



## Who is God When Life Stinks?

### In the Air there's a Feeling of Uhh... Christmas?

*Sing to the tune of "Silver Bells":*

Busy hallways,

Sleeping patients,

Dressed in hospital gowns,

In the air there's a feeling of Christmas.

Rolling IV stands,

Beeping blood pressure cuffs,

Sterile hospital rooms,

And from another new specialist we hear,

"Mr. Bell, Mr. Bell,

It's Christmas-time, with MORE SURGERY!"

Ring-a-ling, hear them sing,

Soon it will be Christmas Day.

NOT your typical Christmas lyrics.

NOT how we expected to spend this Christmas season.

But it was December and Bob had come back into the hospital to have the infection cut out that had spread to his ribs. Now we sat waiting for the plastic surgeons to schedule his reconstructive surgery. No one seemed to be in a rush. Christmas break seemed a bit like weekends at the hospital. Staff was cut back, and procedures were limited. Bob needed this surgery to be able to heal and be discharged. And what an impressive surgery it is...

One abdomen muscle would be cut loose at an end so that the surgeon could flap it into the big chest cavity opening where ribs and chest tissue had been removed. In order to close this huge opening, a skin graft would be cut from Bob's upper thigh to carefully lie on top of the muscle. Blood circulation must be encouraged across the muscle and grafted skin, so the wound vac would be attached again. This also would help to prevent infection after all these muscles and connections were violated.

---

---

How amazing is this masterpiece of skin, muscles, blood, and bones that God designed for us to live in! How thankful we are for skilled physicians.

The hospital staff working during Christmas had made attempts to bring some “holiday cheer” into this stark, tall trauma hospital building. However, Christmas was definitely going to be feeling DIFFERENT for the Bell family this year.

It was now Christmas break from school. On Friday, at the end of this last busy week of work, I dragged into the hospital to spend the weekend. I could now stay overnight in Bob’s room so today I carried a change of clothes and toiletries in my “mistress bag”. We had kidded about Bob having an overnight female guest—and if his hard-working wife found out about this, she would most certainly not be happy!

We were both weary but grateful at the same time. I was weary of carrying around cancer in my own body, but we were so grateful that it was currently under control with the alternative medicine. I was tired of the drive from home to hospital every day, but grateful now for the school holiday and looked forward to just sitting with Bob in his room for a while. My body felt tired each time I dragged my feet up the five flights of stairs to get to Bob’s room, but I was determined to keep exercising and caring for my own physical health as best as possible. But most of all, we were tired of the unrelenting emergencies.

Today, I caved in and took the elevator to the fifth floor. Turning left after exiting, I looked down the long hallway leading to Bob’s room. My tired body stood still and I laughed. “God”, I smiled silently. “I’ve absolutely NO ENERGY left, so you will have to help move my feet down that hall!” And then, of course, I would need energy again for whatever unseen events lay ahead when I reached Bob’s room. Well, just watch how God works!

As I stepped into the hallway of Bob’s wing, a nurse stood outside another patient’s room. She stopped me to say what a “trooper” Bob has been. She marveled at our faith to continue trusting after all this time.

Then, right there in the hallway, as my tired feet stood patiently waiting, and with my overnight bag hanging heavy on my shoulder, our sweet nurse friend began unloading her heart to me. She was not sleeping well, with her sorrow and loneliness from losing her mom to cancer this summer. She still weeps each night for her loss. Oooh, I know how that feels! Compassion rippled through my tired body, and the love of God encouraged me to tell her a story!

---

---

Gently, I began to explain about the first Christmas, when God the father said farewell to the son that he loves so dearly. "See", I quietly shared, "the hurt of separation is something that God himself understands. His son left heaven to be born in human form on earth,. This was God's plan, but it also carried the cost—Jesus would leave his heavenly father, to be born in a humble stable. Through this powerful act of love, God's son could connect with our human experience and emotions. He also would make a way for us to be accepted into heaven forever through his life and death."

Our nurse friend listened well as I briefly painted the Christmas story with my words. She continued to talk some more with me. I listened and then promised to pray that she would find peace through Jesus this Christmas. The privilege of reminding this dear lady about God's love, shown to us in his precious gift of Jesus, began to fill my tired heart with a quiet, calm feeling of Christmas. Yes, even here in this sterile, bleak hospital hallway.

