

Night Watch

A nurse took the tired, anxious serviceman to the bedside. "Your son is here," she said to the old man. She had to repeat the words several times before the patient's eyes opened. Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, he dimly saw the young, uniformed Green Beret standing outside the oxygen tent. He reached out his hand. The Green Beret wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement.

The nurse brought a chair so that the elite fighter could sit beside the bed. All through the night, the young warrior sat there in the poorly lighted ward, holding the old man's hand and offering him words of love and strength. Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the Green Beret move away and rest awhile. He refused.

Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the soldier was oblivious of her and of the night noises of the hospital – the clanking of the oxygen tank, the laughter of the night staff members exchanging greetings, the cries and moans of the other patients. Now and then, she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only holding tightly to his son all through the night.

Along toward dawn, the old man died. The rugged paratrooper released the now lifeless hand he had been holding and went to tell the nurse. While she did what she had to do, he waited. Finally, she returned. She started to offer words of sympathy, but the uniformed warrior interrupted her.

"Who was that man?" he asked.

The nurse was startled. "He was your father," she answered.

"No, he wasn't," the Green Beret replied. "I never saw him before in my life."

"Then why didn't you say something when I took you to him?" the nurse inquired.

"I knew right away there had been a mistake, but I also knew he needed his son, and his son just wasn't here," the soldier explained. "When I realized that he was too sick to tell whether or not I was his son, knowing how much he needed me ... I stayed."

This story was passed to me by a friend. Its origin is not known. But it loudly proclaims that we are not human beings going through a temporary spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings going through a temporary human experience.

--Beecher Hunter