My shoulder was blessed with his tears and we communicated in a silent hug — an embrace of our spirits. We each gave. We each received. We are each the better for that sharing.

We talked about a scripture reading I had recently heard in church. In it Elijah confronts the death of a child by laying on top of that child — by opening his arms in an embrace and hugging death — that which he could not understand but did not deny. He breathed his very spirit into that child's body and gave life to it. In our own lives, we, too must embrace suffering with open arms. Make it part of ourselves, and absorb the sorrow. Only then can we give meaning to those lives and support to the hurting.

I first learned about that lesson years ago in nursing school. My instructors were always concerned because I got "too involved." I "cared too much." She said it would be detrimental to my emotional health.

So, I tried not to care as deeply — to be superficial — to take care of the hurt without feeling it with my patient. And, that most definitely was detrimental to my emotional and spiritual health.

I went back to not only feeling their hurt, but to embracing it. And I never even knew about Elijah! Somehow the Lord has taught me what I needed to know — and has given me the grace to feel this way even after 25 years!

My patient's chest x-ray was free of pneumonia. The doctor gave him an antibiotic and a cough suppressant.

I gave him a hug, a shoulder and a blessing. He gave me much more.....

Patricia Carroll Oetting

AN OLD WOMAN'S PRAYER

Dear God

My hands are old and wrinkled
my hair is thin and white
my legs are thin, tired and weak
and my joints all ache.

But

My eyes still see
my smile still charms
my mind is alive and
my heart still loves

Today

I soared above the earth
looked down and saw my course
smooth turns, rugged turns,
pain, mist and sunshine.

Yesterday

was not in vain
I was, I gave
I lived, I loved
I still am.

Naomi Poston

THE CARING SENSE

You see me blossom in your care

The loving caring action that speaks
in all languages.

Our eyes meet and we are one in spirit and soul...

You hear my cry, whether silent or loud.

And you are there to lift spirits, courage
and to be proud,

For we have shared our interconnecting hands...

You smell the many fragrances

of our mixed bouquet.

The hours, the days, the weeks and still you stay

For we have soldered our relationship
forever and a day...

You feel many moods,

some soft, some hard.

~~You feel my skin, my bones, my soul~~

As we share the secrets never to be told...

Patricia Dittman

LOVE IS A SMALL SPOON

I look at a tiny frame 93 years of age, (and much less in pounds) curled up in the same position as in the womb, and I wonder, dear Lord...what goes through her mind?

She's unable to speak, and so weak she can hardly move.

She **DEPENDS**

on those of us around her
to meet her needs.

She gets something to drink when I offer it,
something to eat when I feed her.

She gets turned when I turn her
bathed when I wash her.

Ah, yes, she **DEPENDS**, Lord,
on those of us around her.

She's fortunate, this little lady, that those who tend to her needs really love her. I've been told she loves mashed potatoes and hates spinach...and told definitely to use a small spoon, please!

This frail frame, almost lost in the bedsheets, will only be with us for a short while...then she'll be back at the nursing home with those who know about small spoons and mashed potatoes.

~~But I still wonder what goes through her mind! Does she pray? Does she talk with You, Lord? She'll have to DEPEND on You, oh Lord, for You are around her more than anyone. I know she'll do fine...because You know all about mashed potatoes and small spoons...but more importantly,~~

You know how to nourish her and care for her, and give what she needs most!

All this reminds me dear Lord, of how I must **DEPEND** on **YOU!** for my likes and for my needs!

You feed me with the Eucharist and Your Scripture...(much better than mashed potatoes).

I thank You Lord,
for feeding me when You choose...and not giving me spinach too often.

I thank You Lord,
for allowing me just to be still...curled up under the sheets when I need to rest...and waiting for You to "move me".

I thank you, most of all Lord
for that loving touch ...that knows the unique me so well; that knows how to feed me with a small spoon!

I am truly grateful...

Bless my 93 year old patient, Lord.

Bless me....

Patricia Carroll Oetting

A CRY FOR CATHY

Hopes and dreams we carried
of a daughter grown and married,
of grandchildren on bended knee
of retirement to live with glee.
On an icy December day,
hopes and dreams were shattered,
our daughter torn and battered.
Now instead of teaching grandchildren
to walk, to talk, to watch the turtles,
we teach her to crawl, to speak,
to leap over small hurdles.
Hopes and dreams anew,
replaced those of shatter.
Through it all, God held our hand,
and was the Footsteps in the sand.

