

## "He Doesn't Even Talk Funny Any More!"

"Grandad! Grandad! No ... not Grandad!" I cried in anguish.

"He's had another stroke and it's pretty bad. He might not pull through this time" said Mum matter of factly. Tears were streaming down her face, as she gulped back the sobs.

It was devastating to see Grandad lying motionless in the stark hospital room. The smell of hospital disinfectant was assaulting my senses, as was the dismal ambience of the room. Grandad has always been the cheerful, happy, understanding person throughout my first 17 years of life. This drab room wasn't him. I let go of his hand & went to open the window to let some fresh air & sunshine in. Only yesterday, someone had mentioned that Grandad had been seen with his head pressed upon the cold glass of this very window, to try & ease his massive headache.

"Why hadn't anyone done something sooner to help get Grandad's blood pressure down & stop his headache? After all, it's 1981... not 1881. Hasn't medical science advanced even a little bit over the past few decades", I pondered to myself. "If I were a nurse, I bet I would do things differently!"

Years later, as the audience's applause died down in the University Auditorium, the Vice Chancellor & Dean began handing out Health Science Degrees. My name was just one of the many names announced that day. That's right, I'm a fully fledged Registered Nurse. As I stepped up onto the stage to receive my award, I felt my chest swell. I had kept my silent vow to Grandad. I was going to be a great nurse and I was going to make a difference!

"Jack! Jack! Can you hear me?" I shook Jack's shoulders to try & get a response from him, as he lay motionless on the hospital bed, surrounded by his family.

"He just slumped back & stopped talking to us" said his daughter with concern.

From the moment I saw Jack slumped back on the bed, I recognised the signs that he may have had a stroke. His normally smiling face had acquired a drooping appearance on one side and one arm was hanging limply off the bed. I fleetingly recalled Grandad, all those years ago. I also knew that time was critical if it was a stroke and there was only a small window of opportunity to get Jack the treatment required to minimize the impact of the stroke, if he was a suitable candidate.

Over the next few hours, Jack was poked & prodded, assessed & scanned, then finally the recipient of a clot busting drug, followed by constant monitoring. He was conscious, but his speech was very slurred. All throughout the proceedings, I took the time to explain to Jack's family what was happening. Of course they cried ... so did I inside! I remember this feeling of uncertainty & potential loss. I hoped Jack's outcome would be alot more positive than Grandad's was. I said a silent prayer.

As my shift ended that night, I set up a recliner chair with pillows & blankets next to Jack's bed for his daughter. She needed to be with him right now, & he needed her. Neither of them were going to be on their own tonight if I could help it! On my way home from work that night, I revisited the loss of my Grandad. He had lingered cruelly after his stroke for a long time. I used to sneak out

of school & visit him at the Nursing Home. He would often cry out of sheer frustration, as we sat quietly together in the depressing, clinical, nursing home room that was now his permanent home. He couldn't speak, walk or feed himself. The stroke had stolen everything from him. But it was still Grandad. My Grandad!

As I began my shift next day, I was relieved to see Jack's name was still listed for room 12, bed C. Nothing drastic had happened whilst I was gone! After report, I made my way to room 12, stopping to put the beautiful, deep red rose from my garden in a vase, which I placed on a small tray with a cup of tea. This was for Jack's daughter. I knew she would still be by his side this morning, holding his hand. I remember only too well, the feeling of never wanting to let go!

Sure enough, Jack's daughter was resting her head on her arms on the side of his bed. She didn't realise I was there. Jack gave me a lopsided smile as I walked in, whilst continuing to run his fingers through his daughter's ruffled hair. What a special moment I had walked in on. As I carefully lay the small tray on the bedside table, Jack's daughter aroused. She peered at me through bleary, swollen eyes then anxiously towards her father. The look of sheer relief on her face was priceless. He was alive & smiling down at her. I didn't speak. Just smiled & left the room. This was their moment to appreciate each other. A moment to cherish forever ... however long that may be.

On my return, it was evident that Jack's daughter had been crying again, but this time, she explained, it was tears of relief & gratitude. I opened up the window to let in fresh air & sunshine ... just like I had for Grandad all those years ago. The perfume from the rose, filled the room. I reassured Jack's daughter that I would keep a close eye on him if she wanted to duck home for a bit. She was hesitant to do so, but Jack's gentle, albeit somewhat slurred words, gave her the courage to go.

Over the next few days, Jack was closely monitored. Each day seemed to bring with it, a slight improvement of his condition. How wonderful this was to witness as a nurse. I had played a crucial role in Jack's recovery, along with the other health care team members. I had made a difference. Prompt recognition & treatment of the stroke was going to give Jack a good recovery outcome post stroke.

About 3 months later, at the local shopping mall, I encountered Jack's daughter & grand-daughter. I asked how his rehab was going.

"What rehab?" she replied.

I looked at them both with concern, when Jack's Grand-Daughter piped up ... "We're going to pick him up from golf, on our way home from the mall."

I must have looked as stunned as I felt, because Jack's daughter added "You can hardly tell he's had a stroke. He's great ... thanks to you guys! "The only time you can tell anything is even slightly wrong, is when he's really tired" she continued. "He can get a bit jumbled still, if he's worn out. That's it though!"

"Yeah! And he doesn't even talk funny anymore!" ... the Grand-Daughter added for good measure.