

## Seventeenth Day

Lucille Pettibone sat in a big brown leather chair in the Montgomery People's Hospital's IC unit where she had lived in for the past three weeks. She had left the chair only to go to the bath, take a shower and brush her teeth and change clothes. She had eaten and slept in the chair. She stared at her penciled in journal of the past 17 days. The journal read: Day 1-no motion: Day 2: no signs of life: Day 3: and on and for Day 17, she had penciled in—doctor said, "If she pees on her own there may be a chance she will live." She left the little black calendar journal open on her lap. She could not write in it today. She put the pencil down on the side table of her child's bed. She sat staring into space and focused in on the sunlight's shadows dancing around making tic tack toe patterns on the wall as the west setting sun filtered through the open wove curtains. The clicking of the machines hooked to Angela, her 30 year old daughter and mother of two, Jason, ten and Tiffany, twelve, beat out rhythms that make her head ache.

As she sat gazing out the window with an occasional glance at Angela, she noticed that Angela's finger nails were still blue from the loss of oxygen when her heart stopped beating as they loaded her onto the helicopter to fly her into ICU. Lucille swallowed hard. She would not cry yet. Maybe there might be a miracle that Angela would come back from the comma that the virus that invaded her heart. Exhausted, Lucille's head nodded. She noticed that Angela seemed to be breathing easier as if she were asleep.

*I hear my cousins calling to me" Angie, come and play with us. Come play with us please, please, please, Angie."*

*The children's voices sound shrill but sweet like the intermediate whip poor will calling at dusk ushering me to come into the woods. The sun is high in the sky. I can't see the sunlight is so bright. There, when I squint my eyes and look hard I see there are no woods; but there, I see is a big black wet cliff hanging out over the head of the stream with water dripping in little rivulets from the top. When the little water spouts hit the ground they slide together and start a stream. I can't hear any water running though. It's like I am looking at a photograph; but, now I am here in it.*

*Again I hear the children calling to me. Sam, the five year old's voice is the high like notes in a minor key....singing, "Angie, do come play. Do play, come on."*

*I open my mouth to answer little Sam, but I can't make any words to tell him. I kept trying over and over to say to him. "I am trying to get to you."*

*"Can you tell me how to get to you? I don't know where you are."*

*"There, I see them all three, Sam, Chad and Eve, playing along the crystal little stream that is meandering down the valley below the cliff. I ought to know where that little stream is. I have been there I know; but, I can't remember where that is. Oh, that light from the sun is putting my eyes out. I can't see unless I squint my eyes real hard; if I close them all I see is a kaleidoscope of pink and red and purple designs turning round and round and round in my head. I am not going to shut my eyes. I am just going to stare and squint and stare and squint until I can figure out where they are. I want to go play, too. But, I don't have a lard bucket so I can't go.*

*Chad is there. I see him in his little cut-off jeans with raveled strings hanging down. He has one of the eight pound lard buckets that Grandma gave us to play with when we visited her; but, they are not at Grandma's. Grandma had a big creek beside her house not a stream. I see Eve in a sun dress with yellow*

*and white pokka dots. The pokka dots seemed to be dancing around her dress like butterflies sticking to the dress, flying off, returning and lighting for a instant then leaving again. I loved that dress and had begged mom to buy me one just like Eve's; but, I don't remember that the pokka dots moved around...that seems so silly to me. Mom would not get me a sundress like Liz's and I cried and cried.*

*I squint again. This time the pokka dots were resting real still on the dress. Eve has her an eight pound yellow lard bucket, too. The children are bending over picking up something putting one at a time in the bucket. They are slowly trilling their fingers of their right hands along the tops of the water and then along the top of the water; then, grabbling something down in the water like a raccoon would watching a fish to catch for its dinner. I cannot tell what they are putting into those little buckets.*

