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S U R V I V O R S

Welcome to the first ever special edition of Sunrise. It is an issue featuring survivors of seemingly insurmountable situations. Enjoy hearing about Christian women, one of whom is frequently told that she should be dead—yet she has overcome.

KEELA—CANCER SURVIVOR



Imagine that you are a 17 years old the summer before your senior year in high school—full of life, involved in all the sports and activities of high school, working a part-time job—seeing a bright and exciting future ahead. Then

imagine that during the night you feel nauseous from what you think is food poisoning. You go into the bathroom where you get sick and pass out with your dad next to you.

That's where Keela was in 2009. Her two years of participation on the dance team and five years on the volleyball team came to a screeching halt. A trip ensued the next morning to the family doctor where she again passed out. The doctor sent her to the Emergency Department. Two days later, a MRI revealed a brain tumor.

Earlier in her life, Halloween Day 2008, a call was received that her grandmother, her closest friend, suddenly became ill and was transported to the hospital. Long story short, a cranial bleed revealed lymphatic brain cancer in her grandmother, which eventually led to her

death. Was it a coincidence that 6 months later (the summer before her senior year in high school when Keela was 17), the presence of an Oligoastrocytoma brain tumor was revealed, and she was diagnosed with brain cancer?

At first she was scared and had times of wondering "Why me." She was already a Christian and never doubted that God was with her. After the MRI and several doctor visits, she had her first brain tumor removal at 17. Because of the location of the tumor in her brain, her first surgery left her paralyzed on her left side for six days after the surgery. She did physical therapy and occupational therapy for six months after she left the hospital. She had to learn to walk again, and she continues to have left side weakness as well as left side vision problems. However, she says, "I am very blessed to be able to walk. I don't take things like that for granted anymore."



Some physical limitations, such as not being able to run and jump as before, still linger; and that is very noticeable for her. Her first surgery brought to an end her five straight years of playing volleyball.

Unfortunately, when she was 19 there was re-growth of the tumor, and a second craniotomy soon followed. Her neurosurgeon, Dr. Jeffery Leonard, is her hero, and she thanks God that she was able to have such a great surgeon as he.

Her first surgery was in 2009, the second surgery was in 2011 and 36 radiation treatments spanned a period of 6 weeks in 2012. The nurses who took care of her provided constant assistance.

She continued going to school and working throughout the surgeries and the treatments. Due to the 36 radiation treatments, she lost her hair—a frightful thing to any woman, but especially to a 20-year-old—and had to deal with wearing wigs and the comments and questions from others about that.

Nonetheless, her progression in life remains on track and undeterred. Her surgery was done at St. Louis Children's Hospital. The nurses who cared for her there were a real inspiration to her. So was her mother who is a RN, and her father who works in the hospital as well. The care provided to her during this interval made her decide that a career in nursing would be her chosen profession.

She graduated with her Bachelor of Science degree from Drury University in 2013. She then moved to St. Louis for nursing school at the University of Missouri at St. Louis, and she completed course work for her BSN in May, 2015.

She continues to have checkups and MRI's every three months. Her most recent checkup and MRI show that the tumor is still there, but it is not growing any more. The future looks good for her, and she is moving on in her career in nursing. She is now a Registered Nurse (RN) and works in surgery and women's health. Her long-term goal is to become a CRNA (certified registered nurse anesthetist). She lives in St. Louis and has a 7-pound chiweenie dog named Daisie.

Keela is a courageous and thoughtful young survivor of cancer. Her story of surviving brain cancer is an inspiration to all who know her.



CRYSTAL SMITH – STROKE SURVIVOR

I have been a single mom since I was 20 years old, and I have worked multiple jobs to provide. I attended a variety of schools to enhance my life, including cosmetology school and Aviation Technology or Aircraft Maintenance (Power Plant and Airframe). I earned an Associate of Science in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Science in Leadership. These achievements mean very little to me now.



On July 8, 2013, before the stroke, I was like you. Life, the life of a stroke survivor, changes. Life changes for everyone in a stroke survivor's orbit.

