



Who is God When Life Stinks?

CHANGES ABOUND

The horror of my brother-in-law's sudden death hung heavy over all of us. When our brief sister-time together was over, we each planned to head for our own homes. Janna and her husband would leave for the Dominican Republic in just three days. I was needed back with Bob at the hospital and at work since school was getting ready to start. My other sisters, and brothers, were quickly changing their regular plans to arrange travel to Colorado for a sorrowful time of standing beside Martha as they all said "good-bye" to a precious, young husband and father.

How quickly life can CHANGE for any of us. Just three months ago, Bob and I were enjoying our jobs and planning for a summer of "less stress" to help my body fight the cancer through this alternative treatment! Now, instead, uncertainty and daily crises marked each day for us. Just one week ago, Martha and her husband Dave were busy, home-school parents of nine children. Now, Martha was facing the rigorous challenge of teaching, providing and caring for her large family – alone.

When I returned home from my sisters, and headed back to the hospital, I discovered that many changes with Bob were underway. Bob had been receiving dialysis three days a week, and the report was that this may reduce to two days/week. Tremendous efforts had been made to start Bob on physical therapy. Because of the clots still in his ankle and knee area, Bob had been restricted to no-movement of his legs. As a result, his legs had seriously atrophied.

The first attempts at therapy were to just transfer Bob's long, 6'8" frame to a horizontal board and strap him down. This required all four members of the "lift team". These were muscle bound men, who apparently didn't have the bedside manner of Bob's tender-hearted nurses. In fact, Bob had nicknamed them the "jerk and drop" team!

Once he was on the board, it would be tilted up vertically, to simulate a standing position. Bob's legs could NOT support his own weight. His therapists had an additional strap around Bob's waist, and the muscles in their strong arms rippled with the pressure of

holding Bob him upright for just short periods of time.

Now that Bob was progressing a bit on the physical therapy, we were assigned a social worker. She told me that soon it would be time to move Bob to a nursing home for rehab. Ohhhh, this was NOT going to be good news to Bob.

As a little boy, Bob often visited nursing homes to see the “old people”. He enjoyed the sweet treats and cookies they handed out. The elderly residents at the nursing home gave him the nickname “Cookie” because of the way he enjoyed those tidbits of sweets. But, he always viewed nursing homes as “the place people go to die”. For Bob to now become a resident in an “old folks’ home” was going to be a very difficult adjustment, mentally and physically.

In between work and hospital visits, I tried to find a nursing home that might change Bob’s dreary opinion. I toured a lovely facility near my work, but then discovered they did not accept our insurance. Checking with our friends in the medical field, we were warned to stay away from the specific ones in our area that did accept our insurance. Since the hospital was still recommending dialysis for Bob’s kidneys, we needed a facility that could handle this as well.

Finally, we received good recommendations about a nursing home/rehab facility called TimberRidge. It was clean, next to a dialysis location, but over a 35 minute drive from our home, in the opposite direction of the hospital. The drive would be exhausting after a long day of work for me, but the social worker confirmed Bob’s room there.

How thankful Bob and I were when our strong, tall son offered to fly down from New Hampshire and help with Bob’s transfer from hospital to rehab. This would save us another ambulance ride, and would let Bob relax in his own car. By now, Bob had begun to stand and with help, take one or two steps at a time. However, our son and I were both cautious about transporting Bob. Neither of us had observed the techniques used by the physical therapists when they maneuvered Bob from laying, to sitting, to standing. Because of his two heart surgeries, Bob had “sternum precautions”. He could not PUSH UP with his hands, as the pressure was too severe on his chest. He could not be PULLED UP

by his arms, for the same reason. Our son let the hospital staff help load his dad into the car and, with a deep sigh, Bob sunk into the backseat. As our son drove away, he called my work to let me know they were on the road.

However, unknown to the hospital staff, my husband and son (also named Bob) had plans to go A.W.O.L. – absent without leave or permission! But only temporarily...

Bob (our son) gave me instructions to meet them at the Chili's Restaurant, located less than one mile from the nursing home facility. My husband was drooling at the thought of a non-hospital meal! This was his very first venture OUTSIDE of the hospital in almost 7 weeks. It felt like freedom! In addition to the celebration of eating real food, Bob was purposefully postponing his new, impending confinement at the nursing home. At this time in our adventure, we did not know that the hospital meals would resemble banquet food, compared to the portions served at the nursing home!

