

The Unexpected Gift

By Maria Houston

The day my child was diagnosed with a medical condition I was given a gift. Deep within the tragedy of this news was a passport. The labels attached to my child's medical files allowed me to enter new worlds. Sitting in the waiting rooms of medical facilities I now was face to face with people's suffering.



I always knew some children battled chronic illnesses and disabilities. I knew unforeseen tragedies could change the trajectory of a family's future. But since I never knew anyone who fought these battles it was easy for me to forget it existed. Now I had a front row seat to people's pain.

In the waiting room, mother after mother told me their story. Some sat down next to me. Others stood in a line in front of my chair, waiting to speak to me. They just want someone to listen. Someone who might care. For some reason they are drawn to my face. And for some reason my heart is ready to listen.

Next to me I see a mom kissing the face of a child. Over and over again she lovingly kisses his face. He is a boy of three years. A boy without words. A boy who may never take a step or say a sentence. She tells me a breath at birth caused his waste to fill his lungs. Four minutes of oxygen deprivation left him in a state that years of therapy could never reverse.

In the hallway, I see a young man in a wheel chair. His mom tells me he was once a normal teen getting ready for college. A simple fall now leaves him paralyzed. He groans to be heard. He was once destined for a different life. Now he sits.

In front of me sits a young girl in a wheel chair. She sits there beautifully with a heart of an angel. Her grandmother sees the girl that is trapped inside. She desperately wants us to see the same girl she does. She combs the girl's hair, paints her nails, stretches her tight fingers, and speaks to this child the Lord has created. They quietly discuss cartoons, stories, music. They smile together. Giggle. Love is in their faces. Satan has not robbed their joy.

Our conversations are interrupted. Before us is a teenage son, learning to walk in a physical therapy apparatus. He slowly takes steps, his body supported by the machine. His dad is walking beside him, clapping with joy, and tears streaming down his face. He is laughing with delight.

Patient after patient fill the hallway. Every story is different but the pain is a common thread between families. Tumors, cancers, strokes, syndromes, accidents. Each robbing lives like an unwanted intruder. All that is left is broken pieces from the break in.

I noticed when people are in these devastating situations they either go one of two ways. They choose to stay in anguish or they choose to experience joy. It is easy to understand why a family would choose the former. The pain is overwhelming. Their situation is unending. Their lives are forever changed. Those mothers' stories are filled with anger, regret, bitterness, jealousy, and sadness. They are trapped in pain.

But then there were other mothers. Mothers who chose joy. They are still in pain but they were determined to never let their pain overcome them. They chose to focus on triumphs, look for God's hand, be thankful for provisions. They chose to look for beauty in the ashes.

I grasp my child's tiny hand and together we walk out of the building. I thank God for His mercies and for trusting me with these stories. I thank Him for opening my eyes to a community that most people never see. A community that I am proud to be part of.