

“SHANNON”

A MOMENT OF GRACE

There is a time in one's life when experience takes the best of us. I can remember when I was young and the way situations and family problems were explained to me. When you are young you tend to take things for granted. I can remember losing family members to accidental deaths and natural causes but I just did not show any sadness about those matters. As an adult, those feelings have changed drastically taking a great toll on my life.

I first met Shannon in 1986. She was 9 years old. She was full of life and the greatest person to be around. It was the first time that I had been to San Antonio. I came down in 1985 with my boyfriend, who was transferred to San Antonio due to his job. It was my first time as a mother and I was young. I met my second husband and his sister who was Shannon's mother.

As my life went on married into this family, I started working in the legal field which started a twenty-year career for me. My husband eventually ended up in prison and his sister and her family and I grew closer together. Little did I know my life would change so drastically. As the months went on, Shannon started experiencing headaches on a regular basis and her sight went downhill. At first, the doctors diagnosed her as having only migraines and I remember telling my sister-in-law how I did not believe that children experienced migraine headaches.

After a few weeks of agony and more tests, Shannon was finally diagnosed with having a lemon-shaped tumor on the left side of her brain. I could feel the sadness beginning to take over. I was afraid of what was happening next. It only took them three more days to tell us that her tumor was malignant and that she was going to die. As the tears started falling down from my sister-in-law's eyes, it took all of my strength to hold onto myself and what I was feeling. I knew then that Shannon and her mother would need me and that I needed to be the strong for them.

After the surgery, Shannon had to undergo a great deal of chemotherapy. She became sick all of the time. After several months of being sick, Shannon's mother decided that she wanted her to take a break from the chemotherapy. She removed her from it. Shannon became alright after that and we started thinking that she was in remission from the tumor. Things were starting to look better for all of us. Shannon started spending more time with me at my house. She would spend the night, go places and just loved hanging out with me. It was a lot of fun, more fun that I had ever experienced.

In early 1989, Shannon's tumor started growing back. Before the decision to put her back on chemotherapy came up, her doctor suggested a new surgery that would involve inserting chemotherapy tubes into her brain that could completely make the tumor disappear. This surgery was supposed to remove the bad cells. The only outcome for us was that the tumor spread all throughout her brain instead of going away. Her doctor then suggested chemotherapy again. Shannon's mother did not want this anymore. The therapy was only to prolong her life. It would not save her. Shannon's mother was depressed and exhausted and did not want her to

be sick anymore.

As time went on, Shannon became more ill. I remember being at her bedside in the hospital, watching her sight disappear. She was not in any pain as she was full of so many drugs. Holding her hand, I could feel her slowly finding it difficult to breathe. Things were starting to become more frightening to me. She held my hand so tight. She was going to die. Her breaths were coming in and out.

Shannon died in August 1989. She was only 12 years old. It took all I had to hold back my tears. I never knew losing someone close to me could be so hard. At her viewing, it had been the first time that I had experienced a death this close. I had never seen anyone I knew in a casket lying there still. Before I knew it, my niece, who I had grown to adore so much, was buried and had a gravestone with her name on it.

It has been 17 years. Shannon would be 29 today. She was young. Her life was taken from her. This part of my life was so different. I had experienced closeness, sadness and death and it completely changed me. I began to enjoy life more, the less I took for granted, and friends and family became more important to me. How did I know that Shannon, who was so young, so fragile, and so loving, could make the greatest difference in me and in my soul. She was and will always be my moment of peace and grace.

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MARCH 19, 2007
EDITED FOR PUBLICATION
OCTOBER 15, 2008**