"I waited patiently for the Lord, he turned to me and heard my cry.
He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and the mire;
He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God.
Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the Lord."
Psalm 40:1-3

"Not Compatible with Life"

I don't guess I'll forget those words as long as I live. They were spoken to us by the night shift nurse supervisor, her words as cold and hopeless as the look in her eyes. We had just been allowed to enter the ICU where our middle son, Jake, had been taken following a car accident. We were holding on to hope by the thinnest of threads, and so far had managed to hold ourselves together and not panic. We were being updated on his condition by the nurse when the words came out: "You do understand his prognosis, don't you? It means that his injuries are not compatible with life". And for the 2nd time that terrible evening, we felt the incredible power of God pull an invisible glass door closed in front of us, and we watched those faithless words fall powerless to the ground.

This is the story of how God brought our son back from certain death. Not one single medical person – the EMT's, the emergency room nurse, the neurologist, the ICU staff, and even our beloved family physician – gave him a chance to survive the night. This is our testimony of how he did.

Hearing about the Wreck

I was taking night classes in Fort Smith that night, and Vickie was attending a seminar in Fort Smith with her mother. I am not a phone fanatic by any means, and I certainly didn't plan on answering my phone during a class. I guess it started vibrating about 6:25 or so, and I thought I would check it at break and see who it was. It kept going off, so I finally snuck it out of my pocket and checked it. There were some missed calls from my youngest son, Michael, and I noticed there was a text message from him, also. I still have this message on my phone; I never erased it. "Dad, it's an emergency!! Jake's in the hospital!! Call me!!" I had no idea what could have happened, but I just refuse to believe in bad things, so I figured Jake had gotten hurt somehow but he would surely be OK. So I tried to call Michael, and of course I couldn't get through to him. While I was trying to call Michael, Vickie got through to me and told me that Jake had been in a wreck and had been taken to the hospital. She didn't have any more information than that, and we both headed to the hospital.

Jake was a typical young adult, having a cell phone permanently attached to his body, but somehow during the wreck his phone was destroyed or completely lost. The emergency crews didn't have any way to find out who to call in an emergency, so they sent a patrol car by his address to see if they could find anybody home. That wasn’t going to help, because Jake was an independent young man who

lived on his own. The patrol car kept cruising up and down the street, and finally the mother of one of Jake’s friends, who lived directly across the street, asked if she could help. The officer told her what had happened, and she called Jake’s friend to let him know. Neil got in touch with our oldest son, Ryan, and finally the family began to be notified. It had taken nearly 30 minutes to get in touch with our family.

The Wreck

Jake had been visiting with our youngest son, Michael, at his car lot in Van Buren. They had decided to go to the house of our oldest son, Ryan, and have a cookout. Jake left the car lot, went up Log-town hill, and then topped the hill and was descending down north 59 towards his home. Going down this hill, there are deep ditches on both sides of the road. Just before he reached the Assembly of God church, something happened and the vehicle pulled sharply to the right. The newspaper reports said that witnesses claimed he was in some type of distress just before the accident – like he was having a seizure, or had dropped something on the floor and was trying to pick it up. I can’t really put too much stock in these eyewitness accounts – for one thing, it took about 3 seconds for the entire event to happen, so I doubt they had much time for viewing. For another thing, Jake’s truck had a body lift and there certainly wasn’t anybody who could see inside of his cab. The most likely explanation was that a tie rod or ball joint on the right side of his front end had broken, which would have pulled him to the right. As for the eyewitness accounts of “distress”, most likely what they saw was Jake frantically trying to steer the truck back into the road – to no avail, because if his front end had broken he had absolutely no control over the vehicle. There was 3000 pounds of metal rolling 35 mph and he was going to land wherever it decided to go.

His truck veered into the right-hand ditch, traveled a few feet, and then struck a concrete culvert with the right front corner of the truck. The rear end of the truck then slung around to the left, and the entire pickup followed. Witnesses said that the pickup spun completely around in the air, while also rotating in the air. The truck traveled halfway across the highway, in the air, and struck an oncoming vehicle on top of its roof. The truck then rolled over that vehicle, and landed in the deep ditch on the left hand side of the road, nose down with the rear end of the pickup sticking straight up in the air. Somewhere in this process, Jake was partially ejected, and possibly even had the truck land on him. When bystanders got to him, he was laying halfway out of the truck, with his lower half still inside the driver’s window. And here begins the series of miracles that kept him alive. He landed in a deep ditch, hanging out of his truck, head down into the ditch. He had already suffered massive head injuries during this wreck, and was beginning to bleed severely from the head, nose, mouth and ears. If he had landed on his back, or with his lower part of his body below his head, he would have almost certainly aspirated on his own blood and would have been beyond saving. If some well-meaning bystander had pulled him out of this position and tried to make him comfortable, they could have caused this same aspiration (inhaling of the blood into the lungs). But somehow neither event happened. The bystanders realized he was bleeding badly and that the blood needed to be directed away from his breathing. How

