

On a January night in 1997, after everyone in my house went to sleep, the phone rang. My mother answered it, and after one minute I heard her begin to cry.

My Great Grandma Beschta changed over the past few months. My distant family members came into town and talked quietly amongst themselves looking exceptionally concerned and gloomy. At seven years old I saw my afternoon card playing, story telling happy-go-lucky best friend no longer getting out of bed. I told her about new games I learned how to play at school. Any other day, I knew this would excite her and get her moving, however, now she just continued to lie there. No words, no smiles, no eye contact. Something was terribly wrong.

My parents talked with me about the situation and explained to me that my Great Grandma Beschta was very sick and would not be with us much longer. I drilled them with questions about why she was ill and where she was going. They told me she had lung cancer and that she would pass away soon.

Not long after this talk, my family and I went to Great Grandma Beschta's house. She was in the worst state I had seen her in and I was afraid to enter the room and see her. My Mom looked down at me and carefully explained to me that this may be the last time I would see her. I nodded my head and entered. My grandparents tilted Great Grandma over a bit so she faced my direction. Still, there were no words, smiles, or eye contact. I began to talk as I normally would, about school and what I was learning. Without warning she extended her hand to me. I grabbed it. She looked me right in the eye and squeezed it three times. These were the final moments I had with my childhood best friend.

Great Grandma Beschta passed away three days later in January 1997 from lung cancer. I vividly remember the funeral her lying in her casket. As I looked down on her, all I could think about was how I wished I could have helped her in some way. This was the first time I knew I wanted to help sick people.

My drive towards this goal intensified as I began working with children. In high school I regularly babysat for a family in my hometown in Clintonville, WI with four healthy little girls. I did not fully appreciate their good health until I began volunteering at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. I walked in thinking I was going to enter a room full of children and play games with them. I could not have been more wrong.

During my time there I have seen some exceptionally sick children and their families in dire situations. Sometimes I would sit with their family members and as they vented to me about their situations only to apologize afterwards for doing so. I ensured them that I could not imagine their circumstances and that I wanted to do more for them than just listen.

The memories of my Great Grandma Beschta and my encounters with these sick children, their parent's, and their stories inspired me to use my knowledge and skills to improve their quality of life. I want to give these sick children the opportunity to do things that the four little girls that I babysit do. I want to give them the opportunity to do things I have been able to do. I want the opportunity to give those kids a chance at a better life. I know that as Physician Assistant, I can provide these children with the opportunities they otherwise would not have.