

A Smile That Gave Life

I try to always remember the positive side of the situation, think of the happiness I experienced during those days, and forget the suffering. A few months ago, I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. It was Saturday, nine in the morning. For days, I had been getting headaches unable to resist. In my tears hid pain and frustration; the frustration of not being able to have control over my own body's form of expression. The headaches had just become too much to handle so I decided that the hospital was my only solution. I will never forget the doctor's chap, peach lips mouth,

“We just found a brain tumor, and it's too late to treat it. I'm so sorry! I don't know how many days you have left.”

The news changed me, destroyed me, and burned my insides at that moment. As I crossed out more days on the calendar, though, the symptoms got worse. My eyes would twitch; my arms and legs began jerking at any hour of the day. I spent days running to the bathroom at any moment to vomit. I'd forget where something I had placed away five minutes before was. At times, I couldn't hear anything. All I'd hear was a loud bee in my ear. I wasn't going to let that stop me.

I studied at New York University, won a full scholarship. All my life, I had tried to be a great student, for NYU had always been my dream. I tried to always have an extremely high GPA, behave well, enough to have the teachers want to adopt me, fill my schedule with extracurricular activities, and did community service on the weekends. Community service wasn't something I forced myself to do; I loved it. When I finally realized and accepted my end was near, I decided to do hospice, be there with those suffering from a terminal disease. If I was able to make someone's last days of life a little happier, it would bring me the joy I needed to die in peace.

During the time I spent doing hospice, I met Charley, the eleven year old that convinced me to **really** live my last few days.

Monday, I opened the door to Charley's room and smiled.

“Hi, I'm Nicole!” I told him with enthusiasm.

“I'm Charley! Nice to meet you,” he responded.

Charley's parents gave him up for adoption when he was born, but was never adopted. A few months before I met him, he found out he had an awful case of tuberculosis. Yet, he was one of the happiest persons I had ever met. We became very close during the weeks we spent together. We both loved ice cream and candy passionately. Every time I paid him a visit I would bring ice cream with caramel, our favorite topping, and candy: gummy worms, gummy bears, and sour patch kids. We would both get a massive sugar rush and spent most of our time laughing, making jokes or blabbing things that made no sense.

"Grrr! The gummy bear monster is going to eat you!" He'd say laughing.

"Aahhhh! Help! Help! I don't want to be eaten!" I'd reply, holding a sour patch kid in my hand.

"No fear! Gummy worm is here!" Charley would say in a super hero tone.

"Oh, but wait! There is a twist in the story. I'm the antagonist, and will eat all of you," I would respond in an accent, as I put a handful of candy in my mouth. We would both begin to laugh and stuff ourselves with ice cream.

We played competitive games of monopoly, sorry, and scrabble. We played poker—he'd always win. He was a clever young boy, and great at hiding the cards he had. He was truly a shark. He told me about his life, his disease, how he felt. He was the only person I felt that really listened to me. As more days passed, the weaker he'd feel, the weaker I'd feel.

I never gave up on college. I spent nights were I'd sleep at three in the morning either studying for tests or writing ten page essays. Charley was always there to help me study. He would test me. I failed a lot of tests, but passed triple that number thanks to him.

"Alright, name the different parts of the human body," he stated.

"Ugh! I don't know! There are too many!" I'd respond, and we would start laughing hysterically.

One of the many times I failed a test, I went to him crying,

"I really just want to give up. I mean, I'm sick, dying, I'm not supposed to be going through this stress. I failed this with a fifty nine percent!"

"No! Nicole, don't say that! That's not the sister I know, I love, I admire. You can't put an end to something you've been working on since you were a teen! You've dreamt of studying

medicine your entire life. If you gave up now, you know you'd regret it, you would let yourself down, let me down!" He'd reply, motivating me.

"Charley, it's just too much. None of my teachers know, they don't have a clue, and they make me feel like garbage! The only people that know are you and my parents. They want me to leave college and go back home, anyway," I'd respond.

"Nicole, if you've survived something that could've killed you months ago, you can survive one dumb grade!" He'd state.

"Thank you, Charley. I wouldn't be as strong as I am if it weren't for you," I'd say as I wiped away my tears.

It was August twenty third, and I sat at my chair impatiently, waiting for my name to be called. I would finally graduate. I would have the opportunity to cure people, to save lives. I wanted to receive my diploma and run to show Charley. Mom and Dad sat next to me.

"I'm very proud of you," Dad whispered in my ear. I smiled.

The night before, Charley gave me a hug, and in a whisper, since he no longer had the strength to speak, he uttered,

"Thank you. Thank you for accompanying me during this time. You're my only family. Congratulations for graduating!"

"No, Charley, thank you. I graduated because you were there to convince me to continue working hard to accomplish what I've fought all these years for," I said, smiling.

My name was going to be called next.

"Nicole Ross."

I grabbed my diploma tightly, and smiled for the picture my parents were prepared to take; flash.

'I'm a doctor. I'm finally a doctor,' I thought.

The last time I had seen Charley he was coughing blood, and that morning, when I opened the door to Charley's room, his bed was empty. I ran worriedly to the nurse.

"I'm sorry; do you know what happened to Charley Peters?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Charley died late last night. A few hours after you left," the nurse stated, eyes teary. I went to show him my diploma. No matter how sick I felt, how close to being

under death's wing I was, I had received my bachelor's degree. I was a doctor. A doctor, determined to cure kids like him. He was the reason for all my hard work and now he was dead.

I now occupy the bed Charley once owned. I wait, calmly, for someone to open the door, and accompany me during these last few days. I feel accomplished, though. I'm a doctor. It's a shame I'll never have the opportunity to save a life, but I know I gave Charley some happiness during the time we spent together. I will never forget his light blue eyes, cheeks painted in freckles, and his bright smile. A smile I hope to see once more whenever we meet again.