



It began as a very typical day. I would have never thought I would be recalling, out of the very deep corners of my mind, a poem I had learned and loved so long ago.

I was assigned to care for a 90 year old admitted with pneumonia and severe COPD. I entered her room, greeting her with an energetic "Good morning! May I open the drapes and let the day in?" I was answered with a weak "Oh please, honey, no". I quickly adjusted my enthusiastic approach. In the bed was a very frail, very ill patient, twisted and curved with kyphosis and scoliosis and needing oxygen to breathe. She was too weak to lift her head up. She expressed how she was just so tired and how she couldn't seem to wake up. "I don't understand. What is wrong with me? Why can't I seem to wake up?" I tucked her back in amongst the blankets which were as white as she was and told her there was no reason to wake up then, that I would let her sleep. I checked on her often, each time quietly entering the room and leaning over watching her breathe. I studied her room surroundings in an attempt to learn more about this frail little lady. There was a New York Times crossword puzzle, partially completed in pen, and a newspaper opened and folded to the stock market page.

As the morning progressed I was increasingly concerned. A sleeping patient without Advanced Directives made me a little apprehensive. I needed to assess her and speak with her. I went about repositioning her and as I did she woke. With a look of certainty and sounding like she had never in her 90 years felt like she had that day, she grabbed my forearm and expressed so clearly "I know what is happening. I have figured it out... I am dying. That's why I can't wake up." I stopped my repositioning and sat at the edge of the bed. I am a certified Geriatric Nurse, well versed in end of life decisions. I knew exactly what I needed to do. I calmly said "You may be dying. You've been sick for a long time. I'll stay with you and we will figure out what it is you want us to do for you". She said that she was tired, had a good life and did not want anything done. She stated that she did not want CPR or any interventions. I offered to fill out the Do Not Resuscitate form with her. As I sat at the edge of the bed filling out the form, carefully writing and spelling her name in cursive, a feeling came over me that I had written the name many times before. I soon realized that I was helping someone who had patiently taught me Language Arts in school 40 years earlier.

As we made the connection the only question she asked me, in a very genuine way, was "Tell me, dear...was I a *good* teacher?" My response was to recite a poem she had taught me. To this day, I remember every word of it. As I started reciting "In Flanders Fields", she joined me. It was such a privilege to be able to speak the words of that beautiful profound poem with her. Needless to say, we both had lumps in our throats and tears in our eyes. In a good way....

Over the next two days I was able to advocate for her, making sure she received the comfort measures she wanted and deserved despite the physician's desire to continue aggressive treatment.

My teacher passed away two days later.