

The Heart of a Good Soul

Despite the blow of the fan on her face, and the wind blowing in from her window, she was still drowning in the heat of the summer. She grabbed the spray bottle from her nightstand and sprayed herself, feeling the cold water touch her skin, slightly relieving the heat. Because of the lack of air conditioning in her home, she had many sleepless nights, too hot for any rest. She never knew what life was like living somewhere with air conditioning until she moved to college.

Vicki Hortin was born in Utah, and has lived there ever since. She grew up poor, because of the unfortunate circumstances of her family. She was an only child, and her father passed away when she was only seven years old. Her mother had many health problems in her life, resulting in her being sick a great deal in her childhood.

Vicki is now married with three children. I am the youngest of the three. My mom inherited distinctive traits from her mother, which has shaped the person she is now. Likewise, I have learned much from both my mother and grandmother, and I would be a completely different person if it were not for them.

Seven years ago, my mother went through an experience that changed her life. She experienced kidney failure and was in need of a new kidney. This was expected to happen eventually since she has a genetic kidney disorder, called Polycystic Kidney Disease, or PKD. Her mother also had the disease, and my sister and I have both inherited it as well. Because of PKD, she had enlarged kidneys that were much too big for her small body, and they had grown innumerable cysts on them. Over time, as the disease progressed, her kidneys needed to be removed.

In March of 2014, she started dialysis as an effect of getting both of her kidneys removed. Every other day, she spent four hours on dialysis, which helped her understand what her mother was undergoing because of the same adversity. The chilly fluids entering her bloodstream while she was on dialysis made her veins run cold every time, so she brought blankets to help keep herself warm. Along with the blankets, she would also bring cinnamon candies to mask the taste of iron in her mouth when the iron was injected into her bloodstream. This lasted two long, difficult months until she received a kidney transplant.

When my mother's kidneys were removed, she did not yet have a donor. One of her friends, many years back, had a father who needed a kidney transplant. She so dearly wanted to donate her kidney to him but was unable to. When she heard my mother needed a donor, she was immediately tested to see if she could donate a kidney to her. She ended up being a match and was able to save my mother's life by donating her a kidney. They both went through this hard experience together, even though her friend had no need to. They were in recovery for six long weeks, which were unimaginably difficult. My mother has definitely grown from this experience. She proved she could endure anything if she did not give up hope, and made others know they could as well. She gained a greater desire to serve others, and she also started to help people who were receiving a transplant, recovering from one, or has a loved one who is doing so.

I have always been inspired by how thoughtful my mother is, and how much she serves other people. She has done many acts of service for multiple foundations, and I have helped as well. We have collected supplies and food for people in need, made blankets and sewed teddy bears, brought dinner to a refugee family on Christmas, and much more. My mother also thinks about the little acts of service, like writing cards to a care center near us to make sure the elderly

still know they are important and loved. Also, when someone is experiencing some extra tough times, she makes sure it is evident to them that they are loved and cared for.

Last year in June, a family a few streets up from my house suffered a great loss when their father committed suicide. He had a wife and four children, the oldest in high school, and the youngest had not even reached elementary school. This tough incident caused much grief, also causing the streets of the neighborhood to be silenced and somber.

Six months later, on New Year's Eve, when most of the world was celebrating, my mother was punching holes in paper bags. I asked her why she was doing so, and she explained that it had been six months since a family in our neighborhood lost their father. She wanted to remind them that they were loved, and despite the darkness in their lives, there was still hope and light. So, she decided to make luminaries to set on their porch. I helped her finish the luminaries by setting fake candles in each one, then I made a poster that said "you are loved" to place on their porch with them.

That night, as the sun went down, we started to load the bags into the back of our car. We gathered a few of my friends to join us since there were one hundred luminaries. Once the darkness covered the sky completely, we drove up a few streets to their house. We quickly, but quietly unloaded the bags and set them all over their porch along with the poster. Only minutes later, the mother of their family posted a photo of their porch on Instagram, thanking people for expressing their love for them, especially in such hard times.

As my mother learned from her experiences, so did I, and I was taught many valuable lessons I will never forget.