Alma Harrell

A CALL FROM CATHY

They say I had an accident
An incident I do not recall.
I cannot speak, I cannot call,
But I can hear and think.
Do they not know I need a drink?
some talk to me as if a baby,
But I think I was eighteen when I came.
Oh, nurse, I wish I could remember your name.
You care, you dare, to speak for me.
You told them Mom and Dad were willing
To learn all to set me free.
You dared, you cared.
I can hear, I can think.
Nurse, you know I need a drink.

AVE MARIA and THERAPEUTIC TOUCH FOR DAVID

"David, let me know your pain;
From fractured leg and heart,
Share with me your private hell..
Next to one who's far,
Far away in his own world:
Moaning, crying, weak.
What's it like to lie beside
One who cannot speak?

"Tell me David, what you do
To cancel out the sound;
Eliminate the smell of dung
In which your roommate's found?
Who can you complain about?
Are you worse off than he?
Tied to IV, traction lines
You cannot be free.

"David, I can see your pain.
Tell me where you are.
Tied in bed. Powerless.
From loved ones you're apart.

I can't move you from this place
To take your pain away.
But let me lay my hands on you
And sing to you today. "

*Ave Maria, gracias plena
Maria, gracias plena.
Ave dominus, dominus tecum.
Benedica tu in mulieribus.
Et benedictus
Et benedictus, fructus ventris;
Ventrus tui, Jesu.
Ave Maria*

I sang the song he loved and used
To meditate and flee,
Escape tormenting stimuli.
He needed to be freed,
To understand why he must bear
This trial, this hell, this pain,
I sang the tune; I touched with care
To give him peace again.

Michele Stobie

*"Precious gift
is given thee"
A Mother births, a Child is born
The Gift of Life, a mother's song
Another song, a child's cry
Echoes down eternity.*

*All the while, awaiting still,
Revealing God's unerring will
The changing/changelessness of Life
Revealed in Jubilation / strife
Of human ken, yet more divine
Embrace in Love, this work of
Thine.*

Chris Malmgreen

Why do I do this?

Why do I do this?
I have my own son
Six years old
Can't walk or talk.
I thought I had no more tears
But look at this child!
Nine months
Inside the barroom
Of her mother's womb,
Treated to Seagram's gin,
Marlboros, and who knows
What drugs.
Although her mother,
Grinning there,
Rotted stumps of teeth,
Says "no"

Do not believe her.
Where is my compassion now?
Oh, child!
Your arms uplifted
Pull at me and I sink
Down beside you
My pounding heart full
Against the weakness of your
own.

I want to merge the two.
Mother, care for yourself,
This child.
Come, take my hand.
I will show you
Why I do this.

Sanford M. Russell

From The Editors

The purpose of this publication is to create a forum for nurses to share their silent moments of reflection on their nursing. We intend that nurses who write for these pages will both offer and receive encouragement and support for the love of nursing.

NIGHTINGALE SONGS is free to be used by nurses and for nursing. We encourage the copying and sharing of its contents; there is no protection by copyright. We will print only stories which have been signed and submitted by the authors. We plan to publish one issue each season.

Some readers have responded with financial support for future issues. We appreciate this assistance and ask that checks be made to one of us since we are avoiding the expense of a special account. We invite your continuing responses to this forum and encourage your contributions to these pages.

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YOUR LETTERS

From Pembroke Pines, FL:
"It's heartening to know that ...the beauty and gifts we receive in life are still actualized. There are so many among us who can't see the daily magic in the sunrise and the sweet bloomings of our everyday life. It is a special thing to be able to share with those who do!"

From Brooklyn, N.Y.:
"What a welcome opportunity, to receive your publication with words describing sacred moments, that I too have known."

From Rochester, N.Y.:
"I'm currently on a planning committee for a Caring Conference... During one of our planning meetings, we read a poem from your publication."

From Mesa, AR:
"The stories and poems...touched my heart and brought tears to my eyes."

From Ottawa, Canada:
I am very interested in reading more from nurses, like Gayle Maxwell, who truly value their professional experiences with their patients."

From Gainesville, FL:
"It's energizing to read about nurses' love of nursing!"

From Margate, FL:
"enables nurses to...bring their reflections, emotions and passion for the field of nursing."

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