



## Who is God When Life Stinks?

### Look! Here Come the Doc-lings

Bob's body was struggling every minute to recover from the lack of oxygen during his "flat-line" time. He was in very critical condition and on life-support machines. It was enormously important that he receive good care, as his case was so severe. How grateful we were to be at this university hospital! There were many outstanding medical specialists who were now examining and evaluating his care.

Because of all the damage done to Bob's body in surgery and in oxygen deprivation, one difficult, pressing question loomed large. How well would his mind and his brain recover? Seven different medical-specialty teams were assigned to his case to address each area affected. Some teams visited twice a day! It was my challenge to warmly greet each team, with welcoming eyes to those who acknowledged me, and then to listen attentively as they clustered together around the foot of Bob's bed, discussing the gravity of his case as it related to their medical specialty.

Each time the door swung into the pod, Bob's cubicle would be invaded by another line of "white coats"- a physician in the lead, followed by residents, then interns and students. This strangely familiar sight—the head doctor walking in, followed by a line of doctors in training—conjured up pictures of a momma duck and her ducklings waddling into the room. I couldn't resist coming up with what seemed to be a perfectly appropriate term in my mind...***the doc and his doc-lings!*** It was humor I knew Bob would enjoy. Oh, how I longed for the day when he could wake up enough for conversation and laughter!

Just three weeks ago, in Bob's first emergency surgery, God had amazed us all with Bob's quick recovery, but today's situation was more severe than we ever imagined. God's miraculous touch had brought Bob through this "impossible" surgery. Now, everyone was eager for encouraging signs in his recovery.

Instead, we soon received NOT encouraging news. Our daughters and I had visited, when allowed, in Bob's hospital room that first morning after surgery, but Bob's condition seemed to be deteriorating. (Our daughter, Becky, had arrived from Connecticut late the night before.) Bob's eyes had opened several times that morning, but they looked crazed and wild. I felt Bob sensed how extremely violated his body had been, and it overwhelmed him, even subconsciously. My heart broke. If only I could say something to calm him down—but he hadn't recovered at all from the anesthesia to understand any-

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thing I said. He tossed and wriggled under the wires, machines and restraints. Surely this would not be helpful to his recovery!

The doctors agreed. They decided to give Bob extremely heavy sedatives to cause a drug-induced coma. Now his body could rest. It would take absolutely every bit of available physical, mental and emotional energy to fight back from the devastation of this surgery.

As Bob lay silently on the bed, I was told he would be like this for several days. I wanted to stay with him, overseeing his care, even while he was in the coma. (Bob would want that too!) But first, I needed to head home to pack. I left our girls with friends-of-a-friend in town while I travelled back to Ocala.

It was late when I returned to our dark, empty house. Was it really only two nights ago when we left home in the ambulance? It seemed like forever since the day I had returned our grandkids and kids to the airport. On the night of Bob's collapse, when his lungs and heart began to shut down, we had left the house still strewn with toys and activities that were needed for our visiting grandchildren. Now, I noticed that things were picked up and put carefully in place. Our Becky had stopped at the house, en route from airport to hospital, and tidied up. What a joy to see the results of her helpful spirit—and to know that God had given to us such thoughtful kids!

It wasn't long before I dropped my weary body into bed. Alone, in our comfortable, dark house, everything was quiet. But not for long. The ringer on my cell phone startled me, and I jumped out of bed, heart racing! Groping to find the phone in the dark, with shaking hands, I looked at a clock. Midnight. This could not be GOOD.

The voice on the other end was difficult to understand, especially since I was just shaken out of a deep sleep. Something about no kidney function...dialysis...permission must be granted NOW! I was not familiar with the details of dialysis and did not understand the brief explanation they offered, except that Bob would have NO chance of survival without it! "Yes", I groggily agreed. "Do it!"

When morning dawned, I anxiously drove back to the hospital, and sat watching Bob as he lay next to the huge, whirring dialysis machine. The blood from his body was continually pumped into this machine, excess fluid removed, and important minerals replaced. Although all of the details were very new to me, I learned the code words and goal numbers,

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so that each time the nephrology (kidney) team gave report, I could understand whether things were improving or not. Mostly, the reports were quite dismal.

