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## **The Life Changing Cake**

I walked inside to the smell of medicine, urine, and helplessness. I had been there many times before to visit, but this time was different. I had a purpose. The nursing home in which my great-grandmother was a former resident was clean and well kept. The staff was nice and caring, and the facilities were immaculate. The thing that left the nursing home with a dreary feeling was the lack of caring visitors. There were a few men and women who had people come to visit regularly, but for the most part these people were just thrown in there to be cared for until they died. I had sat in the lunch room for many hours before my great-grandmother passed away, listening to the struggles and exciting stories of these important and loving people. They longed only for conversation and love. Many times they would forget my name and who I was when I came in, but they spoke to me just as if they knew me, and I played along. However, some would remember exactly who I was and greet me with open arms. These times were important to them, but this day was one that would change the perspective of my life forever.

"How are you today Mrs. McKinney?" I asked as I hugged her in my orange and black Halloween attire.

"I'm doing fine, other than." as she stopped and teared up. I noticed that something was bothering her.

"Is everything alright?" I asked earnestly.

Mrs. McKinney began to tell me of how her son died the previous year in a car accident. A drunk driver ran a red light and blind-sided him in the middle of the intersection. He was on his way to the nursing home to enjoy the night with his mom at the Halloween dinner party. After seeing her suffering expressions, I realized her feelings of sorrow and loss and tried to comfort her by asking if she would like me to attend this year's party with her tonight. She gratefully accepted.

We began the memorable night with dinner and a dance. After she had eaten all of her food, I wheeled her onto the dance floor for a little more fun. We danced and rolled around for an hour laughing and enjoying ourselves without the sorrowful memory of her son's death.

Next was the annual cake walk. They played many Halloween songs as I wheeled Mrs. McKinney around the room never having her number called. The cake walk was almost over, and to the sound of Michael Jackson's "Thriller," the nurse called out her number. As Mrs. McKinney gleamed with happiness, we went up to the table where this absolutely beautiful, decorated Halloween cake laid there peaking up at the excited elderly lady. I managed to grab the cake with one arm and with the other wheel Mrs. McKinney back to her room where I would say goodbye. As we arrived at the room, I asked her where she wanted me to set the cake, and she replied, "right where it is." I stood there and looked at her with a blank stare on my face wondering why she would give me this beautiful cake that she had just won. She told me that she didn't want the cake for herself and never intended on keeping it. For a woman who looked like she had won a million dollars when she won this cake, it surprised me that she didn't even want it. She continued to tell me of how she only wanted the cake to repay me for all the joy and

comfort that I had brought her over the past two weeks. I was astonished. She had not had anything of her own for years, and the first thing that she wins, she gives away as a token of appreciation to a sixteen-year-old.

I realized that night as I was on my way home with the cake in my lap that she never wanted any material possession. She wanted friendship, love, and compassion. The cake meant nothing to her, but to me it symbolized the love that we should show one another. A woman who had nothing gave her only true possession to a teenager for eating dinner with her and wheeling her around a dance floor. To Mrs. McKinney, that night was more than that. It was the thought of my giving up my Halloween to be with an elderly lady at a nursing home. It was the thought of my choosing to spend my time with her over my friends. It was the thought of my not minding what others said when I chose her over them. It was the thought that I cared that mattered to her! She taught me through her actions that material possessions don't matter, but caring for others, loving everyone around you, and showing that love truly counts is the main objective in life.