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Life is Funny Sometimes

Life is funny. We spend all of our time trying to make something of ourselves, trying to be somebody whom other people look to, admire, and would like to emulate. We relentlessly evaluate our standing in relation to others. We think, "Do I fit it in? Do I stand out? Do people like me? Does my life make a difference?"

Some of us would like to be leaders, the movers and shakers of our culture, society, and even species, giving meaning to the everyday for millions and even billions of people. And others of us would like to live comfortably in boundaries we have set for ourselves and never venture too far, but know that our lives have meant something to the small group with whom we associate.

But we all have that crucial piece in common: We live life so that the world, no matter its subjective size, is different, having been changed by our being in it. We all have an innate human desire to leave some sort of legacy, whether we are cognizant of that truth or not. For by our actions, our choices, and even our thoughts, we have the power to influence those around us, whether that influence be big or small, lasting or temporary, famous or infamous.

We desire the lives we lead to *mean* something at the end of it all, to have the satisfaction that our own contribution made a difference in someone else's life, whether that difference be good or bad. This connects and entangles us in a deep network of human love, laughter, joy, intellect, and experience, or conversely, our contributions can connect us to human pain, sorrow, hurt and suffering. Yet there is meaning in both of those contributions.

Furthermore, maybe some of us strive to be connected to human experience in other ways, not just by living our lives in constant awareness of our own contributions, but also of the potential for others' contributions as well.

These great legacies are left by people who teach us about happiness and service, the deeper reason and purpose of life. These are legacies left by people who present us with problems to fix, who stretch our limits and make us uncomfortable, who take us to places we hadn't planned on going or conceived could be possible, all of which, although testing and trying at times, make us better.

In pondering on legacies, I was brought to think of the night during the senior year of my undergraduate education that I found myself in the ICU, not as a healthcare provider, but as a patient. There I grappled with cerebral damage and pain from a motor vehicle accident which had literally left me helpless, feeble, and afraid. I remember lying in the hospital bed being asked to complete simple tasks. The newfound limitations in my cognitive capacity, which became apparent while reading even the simplest and shortest of sentences, were utterly devastating. I would not get more than four or five words into a sentence when my ability to decipher the symbols on the page proved too insurmountable a task. Stuck in a limbo between consciousness and drug-induced reverie, I wondered if I would ever be normal again. Would I be able to do the things that I had always dreamed I'd do? What would my legacy be *now*? But with time came learning, recovery, and perspective, as time always brings. And consequently, with those things came the loss of the overwhelming trepidation I felt during that time I spent in the ICU, and a clearer sense of what my legacy should be.

So this brings me to today, in which I speak in tribute to the legacy of a donor, a woman who gave *me* the opportunity for joy and learning, frustration and love...a woman willing to be my first patient, the patient who *literally* gave herself so that I could leave my legacy as well.

Life is funny sometimes, because in trying to make something of ourselves, we are really trying to leave something for others.