they knew that is beyond me. But that one simple event – landing head down- saved his life.
The next miracle was that the emergency responders were just about 100 yards away from his accident site. One of the city fire stations was located just up the road, and I think I was told that they were on the scene in less than 3 minutes. Even at that, by the time they got to him, Jake had stopped breathing and did not have a heartbeat. He was only mere moments away from death. If it had taken the emergency crews a few minutes longer, there would have been nothing they could have done for him. They managed to get some breathing started, and pumped him full of fluids to get some blood volume going, and quickly got him to St. Edwards Mercy Medical Center – about 15 miles away in Fort Smith. He was barely hanging on, and they didn’t have a good feeling about his condition.


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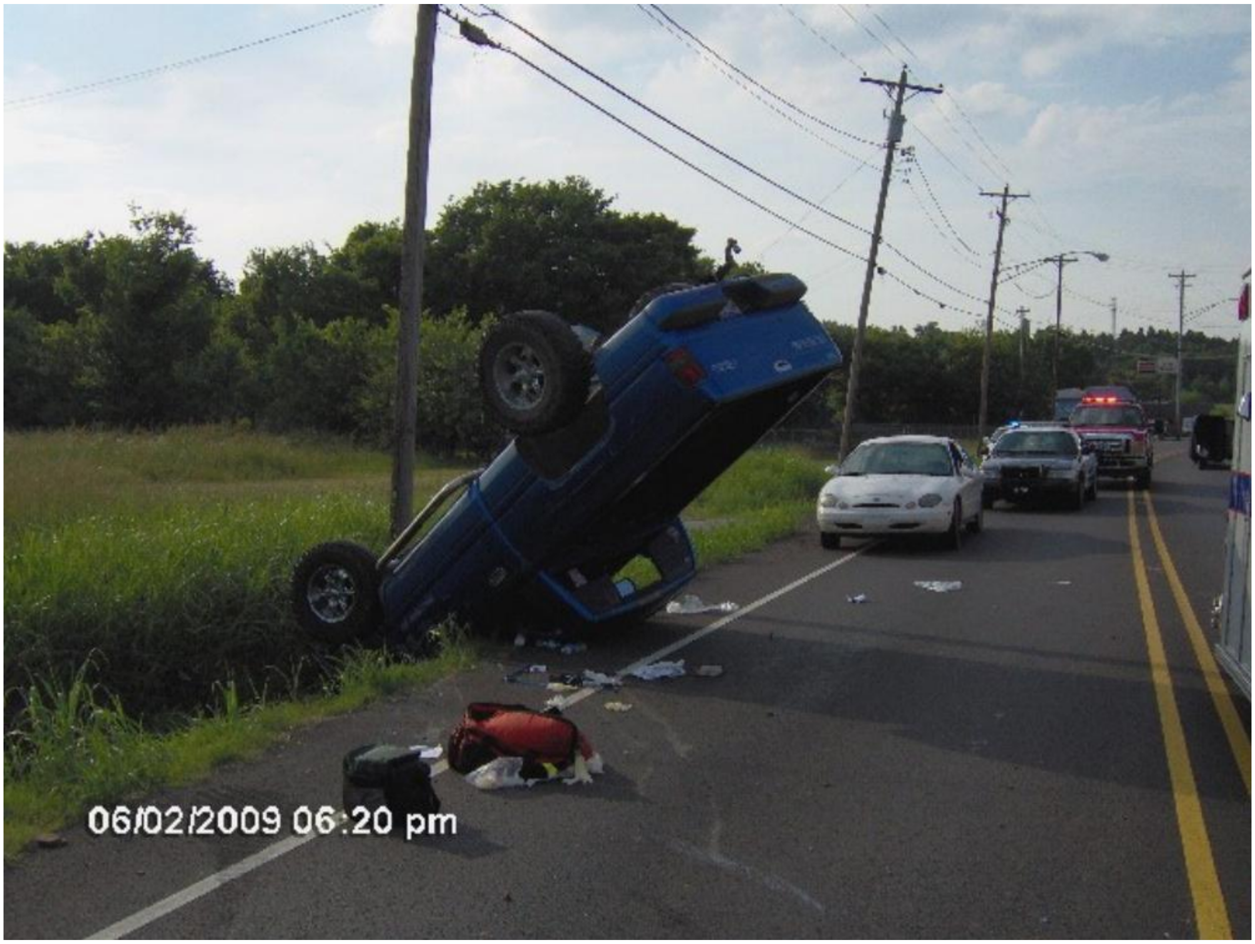

