



W.H.E.E.L.

Scholarship Contest Winner

Colleen Cornfield

Topic:

New Career Choice, Your Inspiration, and Why Now?

From a young age I have felt called to serve others. I have found the most passion, happiness, and purpose in my life while helping and caring for other people. After my parents divorced when I was in high school, I thought I would pursue a law career to fight for other families in similar situations. I graduated from Michigan State University in 2015 with a pre-law degree, but after much reflection throughout my college experience, I realized that I did not feel passionately about the law.

I spent the next few years applying for jobs that I was unsure of because I felt the outside pressure of needing to get a decent job and make a living. More and more I felt called to return to school to further my education, but since I was already sitting on a mountain of student loan debt, I did not feel that school was an option for me.

I worked as a nanny for one of my nephews for a few years and I loved every minute of it. I felt lucky to spend so much time with him and I loved researching and learning about how he was growing- physically, mentally, and emotionally. Taking care of him gave me a sense of passion and purpose that I had not felt in a long time.

On Thanksgiving Day 2020, my thirty-three year old husband went to the emergency room and within twenty-four hours we learned that he was in acute heart failure and he was moved to the Meijer Heart Center in Grand Rapids. There he was sedated, intubated, and placed on a heart pump and ECMO, a heart-lung bypass machine. For the next seventeen days he fought just to stay alive. I spent all day every day at his bedside, talking to his doctors and nurses and learning and researching as much as I could about every aspect of his condition and care. I was constantly in awe of, and unbelievably grateful for, the care the nursing team provided not only for my husband but also for me. They spent extra time explaining each condition, procedure, test, and medication to me, and they encouraged and helped me to be hands-on with my husband's care and recovery. This support not only mitigated the helplessness I had been feeling, but also awoke in me a purpose and a drive that had lain dormant for many years.

Over the next two months, the nursing staff on three different floors of Spectrum Hospital became our family away from family. They held me while I cried on his bad days, they celebrated with me on his good days, and they fought beside us every day in between. The more time I spent talking to and learning from the nursing team, the more I felt in my gut that I was being called to serve in a new way.

On January 7, 2021, my husband was implanted with a Left Ventricular Assist Device, a mechanical heart pump, that will manage his heart function until he can receive a heart transplant. He was discharged on January 27 and I have spent each day since reflecting upon what it would mean to me to become a nurse- to be a source of strength, support, knowledge, hope, and healing for people and their loved ones during the most challenging times of their lives. The nursing staff at Spectrum Hospital helped to give me back my best friend and greatest source of support in my life. I hope to one day have a modicum of the effect on someone's life as they have had on mine and my husband's lives.