I was 51 and was working at Walmart Distribution Center unloading trailers. I had just graduated from Drury University for a second time. I was trying to keep abreast of health concerns, trying to be proactive in preventing physical problems. My primary doctor ordered a series of tests—mammogram, pelvic exam, and the notorious colonoscopy. Standard stuff. After all, I was now over 50. Let's get healthy! Ha!

I was not anxious at all. Truly, I had no concerns. Hindsight is a shrewd taskmaster, indeed. Testing is never fun, and I did not expect it would be. Results came back showing that I had polyps that were not cancerous, but they concerned those with medical degrees. I was advised to have them and one third of my colon removed, a new form of permanent weight loss (I take my humor where I can get it!). I yielded to those wiser than I. Another surgery. I was relieved to be done with it so I could return to my budding life—the one I planned after my last graduation from college.

Two **very uncomfortable** days passed on my return home after the colonoscopy and the first surgery. I finally consented to a return visit to ER—by ambulance, naturally. Emergency surgery—the cuts in my reduced colon had not been closed. My body was poisoning itself from the inside out. Ready or not, another surgery—to repair the first surgery. I felt less sure but hoped the medical professionals were finally done. Life was no longer just about returning to work; it was about feeling safe in the knowledge needed to be healthy.

Life is hazy to me now. Home again. Extremely hot weather outside. I felt removed; from what, I have no idea. But trying to remember the feelings along with the events—well, this is the best I can do. I have a feeling of floating. Chicken-in-the-basket crackers are the only thing that had any taste I could enjoy. I'm pretending all is perfect now. Weird how your mind works at any time and how it allows you only what you can handle. What is going on? This feeling—am I supposed to feel it? Is this normal? I say none of this out loud. I hide the thought in the very back of my mind. A nagging headache.

It's Tuesday, July 9, 2013. My daughter and grandkids are taking me to my one week check-up. My doctor does not seem concerned about my health, in general. She wanted me to exercise more, to eat more to gain my strength back. A headache still; it is getting worse and

nothing I take relieves it. I think it's nothing but a persistent headache.

We went through the drive-thru at Taco Bell and got lunch to take home. Pauly wanted to stay with me; Sophy would go to work with her mom. Both needed a nap. The food didn't taste as good as I thought it would, but it didn't stop either of us from finishing our plates. Pauly laid down to nap while I did business on the phone and computer about insurance matters. What's with the headache? Once done for the day, I headed for the loveseat so I could be close to Pauly when he woke.

I'm stumbling. I must be more tired than I thought.

I see stars appearing in a blinding, flashing second. They interfere with my ability to see; I literally feel my way the last several steps to the loveseat. Confusing minutes come next, and I hope I write it down correctly. I couldn't



"be." I tried to sit up. I tried to clear my vision. I tried to hear, to speak. Charley (my daughter) materialized beside me. She's so mature and smart (I taught her to know everything). I tried to tell

her I didn't know what was wrong with me. I was so sick. She retrieved a bucket; I used it several times. Time disappears for me for a while. What headache?

I'm in the ambulance now. Women are talking to me. Questions. IV's again. Where do you want to go? I want to live. St. Louis? Springfield? I think I nodded. I just wanted to live. The EMT's continue working on me. I hear the sirens; we are moving. I'm surrounded by strangers; in my mind, they are my grip on life. They cared. I was safe. I was strapped in the helicopter. I heard Springfield. The next couple of hours I spent in the air. I say hours, it could have been years; no reality... Though I could hear everything, I could respond to nothing. I couldn't even remember I'd had a headache.

My clothes were cut off minutes after arriving. More tests. Waiting. Doctors waited for test results while I waited in pre-op. Then I discovered I could stay in my mind and hide. They say your mind will protect you; I am a fan of this saying now. My consciousness has its own reality. It fades in and out at will. Huge machines—holding still. Like I had any control! People, nurses, aides, and doctors. Meanness and pain were all I really remember. I don't say that casually—that IS what I remember. Scared. Couldn't even tell anyone. My back pain is very real to me; the only word to describe it is extreme (on a scale of 10, it was one million). My nose hurt. My arms became pin cushions; and, eventually, my

arm veins collapsed from abuse. For a while I was tied to the bed. So I wouldn't hurt myself. Are you kidding me?! I could hear "them" talking about me—did they know? Did they really care, or was I another statistic? Yuk! What was going on?! I was extremely terrified to be alone. Didn't these people know I was going to be fine? Why are they ignoring me?

