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Autobiographical Narrative

A Gift of Respect

My father and I sat in the emergency room, waiting. Colored lights were flashing outside at the entrance and the automatic glass doors swung open and closed, swallowing hunched walkers and quiet people carried in on stretchers. The buzz in the waiting room had become a drone and I could no longer distinguish separate stories from the murmur of complaints. My father, always the picture of calm, sat silently, brows furrowed. I felt numb. It was hard to imagine what would happen next.

Finally a nurse in ugly pink scrubs called us into the recovery room where my mother lay, sleeping. Her head had been partly shaved and bandaged and she breathed heavily through a tube. My father and I sat next to her, holding her hands. This was not how I imagined my spring vacation from ninth grade. My mother had complained of a headache the previous day and then suddenly, here she was sleeping, after doctors had drilled a hole through her skull to relieve the pressure of a hemorrhage.

The doctors began to arrive. There was a parade of them. They swept into the room, one after another, looked at my father, and asked the same dizzying questions. Then they would pause dramatically and launch into speculations about the uncertain future. In every meeting with every doctor, I seemed to be invisible. The doctors were brusque and busy. They spoke quickly, while I felt like I was thinking in slow motion. What I gathered from their monologues was that I needed to fortify myself for helping my mom through a slow process of recovery. Yet, everything about the room, the doctors, and the dreary night outside made me feel inadequate and scared.

Finally, the last doctor entered the room. She was short and energetic. She shook hands warmly with both my father and me and asked us how we were holding up. I stuttered a bit in response. I believe it was the first question I had been asked all night. She nodded gravely, and then proceeded to explain again exactly what all the other doctors had told us. She looked between my father and I as she spoke, holding eye contact with me, then him, for extended periods. She paused often and spoke slowly and clearly. "Do you have any questions?" She asked kindly, when she'd finished.

After she left the room I began to cry for the first time since my mother was admitted to the hospital. My dad patted my back, thinking I was simply overwhelmed by shock and stress. I was, in fact, overwhelmed. At that moment I felt an overwhelming gratitude for the woman who had treated me like a thinking, feeling individual rather than a mere, confused teenager. Her eye contact, her patience, and her understanding touched me in a way I could not possibly express. It made me feel less shaky and more confident. Perhaps it would be a difficult vacation and even a difficult spring, but as we walked out of the automatic doors into a misty morning, I felt sure that I would be able to rise to the challenge.



1. What is the setting of the story? What details does Julie use to help you feel like you are there?
2. Who are the characters involved?
3. What motivates them?
4. What is the conflict?
5. What is the climax of the story?

6. How is the story resolved?

Plan out your own autobiographical narrative about respect here:

1. Setting: (What details can you use to make the setting come alive?)
2. Who are the main characters? (What details do we need to know about them to understand their experience?)
3. What motivates the main characters? What do they want?
4. What is the conflict that drives the story? For this story, you probably want to focus on a single event.
5. What is the climax?
6. How is the conflict resolved? (Remember: this doesn't mean that it has to be a happy ending; it just lets the readers glimpse the result of the climax).