Neither did we know what a CHALLENGE this adventurous side trip this would be!

Eager to see Bob again, outside of the hospital setting, I drove quickly to the restaurant. We had arranged to borrow a wheelchair for this "celebratory dinner date" and right after unloading it from the trunk, my men arrived. I was excited about getting Bob out of the backseat and wheeling him triumphantly into the restaurant for this special occasion.

Uhhh, oh. The mood changed quickly from excitement to frustration. The back seat of our car was much lower than the wheelchair. Bob could not PUSH. We could not PULL. Neither can Bob hold his own weight up on his legs. How will we ever lift this 6'8" man, weak, frail and now frazzled, from the low back seat into a much higher wheelchair seat?

We reached, we grunted and we tried to gently lift. All three of us were quickly getting hot and flustered in the blazing August sun. Bob was trying to explain how the physical therapist would brace his feet and lift under the armpits. Following his instruction, we finally transferred Bob into the chair, but there was no triumph left in our voices. Sweaty, nervous and hungry, we were ready to head into the air-conditioned restaurant

for Bob's first "real meal" in almost two months!

But no, Bob was stopping me with an urgent look in his eyes. "I really need to go", he pleaded. After weeks by his side, helping in his care, I understood without further explanation. "Yes", I answered. "I have one with me in the trunk."

Discreetly, I opened the trunk and quickly took out a urinal, tucking it inside a small carry-bag. Handing off the wheelchair to my son, I said, "Hurry please! Dad needs to be wheeled to the restroom. He cannot stand, so you will need to use this!" I tossed the bag into Bob's lap, and my wide-eyed son wheeled off toward the back of the building.

Wearily, I looked around the restaurant and chose a table with room enough to pull up a wheelchair and two big men. Sinking into one of the chairs, I sighed.

Yes, life had changed for us in so many ways, and new challenges were constantly being added. From our ventures today, it was obvious that we would need STRENGTH for the days ahead. How grateful we were for a God who gives new strength each day, and for friends who continued to pray for us.

Exodus 15:2

**"The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him."**

From: Bob Bell IV
Date: August 23, 2007
Subject: Baby Steps and Nursing Homes

Another update from Ruth about Bob Bell III:

10 days ago Bob was helped to his feet for the first time in 6 weeks!
THANK YOU for all the prayers!

In the last week, if people work together to help him stand (it's a team effort!) he has been able to walk a few steps. It's hard to say "BABY STEPS" with Bob's size 17 shoes, but Bob said he feels like a 12 month old toddler concentrating so hard on how to put one foot in front of the other. After 6 weeks of being confined to bed,

it was very gradual these last 2 weeks to get his body vertical, and slowly to walk. He still cannot get up out of a chair by himself, so lots of physical therapy and hard work is required.

He has finally said "goodbye" to UF Shands hospital and is now at a Nursing and Rehab center, about 20 miles from our home. Doctors from the hospital stopped by to wish him well, and he has made quite an impression on all the medical staff at UF.

God's miracles will be remembered by them, but I'm happy to say that many also commented on Bob's wonderful, willing and kind attitude through all of this! He was a great example of kindness, from the cleaning lady, to food tray people, nurses, aides, docs, etc. Thanks for praying.

The Dialysis catheter is still inserted in Bob's neck, but he's had NO DIALYSIS for 2 weeks now as his kidneys continue to gradually improve... another miracle! Bob may need to return to the hospital for several days to remove the catheter, and we pray that he will not have a bleeding problem with that (since his blood is still trying to balance with being thinned for the clots).

The idea of a "Nursing Home" is quite an adjustment, but it is extra motivation for Bob to work hard and be sent back to his own bed and house (& wife!) We sure do look forward to that! and we know this is only because of so many prayers and God's choosing to heal Bob at this time.

We will still have times of being weary, but we definitely know the strength that comes from being held up by friends, family, prayers, cards, love. It is our privilege to feel how deeply people care, and to see God's love through others.

With deep joy and appreciation,
Ruth & Bob

Phil 4:4-8
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