



Who is God When Life Stinks?

“HOP ON POP!”

Stories written by the imaginative “Dr. Seuss” have a way of securing themselves forever in the memory banks of all good parents who have read those ridiculous-sounding rhymes over and over to their children at bedtime! Even now that our kids are grown, we could probably recite a few lines from several books—as perhaps you can also!

One book that especially caught our kids’ attention was “HOP ON POP”. The cover drawing of two little “Seusslings” jumping on their pop’s belly, as he lay on the floor, immediately inspired them! On weekends or holidays, Bob would try to sleep in late, but eventually he needed to get out of bed! (Yes, life goes on with little ones in the house, and although it was a Saturday or a holiday, mommy needed her parenting partner out of bed by noon!)

Of course, sweet, little, loving bodies are more persuasive than nagging words, so my ploy was to *send in the kids!* One problem—my prank-pulling, dry humor husband would continue to sleep deeply (or appear to) despite all the kisses and precious little prods to wake him up. But the apple doesn’t fall too far from the tree—and our kids dug into their own resourceful, humorous tactics.

Once they met with no success at waking daddy with kisses, they decided to run into the room, shouting “Hop on Pop”, and JUMP—landing with their knees directly on Bob’s chest! Oooouch! Even the strongest pretend-sleeper couldn’t doze through that. Thankfully, Bob’s chest was strong, full of muscle and somehow he endured it repeatedly!

Because it was so effective, “Hop on Pop” became their favorite morning ritual with Daddy, and now is fondly being passed on down to the grandchildren, as they attack their own daddy (ahh, sweet revenge) but also to Grandpop whenever we visit. We love the sweet touch of early morning toddler skin against ours as they sneak into our room early morning—REAL early it seems! We also love the giggles and tickles that follow as Grandpop reacts to the bouncing children on his chest. (While I might also still be in bed, usually I am busy protecting my body, or kissing some boo-boo that resulted from colliding little bodies!)

How excited we were that Bob, Elizabeth and the children were coming down to visit soon after Bob was finally released from the university hospital—13 days after his heart surgery and pulmonary embolectomy. But Bob was grimacing at the thought of ANY

touch to his chest which was carefully held together by skin glue. And under the skin, his chest bone was wired together in an effort to begin the long healing process. The happy fun of “Hop on Pop” would NOT be a part of this visit.

Our grandkids are the most tender-hearted children we know (yep, we sure are proud of them!) How would they react to their big, strong Grandpop laying in bed, unable to play around with them? Would their little minds understand his desire to enjoy them, but his physical weakness and need for rest and recovery? The children were already worried about their grandpop, were praying for him, and we wanted to explain in terms they could understand ways they could still show their love (ages were 6, 5, 1 and newborn).

Little Benjamin asked his mommy, “Can I just touch Grandpop gently?” This little boy adores his grandfather wholeheartedly, and of course we wanted to reassure him this would be okay.

Bob had been discharged without complication—the hospital attendant wheeling him down to my car, and then helping him into the back seat. I was assigned “chauffeur” for several weeks, as Bob’s chest could not be exposed to any airbag potential (no front seat allowed). But as we drove home, Bob realized how very tired and weak he was, in comparison to about three weeks earlier when he first walked into our local hospital with a swollen ankle.

Physical therapists had almost immediately after surgery tried to get Bob up and walking—as is the standard after heart surgery. Although Bob’s surgery included open heart surgery, his problem was blood clots, and his heart was fine! However, whenever Bob stood to walk, his ankle would again swell (from the blood clot issue which remained and would need many months and blood thinning medications to dissolve). So the doctor ordered bed rest, with the leg elevated. Before leaving the hospital Bob was required to walk a short distance, but this was difficult and tired him quickly. We had enough time on the drive home (45 minutes plus) for Bob to plan out his at-home strategies. I would need to place folding chairs around the house, and one on the front sidewalk, so if he should falter, they would provide resting places for his unstable body. This worked well.

Between resting in bed, and resting in the recliner, with faltering steps between the two, Bob settled in and we got ready for the grandchildren to arrive. Their flight plans brought them to Orlando exactly one week after Bob’s arrival home. They would not arrive until midnight, so our son found a great on-line deal for a hotel room that night at the airport hotel. I borrowed a seven passenger van from generous friends, and the following

morning I left Bob resting at home, to drive the three hour round trip to pick up our wonderful family of son, daughter-in-law and four kids.

It was an excited, but cautious crew of kids that walked into our doors to find Grandpop! There would be no hopping on his chest, just real tender kisses on his cheeks, and gentle touches. Bob weakly explained how desperately he wanted to play with the kids, but told them that for this visit he would just *watch* their fun!

So we positioned the recliner with a full view of the back patio doors. Bob dozed in his chair, covered with a blanket, and baby Nathaniel sat in his sleeper seat next to his grandpop. The rest of us then headed outside to jump in the pool where we played, laughed, splashed and made lots of noise for hours and hours! What a great distraction to our weary hearts! What a tremendous bundle of life and energy, after the draining experience of facing repeated emergencies and possible death!

We would have only six days together, but even with all the outdoor fun, the indoor noise soon became too much for exhausted, uncomfortable Bob. Our thoughtful kids offered to head out to a hotel, but we were able to book two nights for them at one of the beautiful rental cabins in the Ocala National Forest—just a five minute drive from our home. The children could explore the woods there, visit here during the day, and then I went to join them for dinner. Bob was benefitting by this midweek break from all the healthy, but loud noises of childhood!