We had no brightly lit Christmas tree or cozy, warm house to snuggle down in for the holidays. No fresh pine wreath on the front door and candles in the windows. Instead, there were a few flimsy door decorations on several patient doors that kept breaking free of the tape. These had been hung by some kind-hearted hospital staff, attempting to add holiday cheer.

However, over this pre-Christmas weekend, there seemed to be a greater willingness by people in the hospital to look past their current personal traumas and connect with others, even strangers.

We met several families of patients on the floor who freely told us their stories of pain, disappointment or discouragement. Just providing a listening ear and a promise of prayer seemed to help make their load lighter. One woman arrived on the wing just to "wait" for a heart transplant... you see, the holidays are unfortunately also high accident times and just perhaps there would be a heart available. Those who are admitted on-site and waiting would have a better chance of getting the heart! How ironic that one family's devastating tragedy could become another family's long-awaited joy.

As I sat in the lounge that weekend, waiting for a procedure on Bob to be done, it was a perfect time to write personal notes on our Christmas newsletters, which included a summary of this past year's events. One woman in the lounge was looking over my

---

---

shoulder, so I explained a little of our story. It was a pleasant surprise when she asked to take a copy of our Christmas letter back to her fiancé's room because "he needs to hear about this faith".

Then one of the nurses, who cared often for Bob, stopped by his room before leaving for her Christmas holiday break. She gave us both warm hugs, and had tears in her eyes. We continue amazed at the loving hearts of staff here, and God's desire to love them back through us.

Finally, someone came to announce that reconstructive surgery was scheduled... "sometime tomorrow". Bob was immediately put on NPO – no food allowed in preparation for the surgery. He and I waited together patiently in the room, and waited, and waited...

**"He who began a good work in you, will continue until completion."**

**Philippians 1:6**

From: Ruth @ the hospital  
Date: December 18  
Subject: Bob's surgery at 10 PM

Yes, that's Tuesday @ 10PM. They just took Bob back to start surgery - I'm staying in his room tonight, and we expect him back here in about 3 hours.

Thank you for praying today - God gave us GRACE to wait comfortably without complaining. Bob's trust and calm spirit are truly inspiring.

Now we are praying for the surgeons and those attending Bob to be alert, wise and successful. We know that God NEVER SLEEPS and we count on HIM in charge of this all.

Love and deep APPRECIATION,  
Ruth (& Bob)

Date: Wed, 19 Dec 2007 10:39 ET  
Subject: He's done it again! (the Bells)

Yes, in many ways God's strong hand has been at work in our lives again.

Just when we feel too tired to move another foot, God elaborately demonstrates that OUR strength isn't necessary, just our availability to let his beauty shine through.

And when we find ourselves waiting from 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. for the promised call of an available surgery room, God takes our open hands and fills them with enough grace to be calm and confident in his timing.

Tuesday (12/18) at 10 P.M. Bob finally went down for the reconstruction surgery. Ruth has a chair/bed in his room, so could actually catch a few hours sleep until 1:00 am when the doctor called to say that surgery was done, and it went well. There is an abdomen muscle now positioned over the area where ribs and chest wall were removed, and a skin graft over the incision area. Please continue praying for the next five days which are very important as the body needs to accept these changes. How amazing is this masterpiece of skin, muscles, blood, and bones that God designed for us to live in! How thankful we are for skilled physicians.

Tonight as I was waiting for Bob to come back from surgery, his nurse came and joined me in the darkened room, telling me about her heartaches of not being able to have children. She has a strong trust in God, and together we affirmed that we want to obey God even when it means walking through painful places. God doesn't have to do things our way for us to be confident that HE IS at work in our lives.

It's 3 a.m. now and Bob is back in the room, in excruciating pain. The morphine should kick in soon, we hope. We cling to the truth of God's promises that "He who began a good work in you will carry it on" - Philippians 1:6.

THANK YOU for reminding us through your prayers that God is at work- each day, and each long night - again and again - whether it makes sense or not.

Merry Christmas from Shands Hospital & the Bells!

PS All our children are arriving in FL for Christmas - Bob is not up to much "fun" but we surely look forward to the extra love of family while here at the hospital, and for God's JOY shining through us all while here.

[Next Chapter](#)