

The Personal Essay

Iryna Timonova

Nightingale College

ENG120-05 English Composition I 2021-1

Professor Hanridge

4/23/2021

The Personal Essay

I learned one of the life lessons that opened my eyes and mind working as a Licensed Vocational Nurse in a Subacute Rehabilitation Center. My first year as an LVN began six months after graduation. Happiness, nervousness, anxiety, I experienced them all. My school provided the foundation of my nursing knowledge, but my first job indeed showed me what it truly meant to be a nurse when I was assigned to a patient who just had a heart transplant. I first noticed him when he was sitting in the hallway, scrubbing his nose with a lack of interest. He looked so disoriented and aged far more than the years given in his admission details that I could not believe he was about my age. His eyes were empty-looking, like the eyes of an injured animal. He was pale as a ghost; I could tell the young man was suffering both emotionally and physically.

Nursing life gets pretty hectic; one shift changes the other, day looks like night or just like the other day. I was on my fifth shift in a row as we were always short-staffed, and I was tired- the sort of tired when your eyes feel heavy and achy. I remembered that one of the rooms had an empty bed and decided to "unplug" myself for a few minutes. The minute when I almost felt like a Robinson Crusoe on a deserted island, I heard a voice: "Tired?" I opened my eyes and saw that guy from the hallway. Let us call him Johnny. His brown, tired eyes, three days of stubble, and messy hair suggested he had not slept properly for a long time. It was an awkward pause for a few seconds until he asked me if I want to look at his drawings. The tension between us melted like a piece of ice in the sun, ever since we started talking almost every day.

I already knew Johnny's past medical history and active problems, including heavy alcohol and drug abuse, which led him to the surgical table. But I never tried to blame or teach 2 him a lesson for whatever happened. I just listened. I felt like he genuinely was desperate for someone

to open. He told me how he and his friends started this terrible drug abuse journey as a group of teens aspiring to become famous rap stars. He talked about how they could meet in different places to smoke and sniff all kinds of drugs that came across their ways.

Johnny told me some of his greatest regrets. He said that the greatest regret of his life was ever to have introduced his girlfriend to drugs; before his girlfriend was into drugs, he could sometimes sneak some pills into her drinks to make her high. One day, while in his room, she had her first puff of smoke, which she said was chilling. He also admitted that sometimes he could threaten to leave her if she could not use what he asked. Johnny felt responsible for her death; the night they fought for the hundredth time, she took drugs even she was clean for several days. She was found unconscious in their apartment and died in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Johnny always talked about his three-year-old daughter, who was temporary under his mother's care. He kept talking about how glad he was to be having a second chance to set everything right. He was calling her "My Angel" and even had her picture on his cell phone background. She really looked like an angel. He told me that he realized that the surgery and rehab prepared him to reenter the world as a new man and develop an excellent example for his daughter.

We talked a lot—about everything. We talked about how his life will change now, and he can leave all his past behind. I saw some doubts in his eyes sometimes as almost he could not believe he had overcome his addiction or maybe he could not fight it in the future. I tried to explain to Johnny that getting sober and clean is not easy but rebuilding the life after addiction and learning how to navigate that new life is an ever more 3 challenging tasks. But I believed in him. We even laughed that maybe he can change his hobby of drawing dark art to the cooking of scout cookies.

The final day had come; Johnny was discharged home. We said goodbye to each other and promised to keep in touch. I did not think much about it until his mom returned to rehab a few

weeks later and said that Johnny died from a drug overdose. On the street. By himself. His mom was standing by the nursing station, and I did not know what to say. I just felt numb. She kept saying something, but I did not hear her anymore; everything felt unreal. The final day had really come, only not as we imagined.

That day I thought about all the things in my life: my family, friends, health, job. I realized that working as a nurse involves so much more than what I do on a single shift. The nurse's role is not just to provide medical assistance but help people through some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. And sometimes people die; not everything happens as in fairy tales. Death is not the complete and unconditional collapse of all the work. Death is the reality of life, and nurses must deal with it. It made me realize how broad and unique nursing can be.

“Oftentimes we hear that nursing is more of a calling than a profession. As nursing students, we do not realize the weight of this statement. But as we go through our nursing journey, pieces stick themselves together, and we realize this probably might be true to some extent. We were called into this mission”. - Unknown