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The Emergency Room

Vickie and I got to the emergency room about the same time, and the staff allowed us to go back to the room with Jake after only a very short wait. There are some images that are frozen into my memory from that room. One of the first things that I noticed was that the nurse seemed to be finished working on him. I don’t mean that in a bad way, I just mean that it looked like she had done what she could do and we just happened to be in the room when she was done. The next thing I noticed was Jake. He was laying on the emergency room table, but he just didn’t appear to be injured that badly. His face and head were scraped up a little bit, but the thing I noticed the most was his right ear. One of my first thoughts as I looked him over was, “Oh, that ear is going to be hard to fix”. His right ear was just hamburger, and it appeared to have been about half scraped off. The nurse explained his injuries to us: there were a few hard blows to the body below the neck, but the severe damage had been to his head. She didn’t give us much detail about the extent of his injury, but you could tell there was a lot of information that she wasn’t allowed to tell us.

Vickie and I just stayed close to him, holding his hand, rubbing his arm, speaking to him. The nurse gave us our space, and even allowed us to care for him a little bit by cleaning some of the blood from his face. We prayed over him and asked for God’s word, that His angels had charge over Jake. He was very still, and thick, clotted, bright red blood slowly oozed from his nose and ear. The nurse gave us cloths to keep him cleaned up, and even brought us some ice so we could make a pack and lay it across the bridge of his nose to try to slow down the bleeding. It was unnerving to not be able to make it stop- how many times in his life had we patched this Superman up and sent him back out to play? – and it was especially unnerving seeing it come from the nose and ears. The blood just wouldn’t stop coming. We would wipe it clean and more would ooze out. Rag after rag we filled up. I remember being grateful to the nurse for the privilege of caring for him. I was pretty sure that we weren’t particularly helping anything, but it gave us something to do and I believe Jake could tell we were there for him.

They told us that the wreck had happened sometime around 6:00 that evening. I looked at the clock after she told us that, and saw that it was 6:45. I told Vickie that we were close to making it through the “golden hour” and that if he could make it through that hour his chances to live would greatly improve. So we stood there with Jake, caring for him and talking to him, clicking off those agonizingly slow minutes. And then, there it was – 7:00. He had made it, and our hearts soared.

It was about that time that we started realizing that maybe we were the only ones who had much hope for him. A receptionist kept popping into the room and asking if we would like to have a priest come in and pray with us. I didn’t mean any offense, but we had been taught how to pray and really didn’t feel like being polite to someone. We had business to attend to, fighting for our son’s life. But still about every 10 minutes or so, she would come in and ask. Finally, a priest did show up, and we did yield to a quick, short prayer. Days later, a nagging thought started running through my mind – I believe that they wanted someone in there with us because they were expecting him to die before he left that room. It was a very disturbing realization.

During the time that we were in the emergency room, our family had gathered in a small waiting room just outside. Granny Obilee had come with Vickie. Granny Jo and

Grandpa J.E. showed up, grim and white-faced. Michael and Ryan were there, physically ill with worry. The boys went back to see Jake for just a minute, but neither of them could bear the sight of their injured brother and they left after just a short visit.

Finally, after about an hour and a half, arrangements were made to take him to the intensive care unit. We made our way upstairs to the ICU waiting room and started running into more friends and family there. We gathered together and huddled quietly, trying to piece together what had happened. After just a short wait, they called Vickie and I back into the ICU for a consultation with a neurologist who had looked at Jake. The doctor was a large man, lacking any bedside manner and charm, and he didn't sugar-coat the message to us. Jake had suffered severe brain injuries, he told us. There was simply no medicine that he could give him, nor any surgery that he could perform on him, that was going to help Jake recover. I'm very sorry, he said, but it is simply out of my hands. And that is when God stood up, stepped between us, and pulled that big glass door shut for the first time. The most terrifying words a parent could ever be told had just bounced off of a shield and fallen to the floor. You would think that we would have just fallen to pieces right on the spot. You would think that dread and fear would have filled us to the brim and tried to turn us inside out. Instead, I can remember a strange calm coming over us, and I heard myself speak words that I had no idea where they were coming from. We thanked him for his blunt assessment, and then said these words: “We are very comfortable with him being out of your hands. We know exactly whose hands to put him in”. We asked him what Jake would need to be able to survive the night. We could tell that our response startled him, and he double-clutched for a minute before he could answer. “Well”, he said, “his blood pressure alone is enough to kill him. If it doesn’t come up, he won’t make it. And then there’s the swelling of the brain. Even if he could live through the night, there is a 72 hour window where the brain is going to swell to its maximum. That can kill him. And then there is all the pressure on his heart to keep everything going. It can just roll over and quit at any time”. Again we thanked him for his input, and he offered his sympathies and left. We went back to the waiting room, where everybody greeted us with heavy hearts, waiting to hear the news. By now, we were physically and emotionally wiped out, and we gathered everybody around us. Please listen up, I told everyone, because I need to just tell this once. I relayed the doctor’s comments, and then looked around the room into the eyes of our family and friends. “We know whose hands he is in, and here is what we’re going to do. We’re going to ask the Lord for Jake’s blood pressure to rise. We’re going to ask Him to keep the swelling down. We’re going to ask Him to keep Jake’s heart strong. And then every time we find out something else that Jake needs, we’re going to ask for that, too”. And not a single one of our family and friends even blinked. They may not have believed exactly like we did, but they knew that something was going on and they were going to stand with us.