Helpful "Angels"

One Intensive Care to another; semi-private room to Isolation where I met Erynn, my angel. Pat is my other angel at Mercy Hospital in Springfield. Several of the therapists are awesome—naturally talented, transparently great with their patients. Reliving some of those moments; precious caring and empathy towards family as well. I distinctly remember smiles and a hopeful second of time as compassion flows from experienced eyes to terrified ones. Stroke is one of many illnesses where the outcome is open ended. A lot of "ifs"; alas, no real answers, to no one.

I had nothing to assist me, during or afterwards, in the throes of a stroke—the recent surgeries prevented that. The stroke became the prognosis and was found as a clot in the stem—moved to the left side of my brain and still moving; it stopped, ending up in the right side.

Damage was apparent in all of me. The hardest to accept was the right arm and hand. Someone may as well cut my hand off. At first I couldn't even move any of my fingers; one could not even pry my arm away from my body. I was devastated! It touched something in everyone around me. Try fearing something so much—an absolute, crazy fear that if you say it out loud, it not only becomes real, it attacks you.

Another surgery weeks later. A feeding tube is placed, appropriately, in my stomach. I don't care as long as they take that thing out of my nose! Words cannot justify that pain. I was becoming impossible. The situation was impossible—for me and everyone around me. Certain people surrounded me with nothing but love. The love of presence seems to be the most important at that time. I was so afraid! Gentle Ben is one of the few that made the nights possible (along with my mom)!

Others were there as well, and they are cherished as well, even if I can't remember names. I needed to scream at them, "Don't you dare give up on me!" Mom kept me safe; she buffered my life. Kirk rooted me in concrete as well, Charley at his side. I had a reason to come home. They loved me—they cared about me—

they still wanted me—whatever was left. They knew me and my life before I did.

Others...and they exist...will answer for their own actions. They will be judged as they have judged. I pray with tears that all of them are taken from positions of caring for the helpless. Trust me, those evil people are there! Telling authorities doesn't happen because of the fear of it becoming worse. Enough said of that—I'm done.

Time passes. I am by no means a fan of the infamous stroke. Anger is seeping in secretly behind the hot flashes. Mid-life crisis for women in early 50's is no time



to have a stroke; not like any time is good for a stroke to happen. For the past 8 years, I was my grandmothers' roommate. She was 94 when she had her stroke. God took care of me and allowed me to take care of her.

Her stroke was different, and perhaps my story as a caregiver will come later. It's humbling to watch a loved one struggle. You'll take what you can get; you just want your loved ones any way you can get them.

The Next Phase

Extreme relief when I'm finally driven by ambulance to an assisted living building, also called a nursing home, also called a rehabilitation facility. It's for those making a transition to home. It's called other things as well, depending on who is doing the telling. It's also a home for the forgotten as well. I have met so many... Some of the greatest people work at Golden Years. I had talked myself into believing that day was the beginning of a brand new me.

The second and most recent exciting event to happen to me is moving to Rusk Rehabilitation Center (RRC) in Columbia, Missouri, September 11, 2013. The longest ride **EVER!** I was terrified, largely because I doubted my ability to "work" six hours a day. I just could not imagine six hours! That was a requirement for admittance. I had no control over several things—my bladder being most important to me. My emotions, which were important to **everyone**. I felt I could deal accordingly with the rest.

I was so determined to get my life back as it was. Little did I realize, there is no going back. My laughing and crying spells were uncontrollable. Period. When they took over, they took my breath with them. I stopped breathing, and it's hard to know just how long you can hold out.

EVERYONE at RRC is incredible! The doctors, the nurses, the nurses' aides, housekeeping, the entire kitchen staff, the therapists, the students doing their internships, and research and development persons. The day shift, the evening shift, the night shift, the weekday shift, the weekend shift. All the office personnel and even the patients! These talented individuals taught me everything in three months that earlier took me 20 years to learn. I came into the building with someone pushing my wheelchair, and I walked out—with my walker, of course. Regardless, I did it!

