

Esther - From January to May, I was finishing seventh grade. I never had much difficulty in 7th grade with schoolwork, homework, or grades. God had blessed me in this way. Summertime came and I did a great multiple of things. Obviously, I slept in until 10 am everyday and my mom wasn't pleased with this because, "even though it's summer, you can't neglect your devos." She stressed the importance of quiettime with God in the morning. Also, our church hosts an event called VBS which stands for vacation bible school. Kids of grades Pre-k to 6th would attend the church program for about a week participating in games, crafts, teaching, and memorization of bible verses. I was in the crafts department with a couple of friends. It was my first year helping out so I was so unprepared. Some of the crafts we made ~~was~~ were paper wigs, lion masks, and cardboard swords. During the weeks of preparation and the event itself, I was extremely ~~the~~ tired but God gave me the strength to take each day one at a time. That was the highlight of my summer. ~~Other things happened like summer outings, summer packets, and lots of chores.~~ In addition to VBS, my mom's parents moved to a house in Calitania, only five minutes away from our house, from IL. Our family spend a lot of time with them. We showed them tourist sites, different restaurants, and the church my dad is a pastor at. School came around again and I started 8th grade. The projects and work load increased from 7th grade but it wasn't overwhelming. From the beginning of eighth grade to ~~now~~ ^{December}, life had been easy-going. I did my chores when I came back from school, played with

the dog, ate, and slept. That was my routine.

→ On December 9, 2013, I woke up as normal. I brushed up, read my devos, and ate breakfast. Interestingly enough, the devo for that day was about how the body is weak but the eternal body is everlasting. I was going to go upstairs to check on my mom. It was late and she needed to bring me to school. My mom was on the stairs holding onto the railing and she was ^{sitting} asleep. At that moment, I just thought she ~~was~~ didn't get enough sleep and was really ~~tired~~ tired. I told her to go back upstairs and sleep for a while but she told me she needed her medicine and to call grandma to drive me to school. So I brought her the medicine she needed and a cup of ~~to~~ water. Although I felt her for only a few seconds, she was asleep again. I woke ~~her~~ up and made sure she drank her water and took her medicine. Afterwards, I called up my grandparents, told my mom good bye, and left. That was my last words to my mom. On my last period, I was called to leave and I racked my brain trying to remember if I had a doctor's or dentist appointment but I couldn't recall it. My sister, Stephanie, and Byron, a church member, were waiting in the office for me. We dropped off our things in our house and ~~no~~ mom or dad was there. Mom stays at ~~the~~ house and Monday's for dad is his day off. I knew something was wrong. Then I notices we were headed to the hospital. I prayed ~~over and~~ over again.

We walked inside the hall and saw our dad. He looked as though he had been crying. He grabbed me and Stephanie and held us tight and said, "Mommy has done to be with the LORD today." Stephanie immediately starting to cry but I stood there for a while in shock. I never expected this. All of us including our grandparents walked inside the room where the body lied. We altogether mourned and as a comfort to myself I remembered that being in heaven is better than living in a sin filled place. I loved her yet I had to keep that in mind. The weeks to come were chaos. People brought us food, families came and prayed with us, family/friends ~~came~~ traveled here, the funeral was the next week. Everything seemed to fly by so quickly. So many people offered to comfort but I wasn't comforted in that way. God helped me overcome the grave. I felt he was the only one who understood fully what I was going through. My friends were of no comfort nor the church but God is good and loved me. Now it is passed Christmas and my relationship with my family and God grew. God is good through the storm and in the quiet. This year brought me great gladness and deep pain but I can say that God is gracious and will be with me in 2014. "Give thanks with a grateful heart."

-Esther