The First Night

After we got Jake settled in, we took turns going back and forth from the waiting room to the ICU to check on him. At first, the nurses made us follow the visiting schedule, but after they saw that we were actually helping them instead of getting in their way they relaxed their rules. We were just there to comfort Jake, and keep an eye on him. We weren't there for room service or to tell them how to do their job. We had a lot of favor from that entire staff.
There were still a large group of family and friends in the waiting room, and nobody was leaving. That waiting room isn't designed to be a hotel room, and sleeping there is not very comfortable. Grandpa JE and Granny Jo settled down in their chairs, not making a peep. Vickie and I took turns trying to lie down and making visits to the ICU. Ryan and Mike and one of their friends, Ryan Evans, bedded down in the middle of the floor, covered up with anything they could find. Aunt Cindy and Uncle Ricky curled up as best as they could on the chairs. Aunt Kelly and Uncle Keith grabbed some chairs and made like Granny and Grandpa. Not comfy at all, but we all had to stay close.
Vickie and I spent a lot of time in Jake's room. We never let him not be touched. We had hold of his hand, we had our hands on his arm, we laid our heads on his bed. We prayed ourselves to sleep over him, and when we would wake up we would pray some more. I felt like we were willing him to live,

refusing to let him drift off. We watched that blood pressure monitor like hawks. If it dropped half a point, we were praying harder. If it gained, we were thanking the Lord. All night long we watched that thing and wrestled with those numbers. His blood pressure didn't improve very much, but it never dropped out and caused him any danger. (We would find out in a couple of days what the source of the problem was with his blood pressure, but that's for later in the story…). A nurse told us several weeks later that she had peeked in on us at one time during that night, and she said she felt the hair raise on the back of her neck. I don't ever want to take any credit for what happened, or make it sound like we did anything, so please don't ever read that into this story. I just simply want to tell you what happened. I remember specifically one of the things that we prayed was that the doctors would be surprised in the morning, having expected Jake to not make it through the night. Morning came, and Jake had indeed made it through the night. The neurologist made his rounds early the next morning, and came in to see Jake. He found Vickie and I sitting in that room, one of us on each side of that bed, with a quiet- if not tired- smile on our faces. He was quiet for a minute, then looked at Jake and checked him over. He didn't say a word. He finished, then looked at us and said – and I promise this was the first thing that he said- "Well folks, I have to admit, I am surprised". Even in the middle of that terrible situation, I just had to laugh. I don't think he ever knew just what to make of us.

Critical Care Nurses

The first few nights Jake spent in the ICU, he had one nurse specifically dedicated to him. We found out later that nurses are usually assigned at least two, sometimes three, patients to watch over during their shift. A very critical patient draws a more experienced nurse who is assigned just that one patient. On Jake's first night he had two of the best – Erica for the night shift, and Aaron for the day shift. They quickly became our friends over the next few days. They would patiently explain to us what was going on, what kind of medicines he was taking, what the expectations were. Aaron in particular was a good teacher – even though he did not hide the fact that he did not expect much improvement. We didn't care about his opinion, we were just thrilled with the level of skill that was being applied to our son. We were quick learners, finding out what the monitors were saying and learning how to read Jake's physical signs.

As soon as Jake arrived in the ICU, the decision was made to intubate him and put him on a breathing machine. They told us that he wasn't having any trouble breathing, but they wanted his body to have to do the absolute least amount of work as possible. They also made the decision to put him into an induced coma, to give his brain the greatest possible opportunity to heal. They gave him a drug called Deprivan, which the nurses nicknamed "Milk of Amnesia". If the name of the drug sounds familiar, you might remember that it was the drug that caused the death of Michael Jackson. One of the risks of Deprivan is that the body will fall into such a deep coma that it will forget to breathe. That is also another reason why they wanted Jake to be on the breathing machine.