All things changed the day I arrived at Rusk. Importantly, the color of my world changed the day Nurse Mary gave me "The" book. The book introducing me to strokes. No promises, just facts. Pretty bows of hope in a best case scenario and yes—even beautiful bows on the ugly ones. The temperature of the days changed when they let me set the goals. I don't think I was ever told no. They let me set the pace, and everyone helped me. These precious people never gave up on me! I still see the twinkle in their eyes, the laughter bubbling over, the tears, and the unending patience. It's a perfume each wears; **it is visible** to the naked eye. They all are in possession of rays of sunshine.

Relearning Things Taken for Granted Before

Therapists were teaching me how to walk again; it was as exciting as it was terrifying. That real action made me want more. I was also eager to learn how to fall. Everyone knew it was going to happen, so it seemed appropriate that I learn how to do it correctly, acquiring the least amount of damage. Very importantly, they taught me how to fall correctly and how to get up. Sounds silly I know; but it's just a matter of when and where. You know it may hurt, and it's vital to prepare yourself, to know how to land and how to get up.

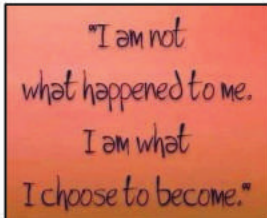
The first time I went down, I slid down; but the pain of going there was intense. My muscles in my legs had not been used; they had shrunk—or whatever they do. At that time I was convinced my legs were detaching from my body altogether! Several people, myself being the first, bawled like a baby. Miss Bonnie talked me calm, then proceeded to talk me up. Bless her!

In the "beginning," my occupational therapist gave me exercises to work with on weekends (at my request). I would lie flat on a bed, lift my arm(s) straight up from my side, and have the same control laying it back down. New to this exercise, I did okay with my left but after finally getting my right arm up, it would fall, without fail, and hit me. Not fun! I just knew it was out to give me a

black eye. You kind of have to take the bad with the good.

Support Group? Not me. I don't want anyone to see me like this. Barb (and Earl) truly became my focal! She let me know she was just like me. All I knew was, here she was—walking, talking, eating and drinking. She became my diamond amidst coal from that second forward. I met her within a week of being at Rusk. Barb is pure magic! I held her tightly throughout my stay at Rusk and even now. Barb and Earl have no idea how important they are to me! They are pure love!

I'm pecking on the keyboard so quickly I think I'm flying (ha ha). I used to type at least 80 words per minute. After five years of college, it is a habit to see the grade



level I'm working in. I started out at Rusk as a 4.6, and I'm surprised to find myself at a 4.9 level—I'm almost to 5th grade! Teaching myself things already learned once. I do have an

opportunity few have. I learn much as an infant would. One of the first things I wanted to learn was to "transfer." This is the ability to move yourself from one place to another, such as moving from the bed to a wheelchair. Important to me also was to roll over in bed and to be able to sit up in bed. Can you imagine the joy of again using a bathroom alone?

Wheelchair Adventure

When Kathy approved the freedom of an electric wheelchair for me, all I could envision was *Freedom!* Bathroom walls in my way...trying to stop a moving chair. A drive through perhaps. Yes, wheelchairs are powerful. Walls are no obstacle for these chairs! Miss Bonnie and Miss Emily were utterly vital to my recovery process. New grade level of 4.7. How does it happen that I go down instead of up? I am afraid of all the unknowns, but I am excited as well. More than anything, I just want it all over!

Fast forward to February, 2015. I didn't sign on for a stroke, but the choices are pretty obvious to many people. As in all things, I don't have to like it. I am living it and must get through every second of it.

Sonia started the process of "helping" me begin, then mom took over. She has been helping me look, and call, and maneuver through offices...people...red tape...more red tape—it's been a nightmare! Get this—no matter my handicap, I'm too young to receive "help" from government funded institutions. Last week Mom called

me, and she and Delmar are as frustrated as I am. They have discussed this idea and would I consider it? There is a trailer for sale—over priced as expected—close to them. I'll be downhill from mom and uphill from Delmar. It's almost 40 years old, needs a huge amount of work; but it could be my home. Delmar and other family members would help me repair it and move. She made an offer; they accepted. The inspections remained to be done and the closing was scheduled for March 11, 2015. How quick is that?

