

WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. WHAT HAPPENED TO ME!

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Many of you have no idea how happy I am to be here. Some of you knew I was missing from church for about 6 months last year. It was unusual for me, especially since I was within one mile of the church. So here is my excuse. I will present it in two parts. The first part is what happened to me; and the second part is what happened to me. I will let you know when I move from the first part to the second.

The malady I have is quite rare. It is called glosso pharangeal neuralgia. Bear with me while I give you a more detailed description of what it is and how it came about. I promise not to tell you anything squeamish.

I was driving home from a luncheon one day and when I happened to swallow, I experienced a sharp pain in my throat. Oh, oh. I hope I'm not coming down with a bad cold. By the time I reached the house it was VERY bad. Boy, this cold could be a doozy! Within an hour I was retching in the bathroom. Something was really wrong. Maybe food poisoning, but I didn't feel sick. Then I thought I might have bruised my throat during lunch with something sharp. But soup for lunch doesn't normally have anything sharp enough to cause that much pain. Each time I swallowed the pain grew worse. Time to get to the hospital. Wendell was not home (as so often is the case) so I drove myself to Hoag Hospital. After I tracked Wendell down, he joined me in the emergency room. We spent over 6 hours there. After some X-rays, and pain killers (which didn't work) the doctor informed me that he had no idea what it was and advised me to see my primary doctor.

The next morning my primary doctor had no idea what it was either but since it seemed to be in my esophagus, he set up an appointment with a gastroentologist for that same afternoon. That doctor lined me up for a bronchoscopy that took place the following day. He couldn't find anything wrong either and since the pain seem to reside higher in the throat, he sent me to an ear, nose and throat doctor. The next day after stuffing more tubes down my throat and up my nose the ENT said he didn't know what was wrong either. All the while, the pain continued. Two days later, they decided to send me to a neurologist. I guess they were running out of doctors. I figured that the next doctor after that would be a psychologist who would tell me it was my imagination. Imagination, hell!!

The neurologist finally diagnosed it. He indicated it is usually seen in older people. (I beg your pardon!!!) He explained there are arteries throughout your brain and as you get older the arteries begin to lose their elasticity. Sometimes they can rub on various nerves and wear away the nerve sheath. For me this is what happened to the No. 9 nerve that is imbedded deeply in the brain. The result is the equivalent of a hot poker searing your throat and the next swallow brings on the electric shocks. The pain was very severe plus it was occurring every 5 minutes or so. It was so incapacitating that it would sometimes knock me to my knees when it happened. It is not classified as a fatal disease but I just knew I was being worn out and I would probably have a heart attack or stroke if it didn't stop soon.

The neurologist immediately diagnosed it as glosso pharangeal neuralgia. It is so rare that after 30 years of practice he had only seen two cases, and mine was the second. After having several attacks in his office he immediately sent me across the street to Hoag. Because it is so rare there is no specific drug made for this malady. The only thing they could do was to try different medications for similar neuralgia. Well, there are several, and I believe they tried them all. I don't know which one of them caused me to have hallucinations, but it was a frightening experience. Now most of you have not had hallucinations, but they are not like really bad dreams. You are definitely WIDE AWAKE. One night I heard my granddaughter at the other end of the floor crying for help. Now this was a young child crying but my granddaughter is 16 years old. That didn't matter. I couldn't just lie there and hear her crying for help. The hospital bed has an alarm that goes off when you get out of bed and I knew that I couldn't get far. So I got on my hands and knees and dragged a metal chair up on the bed to keep the alarm from going off. I jumped out of bed, tore the IV out of my arm and was out the door before the alarm went off. Now, during the day I was as weak as a kitten and walking anywhere was a chore. But I must have run down two corridors to get to her before security guards and a nurse caught up with me...and they were huffing and puffing. The nurse asked me where I was and I told her I was on an airplane to San Jose because my granddaughter needed me. But then I realized I had better say something logical and said "but I am supposed to be at Hoag." They turned me around and headed me back towards my room. There was something like a storage room with a glass door that we walked past and I asked, "Where are the pilots?" Then I answered my own question with "I guess we must be on auto pilot.

Another night I just knew there was a conspiracy against me to keep me in that room forever. But I could hear people outside my room taking a cigarette break. I knew I could escape out through a window and out to the patio. Now the wall on that side of my room was solid but I just knew that there was a window being hidden behind this big picture on the wall. If I could just take down the picture I would be able to climb out. So I stood on the bed and worked my fingers under the picture frame. This was no ordinary picture frame. It was either nailed or glued to the wall. But I put all my strength into it and pried it off the wall. I don't know what I would have done if there had been a window there because I was on the 8th floor. Not to be daunted, I put this huge picture on the bed and slipped off to run away. This time though the IV wouldn't come out because I think they had used duct tape to keep it in place. The only other thing I could do was to take the IV stand with me. I almost got through the door but that darn stand got caught in the leg of a chair and they caught me before I could get away.

I could hear them mentioning a straightjacket...pardon me...a restraining jacket as it is now called. But I started crying and told them I would be a good girl. Anyway instead of tying me down they called Wendell. That sweetheart got dressed at 2:00 AM and stayed on a cot in my room until morning.

