



Kathy Wilson, a Nurse With Baptist Hospice and Palliative Care, Remembers Maria...

Maria Strickland...Oh, that name brings a smile to my face. Now, she wasn't always smiling when she saw me. At first, she didn't even want to see me...she didn't have time. She was doing what all 6 year olds want to do, swimming, playing, visiting with family, going

on trips. She had been on our Hospice service for over 2 weeks before I, her primary Nurse, was able to catch up with her and her father, and that visit was at Wal-Mart. Maria and Randy, her Dad, were there having their pictures made. Maria in her Christmas outfit and Dad, a little scruffy because he hadn't planned on having HIS picture made. What a beautiful couple. What beautiful memories.

Maria doesn't talk much but she watches everything that goes on around her. She is very grown up for her 6 years. She has had to grow up fast. So much of her short little life has been lived in the hospital. She has been fighting this battle since she was 2.

Maria comes over to meet me. I introduce myself as her nurse and tell her that my name is Kat, she smiles, a crooked little smile. "Would you like to come and talk to me for a minute?" I ask. "No," is her reply. She turns to her dad and tells him that she is ready to go home. We make arrangements to meet at home at another time. I tell Maria good-bye and that I will see her soon. She waves and watches me over her dad's shoulder as he carries her all the way to the car. I wonder what she is thinking. (...Nurses...everywhere...even at Wal-Mart!!)

As time goes by, Maria, Randy, his parents, and I became close. I made a commitment to Maria and to her care. I knew that continuity of care was so important with a child, plus I lived close by to them. I saw Maria every day, walked the family through the changes that were happening with her, and changed her plan of care when needed. I usually checked on Maria and her family first thing in the morning, making sure that everyone was okay with what was happening at that moment. At the end of my day, I checked on them again, always reminding each family member that they could call me anytime. Sometimes they did; I always went.

On December 11, 2006, I arrived about 7:30 AM. I knew that things were different that day. After my assessment, I asked Randy if I could stay. He said, "Of course" with relief in his voice and fear in his eyes. I knew that day was Maria's day. All her family was around her. What a mixture of fear, concern, grief, sadness, relief, every emotion all at once. Maria's suffering was over.

What a brave soul. She lived more in her 6 years than most of us do in our long lives. She knew how to give and receive love more than most of us will ever experience and taught her family love lessons along the way. She was a blessing to all who had the wonderful opportunity to meet this extraordinary young girl. I am blessed to have had the opportunity to cross paths with Maria Strickland. The thought of her makes me smile.