



Who is God When Life Stinks?

Heart-breaking and Gut-Wrenching

My sisters had been frantically searching on the internet for a flight for Martha, but their efforts were unsuccessful. They decided that we needed to just immediately drive Martha to the airport and try to find mercy with the airlines there. We were all moving awkwardly and a bit dazed as we were in shock, and yes, disbelief— wishing for this all to be not true!

We had wept with Martha—but too much needed to be done for us to linger long on tears. Martha, with a bleeding heart, finished packing her things, and Beth did as well. We all agreed—Martha could not make this nightmare of a five hour trip on a plane by herself. Beth graciously dropped everything to be Martha’s grief and travel companion.

Sue and Lois would drive to the airport, but we needed someone to stay at the house and monitor phone calls. It was becoming clear to me that Janna’s blood pressure was creeping dangerously high, due to the crisis at hand, so I offered to stay at the house with her. I had been with Janna on other dangerously high pressure events, and recognized her symptoms.

By now, in Colorado, the ambulance had reached the hospital and Dave was officially pronounced dead. It was so final. It was so unbelievable. Martha’s neighbor again called, and she courageously listened as he walked through the steps that would come next. Then the coroner called. NO! That was just too difficult a reality to grasp. It seemed impossible to imagine Dave in the coroner’s hands, when Martha just 2 days ago had seen his big grin as he sent her off from the Denver airport. “Have fun with your sisters!” he smiled, as his last words to her before she boarded the plane.

No longer would Martha see that smile. No more would she enjoy that twinkle in his eyes and feel warm, good-bye hugs. No more fun family adventures with “Daddy” leading the many children under his care! Martha would be returning home to view the cold, empty body of the man she had loved and lived with for 28 years. It just seemed so cruel. And so sudden.

When the coroner called, I could picture the situation in my mind. Actually, I had seen these situations all around us at the trauma center hospital where Bob and I had spent almost two months. My mind went into crisis management mode, and I picked up the extension phone to join Martha at negotiating the details. The situation was “real” to me in

the sense that this happens every day at many hospitals. But it was ridiculous to us all to think that we were discussing our own healthy, vibrant family member, who had so suddenly suffered this fatal disaster.

As Martha, Beth, Sue and Lois climbed into the car to head to the airport, Janna offered to pray out loud for them. We bowed our heads and Janna's quiet, gentle voice began talking to the Father who loves our sister more than we ever could. That did it for me...

My stomach started heaving...my head began swimming. In the middle of the prayer I ran outside the garage to gag and heave on the lawn. How could he...?? Why didn't he...?? If only...??

At that moment I was struck with a sense of God's **powerlessness**. My dear sister was facing what I had imagined happening in my own life over the past two months. Every day I had thanked God for one more day with the gift of life in my husband. God had been so powerful and so present. ***I desperately wanted that for Martha too!***

Ironically, I had asked Martha the night before if she had any advice for me, as I was facing the reality of many years ahead with unknowns about Bob's health. She had suffered a "scare" seven years earlier with Dave's mini-heart attack and the doctors wondered if he was going to survive that event. He had recovered well, but they understood this condition could resume at any time. Martha's words to me, less than 24 hours prior were, "Ruth, each time Dave and I separate, I must recognize that this may be the last time I see him."

Perhaps my readers understand this concept, but it was new to me at the time of her comments. How can you live with that knowledge and not walk in fear? What keeps you from huddling in the "safety" of your own home, wanting to avoid all the risks that living a normal life brings?

In front of me, I was watching the answer to those questions. There was an incredible strength and courage in Martha as she pulled herself into the car to begin probably the most difficult trip of her whole life.

I, too, had to be courageous, fight the nausea and despair, and say good-bye to Martha and Beth. As they drove off, I prayed that God's strength and wisdom would sustain Martha through the searing, senseless pain that lay ahead of her for many days and months.

Then I looked as my sister Janna, noticing that her face was flushed, her one eye drooping. On a recent visit to our home, she had been rushed to our local hospital with the same kind of symptoms from her rocketing blood pressure. The hospitals could only help her temporarily and her doctors were amazed that she was still living a “healthy” life. Janna constantly works at keeping guard on the pressure getting this high. She has a pressure cuff with her at all times, and monitors her pressure regularly. She also always carries her medicine and several homeopathic treatments. But we could take no chances right now of another life-and-death situation.

Even before entering back into Sue’s house, we marched together to the neighbors. Sue’s neighborhood is quite rural, but this neighbor was one that Sue knew well. I had two questions for him. “Sir, please tell me the name of your local hospital, and how long it would take for an ambulance to arrive here.”

This was not being over-reactive—even Janna would admit that things were deteriorating quickly. Armed with the information we requested, Janna and I went inside and began the regimen of caring for her health. We checked her blood pressure (yes, it was terribly, unsafely high) and she took the extra doses of medication reserved for emergencies only. Janna was wise enough, and experienced enough, to write down everything she was doing. In the event that she began to stroke or pass out, I would need to know what to tell the medical attendants whom we might need to call.

Janna then laid down, with the commitment that I would wake her every half hour to measure her pressure and check her abilities. She showed me how to massage in some of the essential oils that seemed to give her relief, and I was glad to be able to “do something” that might be helpful.

There we waited –praying and hoping to hear that Martha got a flight. Eventually we learned that one airline very compassionately went out of their way to get her a standby seat, placed her in the front row right under the attendants’ care, and allowed Beth a seat as well. Martha was wheeled to the gate by a young wheelchair attendant who was wide-eyed as Martha looked at him kindly and said, “Thank you so much, young man, for your help. You see, my husband just died.”

The phone was on one side of the bed. Janna lay on the other side. My body and broken heart lay between the two. There was danger and potential bad news at both

hands. A choice remained. Do I shake a fist at the unfairness of life, or do I continue to believe in the presence and love of a personal, all-knowing God?

At this immediate moment, and in the rush of emotions that overwhelmed me, it was a difficult choice.

**When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.**

**I am the Lord, your God.
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior. Isaiah 43: 1-2**

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