

I KNOW . . .

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[Assignment: Describe an experience which taught you an important lesson, and/or which changed you in some way. This experience may have happened directly to you or to someone close to you.]

(1) Sunday afternoon dragged on. I sat on a window ledge, with my knees to my chin. My red-rimmed eyes dully stared at the river beneath me, and I marveled at the fact that, coincidentally, my father and his siblings swam and played there as children.

(2) I sighed deeply and left my perch. Pausing before the great wooden door, I inhaled and gulped a calming breath. With a determined air, I plastered on a fake smile and entered the room. The slight sound of the flowing oxygen echoed and pounded in my head. I willed my knees to stop knocking, and I sat down next to the bed. I stared at my father, admitting for the first time how similar we looked. His eyes, however, were glassy with his physical pain, while mine were filled with an emotional pain.

(3) My mind went hazy. I thought back to the evening when my father lumbered into my house, something he rarely did, except to pick us up for the weekend.

(4) "I came here tonight to talk to you and your brother about something serious."

My heart stopped. What had I done now?

". . . to the hospital. The doctor thinks it might be malignant. A small operation will take care of it."

I was relieved. I wasn't in trouble.

". . . then I'll be okay."

I shook my head, clearing the memory. He didn't look okay now.

(5) It had been two years since that evening. Years filled with pain and sadness, happiness and normality. I had watched my big, powerful father weaken and become helpless, and at the same time I knew that I became stronger, more mature, and more helpful. I could only do seemingly small but important things for my dad, like stirring his Coke to get rid of the carbonation, sneaking an extra egg for protein into his milkshake, and making his favorite Christmas cookies, even though they were too rich for him. But there was still one thing that I never had the courage to do.

(6) I returned to the sill, surrounded by my family, which for once was somber. Strong hands came down on my shoulders. My uncle, who looked and acted like a refugee from the '60s, noticed how intently I stared out the window. He stroked his soft black beard, suddenly

streaked with grey, and pointed to a huge old house next to the river.

(7) "He was born there. How ironic . . ."

(8) It was getting dark. I could no longer see the house, or the river. I stumbled back to the sterile, white room. Here, out of the small window, I could see the steeple of St. Mary's Roman Catholic Church. I remembered that my father's uncle was the priest there, and that he had baptized my father, myself, and many others there. I shivered, knowing that I would probably be going back there very soon. I looked at the bed, and my thoughts coincided with the echo.  
I know . . . I know . . . I know . . .

(9) I no longer tried to conceal my tears. It took all my effort to summon up the courage that I felt I never had before. My father knew my agony, and took my small hand in his large but weak one. I sobbed and gulped, trying to force out the words I had ignored and resented for so long. My father closed his eyes and gasped out his response.

(10) "I know."

(11) Even now, three years later, the echo continues.

(12) I know . . . I know . . . I know . . .