**Sample Student Narrative Essay**

Joy Through Tears- by Brittany Coggin

When I was growing up, there was a plaque in my grandmother’s kitchen that read, “Don’t get too busy making a living that you forget to make a life.” My grandmother certainly followed this precept. Family was the most important thing in the world to her, and my family and I knew that we were loved.

2 As a child, I spent most days with my grandmommy while my mother was finishing school. My days were filled with baking cookies, playing games, reading stories, and making our famous mud pies. Grandmommy made time for all of this while working and taking care of all the daily chores around the house. When my mother would arrive to pick me up, it was no surprise for her to walk into the house and see Grandmommy and me prancing through the house banging pans while singing “Jingle Bells,” with bright red buckets on our heads. We even called ourselves the “bucket heads.”

3 My grandmother was a remarkable woman. I have always thought of her as the “center” of my family because she was. Grandmommy held high standards for her children and grandchildren, but she held even higher standards for herself. There was never a time that we did not know where she stood on an issue or where we stood with her. She had a way of holding us accountable while still leaving us in no doubt of her love for us. Although I can recall many times that I disappointed her, there was never a time that my grandmother ever disappointed me. If I thought I was in trouble and might get spanked, I usually was and did. If I thought she would be proud of me, she was. Honesty and integrity were very important to her, and she had both in abundance.

4 Tragedy usually strikes when we least expect it. Nothing could have prepared me for what happened with my grandmother. She was the larger-than-life force who kept our family focused. If ever there was a problem, we took it to Grandmommy, knowing she would be able to point us in the right direction.

5 The first sign that there was a problem was when she began having excruciating pain in her legs. Her doctor thought it could be neuropathy or nerve damage because she had shingles when she was young. The doctor then sent her to a specialist, who could find nothing wrong. The following months were filled with specialist after specialist who prescribed pain medication after pain medication but could never diagnose the problem. The second clue that there was actually more to the story began when my grandmother complained that every time she ate, it felt as if her chest was on fire, and she would experience a lot of pressure in her chest. Once again, specialist after specialist could find nothing wrong. By this point, my grandmother’s weight went from 125 pounds to 85 pounds. Despite the weight loss, our family doctor told her that he could find nothing wrong with her. He told her to take Tylenol and to “go home and live her life.”

6 Two weeks later, she was so weak that she fell down the porch steps of our family’s farmhouse. We rushed her to the hospital in Henderson, Texas. She had broken her ankle, wrist, and both of her hips when she fell. While in the hospital, the doctor ordered a “swallow study” to be completed. My aunt, who is a speech pathologist, knew the speech pathologist doing the study. She asked her to go down lower into the esophagus and to use contrast. That was when we found out that my grandmother’s esophagus had completely closed and the opening into the stomach was blocked. Everything she swallowed, including any medication that was prescribed, had gathered at the end of her esophagus. By this time, she was much too weak to have the procedure to open the esophagus. Her doctor sent her to Tyler to have a procedure to remove all of the material in her esophagus and to try alternatives to surgery. During this time, the doctor finally ordered a scan, which revealed that she had lung cancer and that the cancer had metastasized to the bone.

7 This news was shocking to all of us. I had the surreal feeling that I was dreaming and that at any moment, I would wake up and my world would be as it had always been. Instead, the reality was that my world would never be the same again. Grandmommy was devastated but ready to fight. My mom stayed with her the first night in the hospital because she had to have three rounds of chemotherapy the first night. Mom said that after each round, she and Grandmommy “high-fived.” That’s my Grandmommy!

8 During this time, amazingly, it was my grandmother who gave us the strength to handle each day. Mom started graduate school that summer, so I would stay with Grandmommy while she was at school. Each day, Grandmommy seemed to lose the use of something. I found that I could handle more than I ever thought possible. I had to learn how to feed her and administer medication through a feeding tube. All I could think about was how I could not possibly do this. It was just too much and too hard. After a while, it became second nature. I can remember putting her false teeth in without thinking twice about it. When she lost all of her hair, we would play with hats and headbands. I would give her a makeover every time she had a doctor’s appointment. Even when she began to lose the use of her hands, she cooked dinner for my mother. Grandmommy was disappointed with how it came out, but my mom said those were the best salmon patties she had ever eaten. That dinner was a labor of love because every step in the process involved immense pain.

