

## **Why Savannah Smiles**

by  
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During the summer months in the Kiski Valley I would sometimes see Savannah, stricken with cerebral palsy wheeling herself slowly in her wheelchair from her home to the ice cream stand. Getting ice cream on her own was the one treat she enjoyed each week, weather permitting.

One day I pulled along side the ice cream stand and I was positioned directly in front of Savannah as she struggled to put the ice cream cone near her mouth. It seemed to take her an eternity to position the cone correctly . I wanted to help her so badly but I didn't know if she would mistake my gesture as sympathy instead of compassion.

As I got in line to place my order, I could see kids snickering at Savannah's difficult predicament. My heart ached as the hot sun began to drip the ice cream onto her shirt.

After I got my order and went into my car, I noticed that almost all of Savannah's ice cream had fallen into her lap. Savannah's contorted face masked the pain of humiliation she obviously felt. I raced out of my car and began to clean her up. It seemed to take forever for her to get the words out but she thanked me for assisting her.

When I got back into my car Savannah did something I never expected. She got back in line for more ice cream. I marveled at her spirit and determination. It was incredible.

I remained parked to finish my dessert and Savannah went through the same twisted gyrations all over again with her new cone. I wondered to myself how a loving God which I profess to believe could allow someone so innocent to needlessly suffer and lead such a terribly difficult life. Would it be asking too much for something so simple as eating an ice cream cone to be made easy for her?

Then eight months later in the midst of a hectic day as I was racing to the hardware store, I came across Savannah sitting in the sun. I said hello to her and she acknowledged me with slow words. I did a double take as she began to say something else and I walked back toward her to give respect to her words. After repeating herself, I understood the second time that she thought the sunshine was nice. Her simplicity broke through my corporate consciousness and I stopped and looked up at the clouds. And then I just decided to talk with her and although her words were almost painful to listen to, they were more glorious than the oratory of a gifted speaker.

Perhaps Savannah was the rarest of rare people. She didn't see the world as most see it with the pursuit of self, dreams and ambition. She didn't see the visible reality that I saw of a sad set of circumstances, one I could surely not endure. Instead she saw the invisible reality, the true reality of God's love and the hope of being with Him one day. She talked

of Heaven with the innocence of a child. The beatitudes of the Gospel struck me at that moment as I quickly turned so she could not see the tear that streamed down my face.

Maybe this is why Jesus said, "blessed are the lowly" because Savannah had nothing else but faith. It was all she was. It was all she could be.

"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience but shouts in our pains," C.S. Lewis wrote 50 years ago. Maybe it was the pain that Savannah suffered through life that had made her shine so magnificently inside. The shadow of her wheelchair was a pathway to God. My preoccupation with the visible reality almost seemed illusory.

There are many things I don't understand and I will never be able to explain. How I long to have the faith of Savannah and how I long to accept in faith that He is behind all that is. Savannah is an angel in our midst.



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