Employee Essays
Janet Smiled

I saw Janet again today. She remembered me! I am an ultrasound tech at St. Clare Hospital and was called to the floor to do an exam on Janet. I was forewarned before I entered her room that she would be difficult; “distressed” I believe was the term used.

Ok, so I was prepared. I entered her room with my brightest, smiliest attitude and greeted Janet. A quick, blank look was all I got in return. I pulled up a chair next to the bed, gave her a soft touch on the arm, and explained the exam. She was uncomfortable, to say the least, and it was quite difficult to position her for my exam. Take your time, I thought to myself. “What do we have here?” I asked, referring to her plate of untouched food. “Would you like some fish?” She turned toward me as if in response, so I sat alongside her bed and fed her some fish. When she made eye contact, I smiled. “How about a smile, “Janet?” I asked. She pursed her lips and looked away. “Aww, c’mon. I’m sure there’s a smile in there somewhere.” She shook her head. “Another bite of fish? How about a carrot? They feed you pretty good here, don’t they?” I continued as I fed her another spoonful. She asked for a tissue, in which she spit out her carrots! “Are the carrots a little hard?” I asked with a chuckle. She nodded. I gave her some apple juice to wash it down with.

After finishing as much as she was willing to eat, I gently continued with my exam, conversing about the weather and making small talk. Again, I asked for a smile. Nope. She would have nothing of it. “Janet, I know you have a smile in there for me!” But Janet just looked away, implying there was nothing to smile about. “I know you would rather be anywhere than in the hospital, but we are going to take very good care of you so you can get back home to where you’re comfortable. Think of something at home that makes you smile.” Still nothing. Boy! She was difficult! Difficult to get a smile out of, and I’m usually quite good at making people smile. Oh well, I’d have to chalk this one up to the books that I failed.

I finished my exam, and as I was maneuvering toward the door I looked back one last time to tell Janet goodbye, and there it was...quick and fleeting, but I saw it...Janet smiled! “Hey, that’s my girl!” I said as I went back to her bedside and held her hand. “I knew you had it in you! That smile just made my day, Janet!” I cheered, fighting back the oncoming tears. What an awesome day. I love my job!

I saw Janet again today. She was back in the hospital and needed another ultrasound exam. She remembered me as I walked in her room...and she smiled.
Employee Name: Deborah Mueller  
Entity: SSM Health Medical Group  
Department: Central Billing Office

**Presence**

I was 24, single, and had just been accepted to a small Missouri Bible College to finish up my credits to obtain a degree in Elementary Education. I had heard a lot about the school since I was a teenager, and I was eager to attend. I presented myself to the Registrar’s office that first day, but the Registrar was out to lunch. So, I waited. A few minutes later, the President of the college, Mr. Branham, came out of his office, and chatted with me. He knew my dad, who was a pastor, so we found a lot of common ground. Mr. Branham spent about 45 minutes of his time talking with me and making me feel at home. When I met my future husband at the school a few weeks later, it was Mr. Branham who encouraged us to become more acquainted. And when we married a few years later, we visited Mr. Branham and his wife while we were on our honeymoon. Mr. Branham also was instrumental in helping me stay in school when I did not have the finances to do so. He became a mentor to me and my husband. It made all the difference in the world.

We here at SSM can invest our presence in the lives of our patients and co-workers. We can brighten our coworkers’ day by saying “Hello” with a smile. There are also the people behind the scenes who show up every day, and do their jobs cheerfully, and make their corner of the world a little brighter. There is the Patient Accounts Rep who assists families with their bills, and helps them make payment arrangements. There is the Receptionist who greets the patients with a cheery “Hello!” There is the doctor who keeps you laughing all through the appointment. And, there is that same doctor who can read the concern in your eyes, and will do his best to reassure you. And there are the Chaplains who are there as a patient nears the end of life to provide comfort and support to the patient and their family.

When we invest ourselves in the lives of others, we reveal the healing Presence of God. Jesus said, “…Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” And as God’s presence is made known, He changes lives for the better. His Presence in our lives will help us to be instruments of His peace. God’s Presence in my life since childhood has helped me to be a better person, and I am trying to be more like Him. This is how “Presence” has impacted my life.
Employee Name: Elizabeth Meyer  
Entity: Dean Health Plan  
Department: Product Development

**Overcoming my Fear of Death Through my Belief in Jesus**

Every time there was darkness in my life, I had lost sight of the Lord. I have always believed in God, but I never understood that God also believed in me.

After moving to a new town, I did not seek out a church. A neighbor told me of their church and how it went through the bible, verse by verse. A few weeks later, I stepped through the doors of that church and was warmly welcomed by everyone there. It immediately felt comfortable to me and I knew I had found my place of worship.

Soon after that I went through the worst time of my life. I ended up in a nursing home for two months due to a serious infection in my knee. They had to remove my artificial knee and replace it with a spacer. I had to have a PICC line put in and the antibiotic was so strong that I had to get my blood drawn every other day to monitor the dosage.

A few nights as I lay in my bed in the dark, tears streaming down my cheek, I thought that I was going to die. For my entire life, my greatest fear was that of dying. It was then that I realized that I was no longer afraid to die. For the first time in my life I knew that Jesus would be there to welcome me home. I felt a peace that I had never felt before.

