

Hope through Brain Trauma

Just days before, she had been a college student with bright hopes for her future. Now she lay in a coma, blood-soaked hair bunched into a dirty ponytail; lips pursed around a large plastic tube; a machine ballooning air in and out of her chest. We forced open her bloated fist and felt a squeeze! But it was only a reflex, rhythmically pulsing false hope into our pleading hands.

The EMT had found my sister curled in fetal position showing little outward sign of the effects of the horrific crash that took our mother's life and left our dad hovering between life and death. The damage lay within - her brain traumatized on a microscopic level.

Outside the ICU my sisters and I wept out question after question. *Will she ever wake up? Or is she trapped inside...with no way out? Does she feel alone? Does she wonder where Mom and Dad are? What will to happen to her?*

Exhausted by grief and despair as we were, the Lord carried us close to his heart. We were comforted: the Lord, the Giver of Life, held Roxanne in his hands. We left our grief at her door, held her hand, chatted, and sang our family hymn to her:

**You who dwell in the shelter of the Lord,
Who abide in his shadow for life
Say to the Lord: "My refuge, My God in whom I trust!"
And he will raise you up on eagles' wings,
Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun,
and hold you in the palm of his hand.**

Then one day she turned toward our joyful voices and opened her eyes to smile.

Soon, however, we discovered that our 5' 7" sister had regressed to the level of a newborn. She kicked, smiled and gazed; this warmed our hearts. But she couldn't communicate; she couldn't even hold her head up or swallow. The neurologist said she could remain like this for the rest of her life.

The nurses looked for a nursing home. We were sick with the thought of what the future held for our sparkling, intelligent sister. Most of us lived out of state, but we headed home to make plans to care for her personally. We took turns visiting her so she wouldn't feel abandoned.

Then bad news – a life-threatening sepsis; Roxanne was rushed to the hospital. It was agonizing to be so far away, unable to be with her. But the One who washed her in the waters of Baptism, breathing life into her soul, never left her side. Jesus was there in the Word that was sung and read to her daily, crooning comfort to her soul.

As antibiotics coursed through her system, my brother-in-law read the Bible to her.

"Say 'Bible,' Roxanne," he urged. "Bi-ble!"

A hoarse whisper responded! "Bible."

Overcome, he later said he could picture Jesus Himself standing there, saying, "Ephrathah! Be opened!"

The phones hummed with our happiness!

Still a long road lay ahead. Damage from the accident had ravaged Roxanne's brain. She had "forgotten" her right side. Confined to a wheelchair, she needed intensive therapy to regain what use she could, to relearn everything: name, address, how to read and write, even basic manners.

We loved her just the way she was, but grieved the loss of our sister as we had known her. She could talk, but had aphasia: her words were all mixed up. Her memory was patchy. She desperately needed attention, redirection and love.

We struggled between acceptance over the accident that gave our mom the gift of heaven and anger over a girl who had partied all night, gotten into a car, plowed into our mom, and shattered our little sister's future.

But we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him; who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

Those words from Romans shine on the shards of broken lives when we wonder why, when we can see no point to the pain. God calls us to close our eyes to what is seen, reasoned, comprehended, and to look to what is Unseen: Himself. He calls us then to be blind to everything but to Him and to His promises.

Let him who walks in the dark, who has no light, trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. (Isaiah 50:10b)

Searching the Word, we see what is most important to God for each of us: it is not what we are in the eyes of the world: not our personality, charm, intellect, potential. Roxanne lost all of these for a time. God created each of us for His purpose.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

What is God's purpose for your life? For your loved ones? 1. To be His own. He loves us so much He literally endured hell for us. 2. He longs to call others to Himself through us.

Roxanne was 19 – on top of her world. Some of her friends had abandoned the faith to which they had been called. Might she have followed the path away from Jesus? We will never know.



We ask why, but God doesn't always reveal the answer to us. Rather, He tells us **now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.** (I Corinthians 13:12) This is what we cling to: this is our hope in the midst of trauma.

It is now 8 years later. By God's grace Roxanne is a walking miracle. She completed two years of college in five years with tutorial assistance. She learned to drive and live independently. Four years ago she married a man who loves the Lord. Inability to multitask and ongoing right-sided weakness have made it difficult for her to hold a regular job. Instead she happily volunteers her time at an animal shelter. But her favorite thing is to witness door to door for her Savior.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come. . . he will come to save you. . ."
Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.
(Isaiah 35:3-4, 6)

Prayer: Dear Lord, when you call on me to bear trial and tragedy in my life, I desperately need your Word to strengthen and steady me. Guide me to that refuge and comfort. Remind me that you hold me and my loved ones in the palm of your hand and that you will never forsake us. Assure us that you have a purpose for us on this earth, and help us all joyfully live out your will for our lives until we are welcomed home to Heaven. We pray this in your name. Amen.

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