We struggled for hours, stretching into days, trying to get his blood pressure regulated. The numbers just would never come up into the normal range. Finally, the decision was made to give him some blood. I don't know how they determine that you don't have enough blood, but they decided he must low. They gave him a little blood, and his pressure eased upwards. They gave him some more blood, and it came up a little bit more. They wound up giving him 8 units of blood, and his blood pressure leveled off and never gave us a moment's concern again after that. I like to tell Jake that he was just a few quarts low on oil. 8 units of blood! The hospital records show that a person his height and weight should hold 9 to10 units of blood, and they transfused him with 8 units! *80% of his blood volume!* I don't know how much a "unit" of blood holds, but I know that he was way low – no wonder he couldn't drum up any pressure!

The 72 Hour Window

As the neurologist had warned us in his initial briefing, there was a very present danger of the brain swelling so much that it could cause death. They took CT scans of his brain, to get a baseline of the size, and each day they would scan him again and decide the growth or the decline of the swelling in Jake's brain. The doctor told us

that after a severe head injury such as Jake’s, the brain would have a time period of about 72 hours where it could swell to its maximum size; after that, it would begin to return to normal. The problem in this is that there is nowhere for the brain to expand – it only has what room there is inside the skull. The more the brain swells, the tighter it is squeezed inside the skull, until it can actually choke the life out of itself.
So the doctors advised us that it was just a ‘wait and see” game, and all they could do was to manage it as well as they could and see what happened. We weren’t interested in that approach at all. We immediately turned to prayer and asked God to keep that brain from swelling. People would stop by to see us and ask what they could do – and we had specific tasks. We knew that we were supposed to pray for the things we knew about, and we gave everybody who asked the same list: Pray that the brain wouldn’t swell. Pray that his heart stays strong. Pray that his blood pressure stays up. When we found out new things that he needed, then we prayed for new things.

Sure enough, the swelling maxed out on the first day and did not increase at all from the 24 hour mark to the 72 hour mark. Once again, the doctors were amazed at his progress, and we had passed another milestone.