God has touched my life in so many ways. I think about God every day now, not just when I am in crisis. The more that I give up control of my life to God, the more in control my life is.
The Presence of God

People often ask, “where was God when this happened?” The answer to that question is, he was present. He was here with you; he always has been and always will be. The divine nature of God is the perfect example of presence and that divine presence is mirrored, countless times a day, in the actions of others. The mother cradling her new born shows his presence. The grieving widow is filled with his presence. The warm smile of a nurse reveals his presence. The steady and true hands of the surgeon shows his present. In all ways and in all things the creator of the universe is present. He grieves when we grieve and he rejoices when we rejoice. He whispers his joy and grief to us through his spirit, his eternal presence. That spirit is then shared when we take the time to be present. The husband of the wife cradling their new born fills the room with love; presence. The child of the widow embraces her parent sharing tears and loss, an embrace filled with presence. The nurse who smiles while knowing how ill the patient is brings joy with her; to the patient, the family, and her fellow staff, she radiates presence. And the skilled hands of the surgeon are guided by presence when he seeks the Lord through prayer.

Presence is intimate, it’s close and personal. Presence is about a sincere word or a heartfelt embrace. It can be found in hope and loss; it can be felt in fear and courage. Presence is a gift, that when freely given is universally received. It’s that feeling you get when you know you are not alone for the God who created you is surrounding you; his presence.
Developing An Awareness

The Presence of Living in the moment – instead of wasting time in the past or future, we will miss the moment and that is how life ends up passing us by.

The Presence of Being a witness – By living in the moment we must own the moment and not allow it to grow roots in our mind by bear witness to it. Observe it, name it and stand away from it – all at once.

The Presence of Letting the rest go – Whatever is not there in that moment let go. By doing this you will experience a feeling of peace and bliss.

The Presence of Faith – Faith in God, faith in co-workers, faith in family and friends, faith in humankind, and faith in ourselves. Faith speaks the language of the heart. “Without faith in ourselves we would hold ourselves cheap, and without a faith in others we could never live as free people. This is the water that quenches parched souls”. – Evans-Amos

Parental Presence

He opened his eyes one last time and looked at us. We could see that he was sad and helpless. On hindsight, going by my memory of his deep and pensive glance at us, it seemed like his entire life was flashing in front of his eyes. After that long and haunting glance, my beloved father took his last breath right in front of our eyes!

It’s horrifying how life changes in an instant!! I had spent a great deal of time with him just that morning, and then stepped away to my study room to focus on test preparation while he had a paralytic stroke. We were informed by paramedics that it was an unprecedented cerebral hemorrhage of the brain.

Just the week before his passing away, my father had taken time off from his stressful corporate job to stay at home, and I was extremely lucky to be able to spend time with him. Alas! Little did I realize that it would be my last week with him!

I still hold on very tightly to precious memories of time spent with my father. He traveled a lot on work, but whenever he was home, he was completely with me and my siblings. He was an extremely mindful person and was very good at compartmentalizing his life. He seldom would get distracted by work related phone calls or chores, no matter how pressing they were. We had a lot of interests in common – music, poetry, literature, food, and our inherent love for nature. He would spend several hours reading out poetry aloud to me, help me compose poems, or cook my favorite food. We would go on long car drives where we would sing Classical South Indian (Carnatic) Music together. They say that time flies by when one is having fun. We truly did have a lot of fun, but in some ways it also felt like an eternity together.

So, how did those short nine years seem so long, despite him being a busy senior level Management Executive in the corporate world? His sheer undistracted and mindful presence is what made his passage of time in my life feel like an eternity. A passage of time that left an indelible mark in my mind... enough to influence another thirty odd years of my life, and interactions with my children.

Today, I am everything that my father would have liked me to be. I am well educated, am a working professional, and sing, cook, read and write passionately. I have a beautiful family I love, but most importantly, I try very hard to be mindful and present in my surroundings, despite the gadget- crazy world around me that seems to be in a rush all the time Yes! I am human, and I do slip every now and then, but I wake up quickly and remind myself of that precious gift of ‘parental presence’ that my father gave us, and how it impacted our lives so positively!
An Unexpected Encounter

“My son died an hour ago.” Her words jarred me from my 4:00 a.m. stupor. I was so surprised, I had to ask if she’d actually said what I’d heard. She had. “He was only 50. He just died. His children are 6 and 8.” The quiet evenness of her tone was more a product of shock than peace, I thought.

Here we were at the airport. Standing in line to check-in for a very early flight. We’d exchanged a few pleasantries, but most everyone present, even the normally animated airline employees, were still struggling to engage the day. I wasn’t sure she’d have that chance. Her shock, as well as this extra-early start, would likely render her day a painful blur.

I was so stunned by her simple yet terribly profound statement, that I wasn’t really sure what to do or say. “I...I’m so sorry,” was the best I could do at first. She nodded, smiling ever so slightly. “I can’t even imagine what a shock this must be.” She nodded. She’d already mentioned she was in our area on vacation, and now she was standing in line at the airport simply trying to function long enough to make her way home.

“Does the airline know?” I asked. “They told me to just come to the airport.” Not knowing what else to do, I invited her to move ahead of me in the line. “That’s OK,” she said, but I insisted. She thanked me as she moved, this time with a little more smile.

We slowly followed the meandering path toward the ticket counter. After several moments of awkward silence, I finally asked, “Would you mind if I asked your first name? I’d like to pray for you today.” I didn’t really need to know her name, but I wanted her to know I cared about her, not just about some person in line. “I’ll be praying for you, Dona.” She smiled more than I’d seen yet and thanked me for my kindness.

When I left the counter, I passed Dona and the agent working to adjust her travel arrangements. She looked up and thanked me again, both pain and gratitude showing clearly in her eyes. I returned her smile and nodded as I was on my way.

Our encounter, brief as it was, left me changed. I took with me a renewed awareness that my circumstances, however important they may be to me, are no more important than those faced by so many around me. Though they may not share it so readily as Dona, there are people around me - around each of us - every day who are facing unimaginable crises. Staying consumed with my own affairs will keep me from recognizing their needs and from sharing the love that has been so generously shared with me.

Dona, I am so very sorry for your terrible loss. Thank you, though, for the difference you made in me, even in the midst of your pain.