Too Young for Disability??

Everywhere else I turned, I was too young—at least 10 years too young. At least mom would rent me a place near family. It is an odd time at age 53 to be starting over. Again. But I am young enough to start over from a massive brain stem stroke.

No one counted on the stroke. Regardless, it has its own plan, and I am along for the ride. I am grateful. I am very blessed. This time my brain and my heart both tell me, "It's time." I don't believe God is finished with me in any respect. He's just started; and while I feel special, God's about to show me and everyone else! First front row seat I've ever had. This stroke has indeed touched every part of my life. It has touched everyone else's also. Choices become very limited now.

I don't know what it has left me with. I may never really, fully understand what is left or what's to come. Every story is different. People I have met because of this circumstance are more than friends, more than family. They have become a huge part of me. No one understands a stroke survivor more than another survivor. Type of stroke is conversation, background noise, so to speak. Life before the event is obsolete; the future is full of unknowns, rarely discussed. There is hope, not discussed. There is now. Only now.

Seems odd, sharing all this with strangers right now. But this situation is just part of the changes I've made, so it is fair to tell you, these kinds of things happen. They happen to all sorts of people—not just the ones with strokes and such. People like myself tend to get personal with them. No real answers. I am not sure answers exist for the sole purpose of making someone feel good. One side is truly positive for me; the other is one that could be. I am able to live alone. I am able to get my own medications. I still have my mind. I can eat and drink—away from the feeding tube. My body is responding better every day;



sadly it's normal but "stroked" on the right side. I am learning to do things different. I am able to drive, not like I used to, but a handicap sticker allows some freedom with its privileges.

Never Stop!

The last set of goals I gave to Doctor Burris, I told him I wanted to run. I should have said I have that desire to run. After I gave it some thought, I concluded that that's not true. I did not run before the stroke, so why would I want to now?! I'm not in that type of hurry. I have not settled on *a* goal; I want anything and everything I can get. I'm still in the three year window I've heard about, but I warn you I'm not stopping there!

If I were to talk to someone in the aftershock of a stroke, the best advice I could offer is—never stop trying; anything is possible. Each day will be different...and weird. One day you can do something, then it lies hidden for another week or so. Don't you dare give in or give up!

While my "fan club" was/is incredible, your participation in recovery is absolutely necessary! I cannot stress that enough. No matter how small you think your accomplishments are, starting over — mentally, spiritually, financially, physically — well "every-cally" (new word), must be your new attitude! Every minor is a definite major! Whatever one "gets," is more than before. You must surround yourself with *EVERYTHING* stroke. Education and experience are essential! All pieces make the pie, and they all fit together—maybe not like before, but they will make a pie!

Crystal Quotes

Your own body is the heaviest thing you'll ever lift.

Everybody rearranges their life, but they don't always rearrange their priorities.

One might say it took me 51 years to become what I was, and it took seconds to undo an entire life. It is taking 2+ years to stop skidding and redefine who I am, literally!

We always rely on statistics; I became one.

I needed to hear of others like me who represented hope, who had overcome the ravages of a stroke.

God was carrying me. I knew I would be okay. I was not alone.

Anything I do, God gets all the credit. I'm like a piece of Jello. I pray for wisdom that I'll never forget who's in charge.

If this stroke is a precursor to another stroke, with God's grace I'll have given someone else a stepping stone to live Christ-like so others will know.

If God says this is it, I will be so thankful to die knowing I'm not alone. I will be sorry for everyone else's pain, but I'll be okay.

Crystal Smith, Rolla, MO

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The Secrets of Successful Stroke Survival

*Excerpted from "The Secrets of Success," Stroke Connection Magazine
January/February 2004 (Last science update March 2013)*

At *Stroke Connection Magazine*, we hear of individual after individual who beat the odds and went on to do what those around them called impossible. We hear of people who, from the perspective of onlookers, should have no hope and are destined to lives of isolation and dissatisfaction. And yet they hope, they thrive and live lives that are equally satisfying, if not more so, than before the stroke occurred. What do these people carry within that allows them to take what others see as the end of a "normal" life and turn it into something wonderful, happy and hopeful?