Other medical teams visiting Bob included the critical care team, respiratory team, the cardiothoracic surgery team (heart surgeons) and hematology. My biggest challenge was listening to the conflicting views between the heart surgeons and hematologists (blood specialists) regarding appropriate guidelines for the range of Bob's blood. In all of the surgeries, treatments and recovery days of the past six weeks, Bob's blood continued to be VERY DIFFICULT to balance. Our university specialists were knowledgeable and well-trained. However, Bob puzzled them. His condition contradicted the "normal protocols". Heredity tests revealed no answers. It was clear that we needed more than conventional answers and I emailed friends and family with my fervent request for them to ask God, on behalf of these caring professionals for WISDOM!

It soon became clear that Bob's lack of oxygen had completely shut down both his kidneys and his liver. The dialysis was replacing the kidney function for now. But it was discouraging and alarming to watch Bob's lack of liver function begin to turn his skin and eyes into an unnatural, bright yellow color. The liver, we were told, is able to rebuild itself with time. Imagine that! We looked forward to the day when those reports might come!

My girls had to return to their work and school, and gratefully the apartment in town, owned by a local church, was available for my stay. A daily routine began. Bob lay in bed, in a coma, with a multitude of machines and medications working around the clock. Each day I would stand (or sit) by Bob's bed, and listen to reports. Bob would want me to ask all these questions, I knew.

Friends came to visit, and sometimes I would slip to the cafeteria for a quick lunch or supper. Once or twice I went into the chapel, and knelt in quiet prayer. Then, at the end of another 14-15 hour day, I would kiss my husband's non-responsive body good-bye and head to the parking garage. *(No charge for daily parking if you leave the garage after 9:30 p.m.!)*

Arriving at the apartment, I quietly washed up from the day and dropped on my knees before crawling into bed. "Dear God", I whispered, "I cannot do another day unless YOU give the strength."

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The alarm would wake me at 4 a.m. for another dose of cancer medicine, and my mind would immediately wonder about Bob. I could call the nurse on duty at any time, so I called in for an update and thanked them again for their care. It was usually too hard to fall back to sleep, so it was time for an early start to another day. Each morning, I recognized discouragement sitting on my windowsill, attempting to creep into my day. But on my night stand sat a book of scriptures, and I reached for those instead. Scripture reading became my main survival tool. The truths of God's promises would push away the taunting voices of "unfair" and "hopeless". Most mornings, in the light of early dawn, I went for a walk around the apartment complex, carrying in my heart the truths from whatever scripture I had just read—praying, crying, jogging, or singing as I went.

Then it was back for another day of medical rounds and reports. My spirits lifted any time a medical professional would remark about the miracle of Bob's surgery! (This surgery is attempted only 10 times a year in our whole country, I was told, and most often it is unsuccessful.) Sometimes a medical professional would pull me aside, just to talk about the awe they had in what had happened in Bob's life. Whether God chose to bring Bob back to health or not, he was speaking of his power through our lives.

So with each tiny encouragement, I was reminded that God was at work. Any little improvement in Bob's status held reason to celebrate!

**Do not be discouraged, do not be dismayed. For the Lord your God is with you!  
He will never leave you, or forsake you.**

**Joshua 1:9**

From: Ruth Bell  
Date: Wednesday, July 11, 2007  
Subject: Strength for Bob

Dear Family/Friends,

I came home tonight to Ocala to repack and rest, and just received a call around midnight from the kidney doctors who were called in for consultation.

The latest report is that Bob is still in critical condition and his kidneys are functioning at 10%. I granted consent for them to start 24/7 dialysis there in the ICU. This is life saving for right now -- and the doctor indicated it could eventually help improve the kidneys.

My big strong man has a very tough hill to climb. Our family and friends have enjoyed his strong hugs, big hands, and big heart over the years. He desperately needs your strength and prayers at this time.

My daughters and I are continuing strong, thanks to your prayers for us. (Crystal and Becky are here and have been wonderfully supportive -- son Bob is working hard to keep email updates delivered).

The tears flow when we see pain or discouragement in his eyes (he cannot talk because of the breathing tube), so we pray earnestly that God will strengthen him in the inner man physically, emotionally and mentally.

With grateful hearts,  
Ruth and family

PS We love getting your email encouragements and can access them best at [ruth@macroped.com](mailto:ruth@macroped.com) -- THANK YOU for sending them and please understand if we don't respond promptly.

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