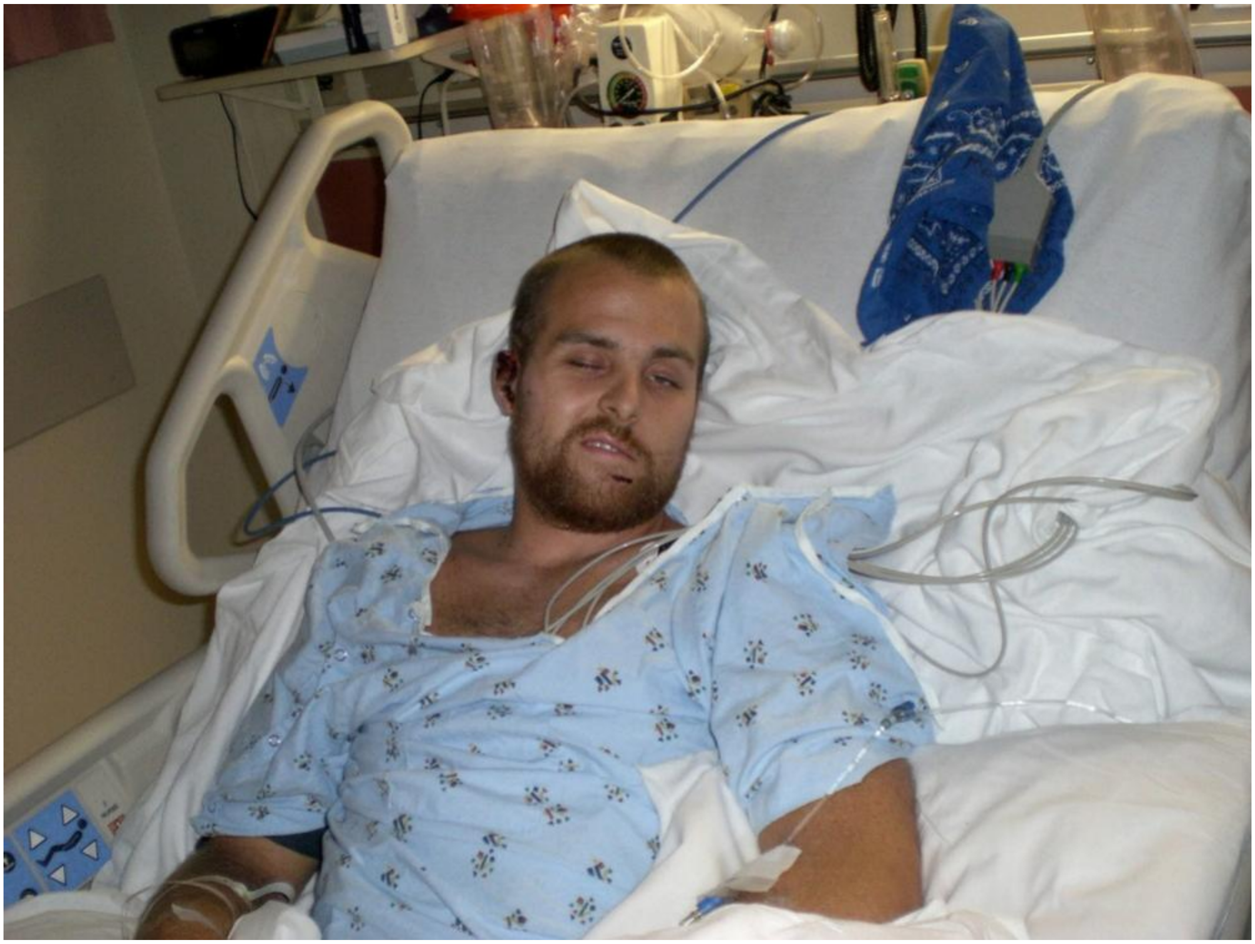
The Awakening

I really came to hate that breathing tube. I know it was necessary, and I know it allowed a lot of healing to take place, but it kept him knocked out and it looked so pitiful. One of the worst pictures we took of him was on the 3rd day, when he had swollen to his worst and was also on the breathing machine. It made him look like he was in terrible condition -which I guess he was, but I didn't want him to look that way- and it seemed to be the barrier to him getting well. As long as he was in an induced coma, and as long as that tube was in there, we couldn't see any improvement. He was on the tube for 7 days. During those seven days, they performed what they called a “sedation vacation” to judge his response and see if they could get an idea about his condition. They would cut back on the Deprivan until he started to become conscious, and then try to see how he reacted. It seemed like a cruel thing to do in a way, but it was necessary for them to be able to see how much response he had. It was encouraging to see him try to move – it had to be a good thing that he was at least trying.

I can’t remember which day it was, but during one of the vacations Jake managed to get one of his eyes open, and fortunately I just happened to be standing there looking for it and he caught my eye. We were so thrilled to see that eye open – someone was home! One of things that we had prayed very hard for that first night was that God would allow us to look into our son’s eyes again. We just had to see his eyes. We hadn’t allowed ourselves to think of the possibility that he might have been forever changed by his accident. We were just waiting for him to come back to us. He kept it open for just a moment, and I felt like he recognized us. We were on our way to recovery now! Or so we thought. He drifted back in to unconsciousness, and we could tell that the nurse was as thrilled as we were about his little episode.

On the seventh day, they decided that his lungs could make it without being on the ventilator. They began cutting back on the medicine, and in a little while he began to move about. You could tell that he was in some distress, and after a while he started trying to reach for the tube to try to take it out. He couldn't really move his arms, because they had them restrained so that he would not accidentally pull his tube out. Finally he started to point to the tube like, "Get this thing outta here!" They settled him down, and then it was time to remove the tube. They ran us out of the room, because they didn't think we would like to see what was coming. The tube is held in place by an inflatable collar that goes down inside the throat. When they put one of those things in, they slide the tube down the throat and into the lungs and then inflate the collar so that air doesn't bypass the collar and fail to inflate the lungs. When they take it out, they just deflate the collar and pull the thing out. I never did get to watch it, and probably didn't want to.

They brought us back in and there he was, looking so much better just from having that ugly thing off of him. He looked so much more peaceful. They kept weaning him off of the medicine until finally he opened his eyes and started looking around. He gained consciousness surprisingly fast and in no time you could tell he was there, wondering what in the world was going on. We quietly told him what had happened – that he had been in a wreck and was in the hospital but was going to be OK. He was confused, but accepted what we said and just laid back down to rest. And there we were, standing in a room (and hospital) full of people who told us that our son was going to die, looking at each other and being incredibly grateful for just a few minutes of looking into the eyes of a very alive son.



