

Name

Professor

Course

Date

Personal Narrative

When I was very young, an uncle in my family got extremely ill. He had several strokes and was in the hospital for a long period of time. All of this was distressing enough for my family, but making it worse was the reality that this man, whom I here call Tom, was very loved by the entire family, as well as by the neighborhood. This was a small community and, likely because of that size, a close one. Tom was among the most popular members of it. When he would come to our house for a party, the neighbors somehow knew he was there and the house would be packed with people. Even as a child, I experienced his charm and easy-going, attractive style. He had the gift of making everyone, including my young self, feel like the most important person in the world when he spoke with them. He could joke very well, certainly, but there was far more to his appeal than that. He was highly intelligent and he never made anyone else feel inferior. He was a gentleman, yet he always made his blue-collar friends comfortable. As I look back, in fact, I think my family saw him as a kind of anchor to their own status in the neighborhood; as long as Uncle Tom was visiting, my parents took on some part of those qualities of attraction.

Consequently, when he suffered the strokes, the outpouring of real concern from all in the community was immense. His hospital room was often packed with visitors who brought candy he could not eat and flowers he could no longer smell. I would sit in a corner and, even at my age, I could tell that this caring was genuine. As I mentioned, Tom was in the hospital for some time but, upon his being released, he came to live with us. He had to give up his own apartment

simply because he required care, and my parents were more than happy to provide this. At first, the neighbors still came by in droves to see Tom and to see how he was getting along. This was not, however, the same man they had loved. His eyes would glare in frustration because he could not speak properly. I remember seeing him literally shake in a kind of rage because his motor skills were now so poor. Then, the experience of caring for Tom was more than my parents had anticipated. Even a child could perceive how stress was eating away at them and I saw my parents argue with each other like never before. Day by day, the entire experience became a disabling and more uncomfortable one, as Uncle Tom would simply sit, feeling useless and blankly staring at the floor. Equally impactful was how the neighbors stopped coming. I think they could have accepted his not being the man he was, but this extreme simply made them too uneasy. In general, people do not like to be around someone who has suffered such illness, maybe because there is an irrational sense that it's infectious. They avoid the individual, which did nothing to help my uncle's state of mind.

Tom did not live much longer and, when he died, he was sincerely mourned. At the same time, I am also sure that there was a sense of relief, if of a guilty kind. I know my parents never quite got over this experience, just as their relationships with the neighbors were never the same again. There was a new lack of trust in place because those people had, in my parents' eyes, failed Tom. In retrospect, I am absolutely sure that some form of professional counseling would have been highly beneficial to my family at that time. Taking on the caregiver role may often be traumatic, but my parents assumed the roles relying only on themselves, and I believe counseling would have given them a far better sense of the realities, and maybe some comfort as well. Instead, they only "did their duty" and ignored, or tried to ignore, how the entire experience was harming them.