9 While this was a time of loss, it was also a time of happiness. The time I was able to spend with my grandmother drew us closer. Each moment I spent with her seemed suspended in time. Every word, facial expression, and hug became an everlasting memory. Sometimes it seemed that my whole family was in so much pain, and no one could reach out to help each other. My grandmother loved each of us so much, so she reached out to help each family member. Her love enveloped each of us, and it kept us believing that she would get better. I know that love is not tangible, but during this time, Grandmommy could look at me, and I could feel how much she loved me. In the midst of her suffering, she gave me love and comfort. In a sense, she helped prepare me for what was to come.

10 In December 2005, my grandfather was taking Grandmommy to her doctor’s appointment. After getting in the car, she collapsed and then became unconscious. I rushed to meet my family at the emergency room. When I got there, Grandmommy had regained consciousness but was not getting enough oxygen. My mother explained to her that she had pneumonia, and the doctors wanted to put her on a breathing machine until she got over it. Mom asked her to squeeze her hand if that was okay. Though Grandmommy could not speak, she squeezed my mom’s hand to tell her to let the doctors go ahead with the procedure. She then went into a coma that lasted a week.

11 When she awoke, she was terrified. The doctors said that she had a severe staph infection. This scared her because her father died of a staph infection. Doctors told us she would not be able to live without the breathing machine. Grandmommy had signed an advance directive requesting that she not be allowed to live with such suffering. The days following were miserable. I did not want to lose the one person who truly understood me, but we could not let her suffer. Even without the use of her body, her mind remained alert. We would stand around the bed in her room, and she would look past us with the most beautiful smile on her face. She mouthed that she was tired, and we knew it was time. The following morning, the doctor took her off the breathing machine, and she died with her family around her.

12 My grandmother lost her battle with cancer in December 2005. While I still mourn her loss, I feel honored to have known her. Grandmommy’s life will always serve as an example of how to live a life that needs no apology. She taught me that love is everlasting and that people are more important than material things. Because of her, I am stronger than I ever thought possible. I am blessed to have had this remarkable woman as my grandmother.

**Source: *Strategies for Successful Writing -A Rhetoric and Reader-* James A. Reinking Robert von der Osten PEARSON PP 153 -156**

**Questions:**

1. Identify the point of view of the narrative. Why is that choice of point of view important to this particular narrative?

2. What context did the writer provide before the central conflict of her grandmother’s illness? What was the role of this context information?

3. Narratives depend on very specific details. What details best helped develop the character of the writer’s grandmother? Why were those details effective?

4. What is the main point of this narrative? What other possible conflicts or themes might the reader have focused on? How would the narrative have to be rewritten to make that point?

5. This narrative uses very little dialogue. Would the narrative have been improved by dialogue? Where could dialogue have been added effectively?

**TASK: Choose ONE TOPIC only.**

**1. Write a personal narrative about an experience that**

a. Altered either your opinion of a friend or acquaintance or your views about some important matter.

b. Taught you a lesson or something about human nature.

c. Acquainted you with some previously unrecognized facet of your character or personality.

d. Brought about a significant change in your way of life. Keep in mind all the key narrative elements: purpose, action, conflict, point of view, key events, and dialogue.

2**. A maxim is a concise statement of a generally recognized truth. Noting the key elements above, write a first-person or third-person narrative that illustrates one of the following maxims**

a. A little learning is a dangerous thing.

b. The more things change, the more they stay the same. c. Don’t judge a book by its cover.

d. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.

e. Pride goeth before a fall.

f. Sometimes too much of a good thing can be wonderful.

g. Sometimes good intentions have unexpected consequences.