Backsliding

So there we were, only a week after the accident, seemingly progressing amazingly well. Jake could talk, but only in a very weak whisper. He could move arms and legs at command, though very limited. He could remember past events, he could recognize his family, he could respond to questions. It seemed as though he was well on his way back. Somewhere around the 9th day the decision was made to get him out of bed and have him sit in a chair. Just another step in the right direction towards getting well. The big moment came, and the nurses helped him to his chair. He was in a lot of pain, which we thought was to be expected. But he had severe head pain and simply could not bear to be vertical, so the nurses quickly laid him back down again. That was our first sign that things were not quite as well as we thought.

During the first couple of days after having the tube taken out, Jake had made progress by leaps and bounds. And then slowly he started to digress. He would sleep longer, and when he would wake up it would take forever for him to be alert. His responses to questions and external stimuli gradually slowed to the point where we could hardly get a response out of him. It was like he just couldn't wake up. A CT scan was ordered and it was determined that his spinal fluid was not making a loop – it was being delivered to his brain, but it was not leaving the brain. There are some filtering/pumping devices in the brain called ventricles, which serve much the same purpose as the ventricles of the heart. Fluid is collected there and then removed back into the circulation loop. The CT scans showed that these ventricles were becoming enlarged. Once again, the brain was being squeezed because of pressure from within.

Spinal fluid is supposed to drain from the ventricles to the spinal column by moving through some small tubes and channels in the back of the skull. Apparently these tubes and channels in Jake's skull had been crushed, and there was no way for the fluid to drain from the ventricles. The fluid would travel into the brain, but could not leave the ventricles, and the ventricles would just swell like a balloon. It was this swelling that was causing Jake to become comatose again.

Another sign of trouble was that he kept leaking a clear fluid out of his ears. It never was a large amount, just a steady wetness that we couldn't get to dry up. We figured it had something to do with having a head injury, and as far as we knew it was just part of the healing process.

They were trying to get him to adapt to a vertical position, so they would try to sit him up in the bed as much as he could stand. One afternoon we were just sitting with him, and he was sitting up in bed, and suddenly a gush of fluid ran out of his nose. At first I just thought it was something from his sinuses, but the nurse was very concerned and reported a discharge of "CSF". That was the first time I heard that term, and I didn't know what it was.

The doctors started looking him over in a different light, and they decided that he was leaking cerebral spinal fluid (the before mentioned "CSF") from some injured area of his head. So we had another problem dragged out of the darkness and into the light where we could present it to God: a breach in Jake's cerebral spinal fluid system.

The brain and the spine are nourished by this cerebral spinal fluid. I was not aware of this, but there is actually a closed loop that this fluid circulates through – from the spine, to the brain, and back through the spine again. This fluid is a very clean, germ-free fluid that is extremely susceptible to infection if exposed to outside bacteria. Perhaps you've heard of meningitis – an infection of the spinal fluid. It happens if there is some type of breach into this closed loop and bacteria invade this clean fluid. It is a very serious condition, and hard to cure. With Jake’s head injury, he had an undefined number of fractures throughout his entire skull. The nurses allowed us to see his CT scan one time, and tried to explain it to us. A CT scan takes images of small slices of the head area – much like slicing up a tomato and then examining the slices. The computer images can go from slice to slice and give a very detailed image of fractures or rogue fluids in each slice. The nurses started moving the images from slice to slice and showed us what was going on. On the first slice, they said, “Look, there’s a fracture there”. Then they moved to the next slice and said, “Look there’s another fracture here”. Then to the next slice – and they started getting quiet – “Look, there’s two fractures here”. And every slice – fractures, fractures, fractures. As far as I know, nobody ever counted them or gave us a number. It was like dropping a boiled egg on the floor and trying to figure out how many cracks there were. They finally pinpointed the source of Jake’s leak. It was a crack in the wall of the sphenoid sinus. Don’t act like you know what that is – we certainly didn’t. The best way I can describe it is this: If you took a cantaloupe, and pretended it was a skull, you could cut it exactly in half and open it up. If you took a very large sugar cube, about one inch square, and set it in the middle of that cantaloupe, then that would be a very good representation of where a sphenoid sinus is located in the skull and how big it is. It is actually part of the bone structure of the bottom of the cavity where the brain resides. One of its main functions is to act as a bridge where a bundle of nerves run across. It was this sphenoid sinus that was cracked; spinal fluid was leaking from his brain cavity into his sinus cavity, and then would leak out of his nose or through his ear canals. The danger of this crack was twofold – one, that he was losing spinal fluid, and two, that there was an opening for bacteria to enter his system.

Another problem that the CT scans identified was that there were a lot of air bubbles in Jake's spinal fluid. There were air bubbles in his brain (which we found out are what caused his intense pain when they tried to set him up – air bubbles were changing position) and there were air bubbles in his spinal fluid along his backbone. What this meant was that not only was there an opening for bacteria to enter this closed loop, but there was also an opening for air to be drawn into his CSF system. Air in this system is a very bad thing – there's just not room enough for the fluid required and air bubbles, too.