Too soon, it was time for their return to New Hampshire. Bob's two week check-up at the hospital clinic was scheduled for the same day as their return flight, so we had to do some creative thinking. I would take Bob to the clinic appointment, which would require several hours in travelling and waiting, and our son would drive the van with his family to spend the day in Orlando. They wanted to visit our daughter Crystal, do some shopping, and then I could ride down with friends to meet them (and the van) at the airport. Our friends would drive their van directly home, and I could linger to say "good-bye" to the family, then head home also.

It is always so hard to give hugs to these precious children and wonder how long until the next visit, or how much of their growing up adventures we would be missing! Ever since the cancer diagnosis, and now Bob's life-threatening emergencies, our own children deeply felt the impact of each good-bye with us, and tears flowed quickly at the airport terminal curb. Our daughter-in-law Elizabeth (we hate using the "in-law" part of that, as we consider her one of OURS!) especially has a hard time with good-byes, and

often I need to swallow my own tears to be strong for us both! (Yes, Elizabeth, it hurts me to say goodbye to you too!)

Our kids and grandkids wanted me to stay and grab some supper with them at the airport after they checked in, but I felt the urgency of returning to Bob. My mind was tired, but content, as I drove away from the terminal. The drive home was quiet, and I spent time thanking God for the wonderful family times, for the fun of grandkids, and for the opportunity we had to see ALL of our children during this eventful, uncertain time of our lives. We deeply admire our young adult children, and their faith and love inspire us!

As my long drive was almost over, the cell phone rang. It was our Sunday School teacher, just giving a check-up call. He and his wife had been at both hospitals several times to visit Bob, and were great at building community in the group of adults who studied together each Sunday morning. I updated him on Bob's slow but steady recovery, and about our family's visit. His call was interrupted by someone beeping in. I was now only five minutes from home, and Bob's raspy voice was on the other end of the phone.

"I'm having trouble breathing", he said. "Will you be here soon?" I drew a deep breath myself, trying to stay calm, and assured him that I would be there almost immediately. At our clinic appointment earlier that day, Bob had mentioned some shallow breathing to the physician's assistant that examined him. They assured us that this is often typical of weakness which follows surgery. The physician assistant said we could get another chest scan to check, but that it probably was not necessary. The drive to the clinic had already worn Bob out, and he was eager to get home, so we decided to just wait and see if the breathing improved.

By the time I arrived home, Bob was clammy to the touch. I kept thinking of the clinic visit, where I heard that we had nothing to worry about. "Perhaps Bob has become overtired while I was gone", I thought. "Let's try moving you from the recliner to the bed to lay down and see if you improve." I am NOT medically trained, but have always worked hard at being alert for how to keep my family healthy. So I was trying my best, but did not have the knowledge or experience to recognize what poses a medical emergency.

As soon as Bob took his first few steps, his legs buckled under him, and he collapsed in the hallway. I knew we needed to call 9-1-1, but I panicked at the thought of rushing off to the local hospital where they had previously shipped him away—his case had been too complicated for them to handle. I couldn't take chances with people trying to "figure

out” what to do, while my husband struggled to breath. He needed to be back at the university hospital, one hour away, and I didn’t know how to make that happen.

Who should I call? My hands were shaking too much to look up numbers in the phone book, and I didn’t want to leave Bob’s side for even a split second. Ohhh, the phone call from our SS teacher—I could just push redial on my cell phone! Although it was after 10 pm by now, Gary answered immediately. “I need help—NOW!” I almost yelled into the phone.

“What do you want me to do?” Gary was ready for action, and I wasn’t sure what to ask. Another friend from SS works with the EMTs, and I wanted his advice. I would trust his knowledge of Bob’s situation and needed him here to direct the ambulance crew. Gary stayed on the phone with me, while his wife dialed our EMT friend. I realized then that Bob could be dying in front of me, and I did not want to share that experience with strangers. “Can you come over right away??!” I pleaded.

Gary was in the car and at our house within minutes. Our EMT friend also arrived (he was off duty), and he had an ambulance crew on the way. He took Bob’s pulse, and said we needed to move quickly. It was obvious from his quiet, deliberate actions that things were turning worse, as Bob lay crumpled on the floor and struggling to breath.

The flashing red lights in front of our house at 10:30 p.m. drew attention from our neighbors, and one neighbor across the street walked right into our house. We knew him only casually, but knew that he attended the church where I work. It was another familiar face, in a very tense time, and I welcomed his presence and concern. He wanted to call the pastor to tell him of Bob’s condition, and I agreed.

It took all the strong men in the room to lift my large husband onto a stretcher, and as they loaded him into the ambulance, I walked closely by. The night air was still warm, as this was early July in Florida, but I shivered. Once before I had experienced the terrible aloneness of an ambulance ride to the hospital—it is difficult and awkward to sit up front with a loved one in the back, out of sight, under someone else’s care. This ride would take us to our local hospital, only 10 minutes away. I was afraid, but kept whispering prayers for wisdom—for the medical staff, and for me—to have the knowledge and strength for whatever was ahead.

If you lack wisdom, ask of God and He will give it liberally. James 1:5 [Next Chapter](#)