

# Four Floppy Ears

Category: Miracles

written by Alyssa Brennan | August 23, 2018

He was my first encounter with a comatose patient.

How does one communicate with an unconscious body? With tubes and wires and braces. He was fragile. He'd suffered a diffuse nerve injury and faced an unknown prognosis, yet his family was pleading for a hint of recovery as we were preparing to transfer him to a rehabilitation facility later that day.

He lay motionless on the stretcher while I awaited the arrival of transport staff to wheel him away.

He was a middle-aged with a wife and two young daughters who awaited his arrival hundreds of miles away. A hero at home, he had stabilized three car-accident victims before being struck by a reckless driver. A hero abroad, too, he had recently returned from serving two tours overseas as an Army medic. My dad had served two tours overseas as an Army doctor; just a small coincidence, I thought.

I was the only person waiting with him in his silent room. I began to wash his face with a damp cloth. When I saw his ears, I froze. He had goofy ears—top-heavy, with big floppy lobes. I would always joke with my dad that he had bestowed his goofy ears on all five of his kids; he would joke back that they would make us better listeners. It was our own kind of comedic relief, during a time when his second marriage and new family were a point of tension in our rocky relationship. I suddenly saw my dad in my patient's motionless body, and a wave of emotion washed over me.

As I stared at those familiar-seeming ears, I figured that since they were big and goofy, they should be good for listening. I leaned in and attempted to explain the changes he might feel as he flew several hours away to start a vigorous rehabilitation program. I slipped my warm palm into his cold hand to thank him for his bravery. Speaking into his ear, I begged him to continue fighting, while his wife and daughters awaited the homecoming of the man they loved.

Only he knows if he heard my plea that afternoon. But my memory of that day reminds me to always speak to my patients regardless of their level of awareness because, like Dad says, all ears are made for listening.

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