

The Thing to Remember

By: Catherine Wright

In my hometown, there's a pork company that advertises through faux pigs placed in our downtown area. The pigs stand about four feet tall in the same stance with the same smile on their faces, but all are decorated differently. One is a normal pink pig, one has colorful puzzle pieces painted on it, but my favorite is one that is covered in reflective silver pieces, like an oddly shaped disco ball. This pig is my favorite, not because of the way the sun shines off of it or the way one can see one's own reflection in it, but because it is completely different from the typical muddy, pink pig. It goes against the ordinary, it defies expectations, yet it tells an honest truth: underneath all of life's messes lies a sparkling pig.

I remember the day as if it were yesterday, rather than nearly 10 years ago. I was in the second grade- a time meant for spelling words and triple-digit-addition- when I was told one day as I got off the bus that my mom was going to have an emergency splenectomy. I have always been someone who gauges how strong my emotions should be based on those around me; on that day my parents seemed calm, so I stayed calm. It was a routine surgery. Routine is clean. Routine doesn't dirty the pig.

That night, my grandma drove my sister and me to the hospital to see my parents before my mom's surgery. In the backseat, my sister and I reveled in the light of the disco ball by singing and dancing to "Moves Like Jagger" by Maroon 5, almost as if we were two kids who had no clue what was coming, because we were and we didn't. When we arrived at the hospital, we went to my mom's room with its dirt-colored drapes and sickeningly clean smell. After being there for a while, my dad took my sister and I to the food court downstairs while my grandma and mom stayed behind.

I do not remember what we ate or what the food court looked like, but I remember coming back upstairs. I remember skipping back to my mom's room. I remember feeling like I had walked in on something I shouldn't have: my mom crying in her bed, my grandma standing stoically in the corner, and a doctor standing next to the bed. I backed out of the room but not before my grandma saw me. She followed me out the door just as my dad and sister were arriving, and she whispered something to my father as they traded places. It was a word I had heard before. I knew several people with it in fact. So when I heard that my mom had cancer, my tears began to pour, but instead of washing away the dirt that was encasing me, mud was all that seemed to be left.

There was a nurse who came to my grandma, sister, and me as we sat in the waiting area outside of my mom's room. She took our hands, this virtual stranger, and prayed with us over my mom's health. My mom came home a few days later and over the next few weeks, as more people found out about her diagnosis, there was an outpouring of support toward our family. People stopped by the house to bring food. Cards arrived daily. Our church held a fundraiser. I saw the same compassion in my family members as I did from the nurse that night at the hospital.

My heart breaks for the second grader who was scared she would lose her mom, for she was so distracted by the mud she couldn't see the sparkling pig underneath. Yet, every story has one, no matter how messy it seems. There are days when I think about my mom's cancer and all I see is muck; some days the sparkling pig eludes me. Yet, when I think of the growth I've had after my mom's diagnosis, I begin to see the shine underneath. I will not tell you I'm grateful for my mom's cancer, but there are some lessons learned from it that I am thankful for. The reaction of my community showed me the power of humanity and how it is always working to combat the

bad in the world through its goodness. It has shown me that I have a passion for helping the sick and how that helping can come from simply holding out your hand. Most importantly, it has taught me that while life can be hard and complicated and just downright ugly some days, there is so much beauty and goodness in the world. It is human beings' eternal search for this goodness and beauty, for the sparkling pig, that allows us to grow. Sometimes it is harder to find than others, sometimes there's more mud covering it, but it is always there. There are days when everything, including ourselves, will seem broken, and that's okay because we are broken. We are the shattered pieces of the disco ball: connected together to be a light in the darkness, to be reflection in a time of unclarity. Life is imperfect and full of flaws, yet we must always remember: no matter how much mud life is covered in, there is always a sparkling pig underneath.