After 8 days they finally let me go home. I was a wreck but they had found 4 drugs used in conjunction with each other that seemed to considerably reduce the pain. It was difficult to tell if the cure was worse than the pain. It made me extremely nauseous to the point I had to spend almost every day in bed. I might get up for an hour at the most but the nausea was overpowering. Being able to eat was not high on my priority list. But Wendell made things for me to eat every day. Even drinking water shot pains through my throat. I was weak, my hearing diminished, my speech was jumbled, my English was worse than it ever was, my spelling had gone to Hel.....Heck, and I developed double vision. I was not a happy camper. I cried often. The funny part is that I would start crying especially when I would think about all the people at church who were much worse off than I. I thought of

those who suffered with severe pain, nausea from chemotherapy or other drugs, and those who kept fighting just to stay alive. My malady is fatal only if you want to commit Hari Kari.

At this point the neurologist referred me to Cedar Sinai Hospital in Los Angeles. Believe me, this is a very long trip when you are already super nauseous and are prone to car sickness as well. Traveling with a sick sack became the norm. However, the pain center is an excellent place to be and the doctor there has been able to keep the pain under control. He later began reducing the medications a little at a time to determine which one was doing the job. He told me, "this is an art, not a science," as we experimented with the different drugs.

The pain is gone. By slowly reducing the different medications we have found which one is doing job. The Cedar Sinai doctor indicated most of the side effects would go away as the medications were discontinued and he was right.

Now the second part of this presentation is about the church and what happened to me. Not only did Bruce and Chip come to see me but also cards and letters began to fill my mailbox. I also received an occasional phone call, although, I could not talk long or else my hot poker would raise its fiery tongs. Day after day, there would be at least one or more cards from someone at church. And now I know the true meaning of "church family." We have heard that term a number of times from our ministers in the pulpit. (Shrug) I knew what it meant. But it wasn't until I actually experienced it that I could understand what it REALLY meant. I could visualize the church being blown away by a tornado, but we would still be a church. We wouldn't walk away unless it was to find another place to gather. The love and concern I experienced didn't come from the church (point to building) but it came from the church (point to members.) WE ARE the church now has a whole new meaning for me. I was astounded at the number of people and groups praying for me to get well. And you know what? It worked. The power of prayer coming from a church family has to be the most successful medicine available. And I sincerely thank all of my own family and church family for providing the best medication in the world.

For every bad thing that happens to you there is usually something good that comes from it, IF you watch for it and listen. I believe God was actually telling me to "sit down, shut up and listen." In my case, it was quite astounding. You have heard Bruce say that he can hear God's voice. Yea, right!!! Well, during all the hours I was in bed I couldn't read or watch TV because of the double vision. So I had lots of time to contemplate a number of different things. I suddenly realized I COULD hear God's voice. It was quite clear although it was not a booming, lightening striking sound, but it was there. I know, because one night God forced me out of bed at 2:00 AM to get to the computer to put these thoughts in writing. I haven't had to change many words. These words just poured out of my head. God was pumping them out as fast as I could type. Another time I dreamed about something that actually occurred a few days later. I can honestly say that God talks to me. I would like you to know that it doesn't necessarily have to be that booming voice that comes out of the sky. If that is what you are waiting for, you will probably never hear it. It comes by being receptive to listening for it. It could come in a dream. It might come with certain circumstances that are unexpected. It does come with meditation and being receptive to the sights and thoughts that surround you. You can't just give a quick prayer, jump up, put the dirty clothes in the wash, and jump in the car to run errands. How can you hear Him over all that noise?

Does God speak to you every day? I don't think so, at least not for me. (Maybe for Bruce and Chip.) Do you think that I am not susceptible to the distractions of the laundry or running errands or trying to decide what to get at the grocery store? It takes a real conscious effort to set aside that time. Am I guilty of skipping it? You bet.

I try to continue the necessary contemplation time that is required to maintain my link to God because I don't want to lose the euphoria I experienced when I recognized what is possible.

I learned something about prayer during this episode. The biggest challenge is one that many of you have told me about and that I share with you. I found it difficult to pray for more than 1 ½ minutes before my mind wandered off to other topics. I went through the routine of trying to pray at different times of the day and eventually thought that the best and quietest time was at night when going to bed. Well, after about a few minutes I would fall asleep. So much for allowing God to speak. The only solution that finally came to me was to stay in bed in the morning. And pray. As soon as my mind starts to wander, I say to myself "the Devil made me do it" and force myself to get back on track. Your mind will continue to wander, but keep saying that mantra every time it happens. "The Devil made me do it!" Either you or the Devil will win. But keep at it. Eventually he will start to do it less and less as he gets tired of the game.

As I continued to pray it became easier to extend the time I spent. First I achieved 3 ½ minutes, then 5, then 8, 12, 15. I am now up to 20 minutes and aiming for 25. (Don't keep peeking at the clock, just concentrate and you will find that little by little you can start having a decent conversation. And sometimes NOT.

But sometime today or tomorrow or next week you will get one of those moments when something takes place that gives you an answer, or some thought or solution flashes through your mind. Ah Ha!! Why didn't I think of that before? And you will know that God has spoken to you.

The last thing I discovered is that when you pray every morning there is a tendency to remember it throughout the day. You may even find yourself saying a short prayer between your daily activities. The more you pray, the more you will want to pray. It becomes easier and easier each time, and you WILL pray every day.

When I started returning to church, many people commented how healthy I looked. Well, like the man on the pallet, I felt like I was lifted way up and dropped at God's feet. And I, too, was miraculously healed, both on the inside and on the outside. My spiritual life was lifted to another level of understanding and acceptance.

In closing, try to remember that whether it is some illness, some irreparable event or catastrophe, it is your church family, their prayers, the power of your own prayers and the grace of God who can provide you with additional insight, understanding and the strong will to see you through.

I have been blessed not only by God but also with the many prayers and concerns that have been sent to me from my family and church family. God Bless you all. AMEN

Let us pray

