

The Stroke of Midnight

Category: The Middle of the Night
written by Greg Manship | October 27, 2016

As a member of a youth ministry team, I was sleeping on the floor of a church gym. My brothers knew I was in there, but they couldn't find a way into the building. They went from door to door without a flashlight, using the building's limited exterior lighting and finally locating a door that someone, by chance, had forgotten to pull tight and lock. Whether by stroke of luck or stroke of Providence, they were just as surprised as the chaperone sitting by the door when they pulled on the handle and the door swung open with a rush of cold November air.

"Where's Greg—Greg Manship? We have to get him. Our grandma has died."

They found their way to the gym and roused me from sleep. I felt someone stroking my shoulder, and I heard husky whispers: "Greg, Greg, get up. Grandma died. We gotta go see her."

We drove about 20 miles to the Masonic Home: My brothers and their wives, my wife and I. We didn't talk much during the trip, except to ask and answer the pressing questions:

"Who called?"

"A nurse from the Infirmary."

"When did she die?"

"Not sure. Maybe an hour ago. The nurse found her dead when she went in to check on her."

"How did she die?"

"Don't know. Probably another stroke."

Grandma had been in the Infirmary since her first stroke a couple of months ago. That one was not life-threatening, but she was severely incapacitated and bed-bound. She was no longer the joyful, playful story-teller and cook we grew up with. She couldn't communicate orally, but she would communicate with her eyes: an intense, unwavering gaze that pleaded for comfort and companionship. We all knew "the look," and we all—nurses, aides, family, friends—did our best to care for her and converse with her despite the stroke that had robbed her of the life she'd once enjoyed.

When we entered Grandma's room, I noticed several things: the quiet tears of the nurses; the warm glow of a light above Grandma's bed; the coolness of her forehead; the words we spoke to her; the stories we shared with each other; and, lying in the bed, the woman who'd given birth to my mother, who gave

birth to me.

And then, in the middle of that November night, it struck me: I am truly a blessed man.

Thank you, Grandma.

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