*Oh, I see little Sam now. He has on shorts and no shirt and big cowboy boots. He is so funny pushing the big boots along the sides of the creek and his bucket is a two-pound lard bucket built just for little types. Grandma must have picked that bucket out just for him. Ooops ,he fell down. Chad and Eve won't stop and pick him up. He is just lying there stretched out with those big boot toes sticking straight up in the air. I want to tell Chad and Eve to help Sam. Again, the words are stuck. I can't make any sound. My throat hurts. My teeth hurt. I feel like I am smothering to death but here isn't anything over my nose and mouth.*

*"Ohhh, I feel like I used to feel when Dad held a feather pillow over my mouth and face and I would scream for him to take it off and let me get up. He would keep holding me down. I can't breathe. I can't breathe."*

*"Oh, finally there is some air. I can breathe again."*

*Oh, little Sam is up again. He is trying to hand fish like his brother and sister; but, his hand is coming up empty.*

*Now I feel like I am flying above them. I can't fly; but, I am flying. I look at my arms they are outstretched; but there are no wings. How in this world am I flying? I try to call to my cousins, "Look, Eve. Look, Sam. Look Chad." This time I can talk; but, they don't seem to hear me.*

*They have stopped calling me to come play with them. They don't notice me at all floating above them just a few feet above their heads. I call again and again as I float; but, still they keep on hand fishing. Now, I can see what they are lifting out the water...ting little blue-green frogs. I can see their eyes. Their eyes are hilarious. They go in and out on little wires in circles like miniature slinky toy wires.*

*I am laughing so hard at all those crazy weird little frogs. Eve's and Chad's buckets both full to those little wire eyed frogs. Poor little Sam; he does not have a single frog in his bucket. I wonder why neither of them can hear me laughing.*

*I am going to watch awhile and see if Sam can get him a frog for his bucket. Oh, that is so funny. I am laughing so hard my stomach should hurt, every time Eve or Chad catch one of those strange little frogs. Oh, the children's eyes are going in and out on little circular wires just like the frogs's eyes are. They don't seem to notice that their eyes are doing those crazy movements. I wish I could go play and see if my eyes would do that, too.*

*I try to go down to the ground where they are but I can't I am just stuck up here like a piece of paper in a whirl wind going round and round and nowhere. I will lay my head back...there that feels just like floating in Blue Lake on my back with the sun glaring down on a bloody hot July day. I just don't get why this sun is not hot. It looks so bright like sunlight reflecting off the ice on a zero day. It's not cold either. I just can't figure out how sun so bright is not hot.*

*I wish I could go somewhere.*

*"Angela" a voice startled me. I opened my eyes and sat up. I was still floating but I could not sit up. Strange.*

*"Yes", I answered looking toward the direction the quiet voice came. I could see no one. The voice sounded like Gram's voice. "Gram, is that you?"*

*"Angela, you need to go back." the voice said.*

*"Go back where?" I surprised myself that I could talk so easily when just a while ago I could not say a word to my cousins.*

*"Go back, go back- go back, "the voice repeated again and again. Just move like you are swimming."*

*Instantly I spread my arms out and started to move them as if I were swimming the butterfly stroke...I stared gliding away from my cousins. I can't see the cliff or the stream or the children. I can't see anything the sunlight is even brighter now. Oh, wow, all of a sudden it is as dark as a tornado cloud. It is purple black all around me.*

Dr. Hamilton entered the room. Lucille roused from her half sleep state and watched the doctor scrutinize the nurse's charts.

"She has peed all on her own." The doctor spoke in a staid clinical voice.

Lucille picked up the blunt pencil and entered into the little black calendar journal in huge letters—DAY 17—Today Angela has peed all by herself.” Then, added “Hallelujah—thank you Jesus” as she sobbed in relief.

“Mom, is that you Angela’s spoke weakly?”

“Yes, sweetheart, yes, Mom is here.”

“Mom did you see Sam and Eve and Chad while they were here?”

“Shhh, everything is going to be all right now, you just rest.”

By Carolyn Pennington, Jackson County