

Helen's Story

While the nursing profession has brought me much joy and satisfaction as a career, it was only during the time when I provided hospice care to my grandmother that I felt like a nurse. My grandmother was and still is the most influential person in my life. Although she is gone, it is her wisdom and spirit that my aunt says I inherited. My grandmother was on dialysis for 24 years, and I can recall the day we got the diagnosis because I was with her. I was not a nurse at the time, but I was working my way toward the path. She never knew that I cried each time I saw her ankles swell or each time she came home tired after hours of blood cleansing, or what was worse for me, seeing her get swallowed up in such a normal sized chair because she had lost so much weight. We were thick as thieves one would say. I was carrots, she was peas, I was peanut butter, she was jelly. Her special name for me was "Nell" and needless to say, when she got sick, I knew it would be Nell that had to take care of her. And so, as a new nurse, I did just that. No one was taking care of my gram, but me.

The day she decided to stop dialysis was hard for everyone especially my uncle Mike her youngest. I remember the question he asked calling from work to check on her, "jealous (another nickname) tell me what's really going and what should I do?" as I revealed to him that his mother was dying and he had to let her go, it became clear to me the level of trust my uncles and aunts had in my ability as a nurse and it showed me the type of nurse I was evolving into. When my grandmother died on a beautiful Sunday morning, I was with her along with my uncle Phil. Even though she had stopped breathing, me and my stethoscope needed to keep listening until my uncle took the device and said, "jealous she is gone."

I did not cry in the moment but when her body was removed, the only thing I could do was simply curl up in the spot she had laid and smell her on the covers. After all the burial and the various thank you notes and such were over, I went back to the dialysis center to say thank you to the nurses who cared for her. As I walked in, I glanced over to the chair that she claimed as hers and began to cry. You see, it was me who took her to her first dialysis treatment, and it was me who helped from her chair after the last.

I knew I had done well when in a dream, as she sat in her usual spot by the window and motioned me over, she pulled my face close and without a word gave me a kiss on the forehead. That was her thank you to me and my most cherished moment after her death. For me providing hospice care to my grandmother was the absolute best experience and nothing in nursing has ever been close to that feeling of servitude and accomplishment. Helping her make the transition from life to death, helped relieve me of all my fears as a new nurse regarding the death experience and for that I will always be grateful to her.