

## Grace...This Stuff's Fo' Real



Grace has been on my mind a lot lately even if it eludes me. I was always a clumsy kid, never excelled at sports. In fact, my knees don't tan because I have fallen and skinned my knees so many times through the decades...just by walking! Once when I was creek dipping as a child, I slid down a waterfall I was climbing, arriving at the bottom

crying and all banged up, I remember my dad saying he should have named me Grace at least I would have a little in my name. I am not graceful in my words either. No matter what the words come out a bit awkward even when I try to "Say, Grace."

I do appreciate grace and for the last month, with coronavirus resurfacing I have experienced grace in others again and again.

A few weeks ago at work, I cared for a gentleman with serious SARS-Cov-2 respiratory failure. As I was present to intubate him one night, I knew he would never be able to see his sons, speak again to anyone, likely our conversation was the last he would have in this lifetime. I felt pretty inadequate. I recalled one night during the early July days of my residency, at the VA a man was hemorrhaging from a gastrointestinal bleed and there was nothing more that could be done. All I knew to do was recite the 23rd Psalm as he slowly faded away as I sat at his bedside. Thirty years later, I felt the same inadequacy, yet these days I was even less prepared to offer him or myself comfort. I didn't know him except in these few moments. I am a night doctor. These days in medicine I seldom get the chance to develop strong relationships with my patients in the hospital the way I did in the past as a primary care doctor. I know he was scared. I had watched him fight all week from the other side of his isolation window. We had given each other the thumbs up sign several times in the previous nights. I knew that his decision to take the next step and try artificial respiratory support would be unlikely to extend meaningful life for him but he chose this step with such strength and grace. I told him all I honestly knew, which was that his sons whom I had spoken with earlier loved him very much but I was at a loss to share much more than my touch as I awaited the effects of the medicine that I always pray takes away any pain, suffering or angst. Grace was strong and silent in this man as he faced his last lucid moments on this earth trying to maintain hope for his sons and grandchildren.



The same week I had to call several families and cancel their summer retreats due to the Covid-19 surge. I dreaded it but each mother I spoke with was filled with such soothing words of grace and love. I felt humbled as I added one more disappointment to their lives in order to protect our community in Hayesville. Most of The Still Place families are veterans of months, years and lifetimes of self-isolation at home, hospitals, Bone Marrow Transplant units and Pediatric Intensive Care Units. These mothers are as graceful as ballerinas in life's dance of living through sorrow and disappointment.

Finally, I have to mention the grace of the ICU and ED nurses and respiratory therapists, I work with at Pardee Hospital in Hendersonville. For the last five months they have cared for our SARS-Cov-2 patients with so much encouragement, strength and grace. I listen as they always have the perfect words of encouragement, love and reassurance speaking to frightened or dying patients often gasping for one more breath. During the unknown early days, despite frightening exposures they rushed to help critical patients occasionally forgetting one part of the complicated PPE donning, left to wonder and isolate themselves from their vulnerable parents, friends and family for weeks on end. They went through pay cuts and fewer hours when the census was low and then always when things are difficult and we hardly have enough staffed beds, they rise again and again to serve in ways they never expected. Grace and strength always serving their patients with dedication and never whining or standing for long in puddles of self-pity.



I hope during these trying days we can each show one another more grace through words and acts of kindness, encouragement, tolerance and strength. In the ungraceful yet genuine and somehow encouraging words of CardiB..."coronavirus...this "stuff's" for real." Hopefully, here to teach us rather than tear us down.

-Dr. Dawn



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