We thought if we were to sit down with some of these people and explore that question, we might find some common ground. Perhaps we could uncover the secret ingredients to successful stroke survival.

So we met with three men and three women of various ages from around the country, all of whom have survived stroke. We asked a few questions, listened...and learned.

Defining Success

When asked to define "success" in the realm of stroke survival, the group covered extensive ground, different milestones in recovery, like regaining speech or mobility or driving again. But when they really boiled it down, physical, communication and cognitive accomplishments weren't how they defined success. They concluded that one may live with these types of challenges at some level for years, but can still be considered successful.

Wendy Covill, the mother of three small children who lives in rural New Hampshire, had an interesting idea where the process started. "Success and courage go side by side," she said. "It takes courage to get up every

morning and try the things you failed at yesterday, to try today, in front of other people, with the likelihood you are going to fail again. Without the courage to try, there is no success."

"Waking up, getting out of bed and accomplishing at least one thing before my nap. If I can do that, I have had a successful day," explained Sherry May, a poet and stroke advocate in Iowa.

Throughout the conversation, however, two things stood out and were mentioned by all the participants in one way or another. First was accepting the "new" normal, whatever that may be. The second was the ability to move forward with a positive attitude.

Art Gottlieb, an author living in California, gave a clear synopsis: "Life will never be the same for anyone who has survived a stroke, but successful survivors are those who can accept the reality of their new situation with a positive attitude. As such they are able to live each day productively, with as much creativity and fulfillment as possible within the new boundaries imposed by the stroke."

www.strokeassociation.org/STROKEORG/LifeAfterStroke/RegainingIndependence/TipsforDailyLiving/Secrets-of-Successful-Stroke-Survival

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FIBROMYALGIA—A SILENT, CHRONIC TORMENTOR

Fibromyalgia is often called the "silent disease." It strikes 60% more women than men; however, fibromyalgia is not a disease. It is a group of symptoms that some in the health field believe always has an underlying cause—for instance, chronic untreated Lyme disease. The symptoms are hidden from anyone looking at the individual who has "fibro." There are no deformities. There is nothing on the outside that has any visible telltale signs.

People cannot see the widespread nerve, muscle, and tissue pain or the excruciating soreness of the skin or the lumps covering the body. No one can see the debilitating exhaustion that goes with it. Fibro sufferers have what are called "flare-ups." The slightest amount of stress—whether physical, mental, or emotional—will send the individual into one of these flare-ups. That means the pain and fatigue will become worse, frequently putting the person in bed. Most of the time, the pain becomes uncontrollable. These flare-ups can last days, weeks, or

even months. This plays havoc with every aspect of one's life, including spiritual life.

Often, fibro is not diagnosed until years after the symptoms begin. Most people do not know what's wrong. They only know how much they hurt and how exhausted they always are. Physicians still do not know much about fibromyalgia or how to treat it. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and most other debilitating diseases can be diagnosed with imaging tests, blood work, etc. There is nothing about fibro that can be seen by x-rays or blood tests.

The most severe symptoms of fibromyalgia are: (1) "Brain fog"—difficulty with memory or concentration. The inability to focus is a severe problem with individuals suffering with fibro. Symptoms worsen during flare-ups. (2) Insomnia—rarely are fibro sufferers able to sleep through the night because of numerous interruptions in their sleep. (3) Widespread pain affects the nerves, muscles, and tissues of the body. This worsens during flare-ups. (4) Severe muscle spasms. (5) Clinical depression that becomes worse during flare-ups. (6) Gastric and digestive upsets. (7) Recurring infections and hoarseness are two of the later symptoms plaguing fibro patients.

This is only a partial list of symptoms with which fibro sufferers contend. Dealing with fibromyalgia is a daily struggle for all who have it. Each day is a day that we must depend on our God to get us through, to give us strength and energy to do the daily "have to" chores.

Twice I have asked God to remove it from my body, but I have always been reminded of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 12:9—"But He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."

Each day I pray for His strength and energy to do the things I need to do, and He always answers my prayer. I must admit that there are days when it is more difficult to trust Him with all of my being; but if I don't, my days are much harder. My prayer is always, "Father, you know that I can't do it; but you can, so I'm trusting you to get me through this day."

Doctors are unable to do much for fibromyalgia, but Jesus is the "Great Physician." His healing of the soul, our sin problem, is the most important healing. I praise His Holy name, and I am *so* grateful for His grace and peace.

Mary Anna Melton, Rolla, MO

HOMEBOY'S NOTIONS ON STITCHES

Lumpectomy—a fearsome word. Missionary wives face the same sort of dilemmas, the same sort of diagnosis and the same sort of surgeries the world over, but living in a different culture adds a new twist to normal everyday happenings.

September 19, 1993, I decided to do a total relax job under the knife of the most famous surgeon in town. The nurses at a private hospital in Khon Kaen, Thailand, made me wait a long time on the table in his operating theater for the 8:00 p.m. lumpectomy surgery. I had told the doctor to check and if that lump had roots and was cancer, don't wake me up to tell me and then put me through another surgery. Just whack it off.

During that spell, I prayed that should I die, God would provide a better wife for my husband, Kim; a better mother for the five children remaining at home; a good upstanding husband for Sawan (18) and a pair of energetic wives for Atethan (21) and Sratha (20). Finishing my prayer, I dozed off while waiting for the nurse to shoot me full of drugs. I smelled something cold and sweet and cracked one eyelid to see the black mask coming down upon me. Galvanizing strength, I took in an extraordinarily deep breath of bliss.

Upon awaking, I checked to see if my meat was still intact but came upon a swollen mass of bruised flesh. My first thought was that I had apparently fallen off the narrow surgery table. Shaking my head a bit, I noticed a full IV bag so I closed my eyes for a while longer.

A half-bag later I woke up wet—the IV was leaking all over me. Getting that fixed, I decided it was in my interest to sleep off the remainder of the bag before asking the nurse to return me to my private room.

No sooner said than done. I went to the bathroom and took a look at the damage. I was as completely bruised as I felt. Once out of bed, I sat in a chair and waited for the doctor to come. Eventually he showed up.

I found out that during the hour-long carving, he had removed a 10x6x3 centimeter lump from my left breast. I could tell by his eyes that that was that, but I still had to wait ten days before the lab report announced "the mass was non-malignant."

After talking to the doctor, I went home and returned on Day Three, ready to have the stitches taken out. I am a vitamin nut. I heal fast but the doctor seeing, did not understand.

Being a cautious man, he made me wait until Day Five—his mistake, my pain. Before surgery, I complained to this same doctor about his outside stitching job on my 8" appendix scar done a couple of years earlier with his twelve 1.5" wide stitches so he decided to do an inside job instead for this session.

Day Five arrived. The doctor snipped the stitches holding the blood/plasma sucker and carefully pulled out a seven-inch, little finger-sized, white hose. Freedom at last from that dangling grenade shaped, mashed-for-suction plastic bottle! That pain was bearable. Next, the poor doctor cut off one end of the stitch and began tugging on the other end.



"Hum. A little tight in there," he muttered.

Then came the yanking; later, the wrenching. The thread broke. After winding the remaining black catgut around his pliers, it felt as though he put his foot on the bed for leverage.

Putting his blood wiper pad on the wound, more to hold me in place than for any other reason, he said, "You can scream if you want to."

With concentrated effort and lots of muscle power, he made one l-o-n-g millimeter-by-millimeter drag. Finally, victory sparkling through his thick black rimmed eyeglasses and a wide smile on his sweaty face, he held up the shiny swinging 6-inch black thread and said, "See, only one stitch."

When I got home, I told my husband, Kim, about the stitch removal (he had been off teaching somebody about the Lord while I was fixin' to enter the pearly gates). I think my chances of convincing him to have the reverse vasectomy operation flew out the window forever. Well, you lose some and then you lose some.

Rebecca Voraritskul, Thailand



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