In order to get the fluid to move out of his brain and to try to remove some of the air that had accumulated, the doctors inserted a tube into Jake's head called a drain vent. This vent created a path for the fluid to be removed from his brain and started removing the pressure. We saw almost immediate results – he became alert and talkative again, and resumed his path to recovery. The drain vent itself was a pitiful looking thing. It made him look like Frankenstein. It looked like a syringe tube with a plastic tube coming out of it, draining into a bag. They would keep an eye on this bag – they wanted it to be clear fluid, with no blood. They also would test this fluid to make sure no infections were trying to take place. We took several pictures of Jake during his hospital stay, but I did not take a picture of his drain vent. It was just a little more than we could stand.

So the decision was made to repair this leak. The ear, nose and throat doctor who was to perform the surgery briefed us on the procedure, and we asked if he felt like this could cure the problem. He acted very uncomfortable trying to come up with his response.

Finally he just simply said, Folks, I have no idea if this will work or not. *I have never seen this type of injury on a live person!* I have since come to somewhat of an understanding of his statement. How in the world can you break a bone located in the exact middle of your skull and survive it? This surgeon was seeing things he had never seen before. Once again, it showed us the seriousness of Jake's injury and the miraculous healing that was taking place.

Liposuction, Sinus Patching, and the Lumbar Drain

In order to repair the broken sphenoid sinus, the surgeons had to harvest some body fat from Jake's abdomen. The plan was to use this fat, mixed with a glue product, to patch the break in the sinus. The surgery was scheduled, and we walked across the hospital to the waiting room and settled in for the wait. The surgery lasted a little over an hour, and then the surgeons came out to update us. Again, the nose doctor simply wasn't sure if what he had done would work. He felt like he had successfully patched the crack, but really couldn’t be sure if that was the only place where air was leaking into the brain. The only way to really tell, he said, was to continue to perform CT scans and see if the ventricles were shrinking and if the air bubbles were diminishing. He didn’t exactly inspire confidence in his work, but we were willing to believe for the best and took it all as good news.

During the sinus surgery, the neurologist who was taking care of Jake also placed a lumbar drain in his lower back. The purpose of this drain was to try to continue to remove the air bubbles in his spinal fluid system. So the doctors were working hard on the problem, trying to help Jake in every way they could. Jake was out for a day or two after that, and had to be placed on the ventilator again, which we thoroughly despised. We lobbied long and hard to not have to be placed on that ventilator again, but in the end it was deemed to be the safest process, so we yielded. The surgeries went well, but they let him stay on the ventilator for six long days in recovery. Finally they took it out again, and Jake began the healing process once again. He recovered nicely and soon was talking. He proudly referred to his stitches on his abdomen, where they had harvested the body fat, as his “liposuction”.

No More Airhead

They continued to monitor his ventricles after they did the sinus repair, and the air bubbles gradually disappeared.

They pronounced the sinus repair a success, and at least one problem was solved. There was no more air seeping into the brain cavity now, but the spinal fluid still wasn't draining out of the brain. The drain vent was doing its job, however, and while Jake's body couldn't do the work of removing the fluid the vent was relieving the pressure externally. Jake seemed to be holding his own, but it was time to get these obstacles out of the way and let the healing begin.

Vickie and I would be asked to leave the room during certain procedures, and one of these times was when the nurses had to bathe Jake. One day it was time for the bath, and we left for a while so they could do the deed. When we returned, we could tell there was a bit of tension in the air, and pretty soon we found out why – they had knocked the drain vent out of his head while they were bathing him! At first I thought this was terribly irresponsible care, but we found out a few weeks later that it wasn't all that hard to remove (more on this story later…). So we had to send him back to surgery to have another drain vent installed. It seemed like this was the beginning of a bad stretch of luck, where his healing just couldn't get jump-started and he really deteriorated badly.

Losing Weight, Fighting Fever

One of the really bad things about being on a ventilator is that it causes your throat to be in a "stuck open" position after the ventilator is removed. It's not really a dangerous situation *except* for losing the ability to swallow food. The epiglottis has been moved out of position, and it won’t cover the airway to the lungs when the patient tries to swallow. This can lead to inhaling food into the lungs, which they called “aspirating” and can lead to extremely dangerous problems with the lungs. The doctors were very strict about the swallowing requirements. Jake had to pass swallow tests before he would be allowed to have solid food, and until then he was on IV fluids only. The problem for Jake was that by this time, he had been on a ventilator twice; the first time for seven days, and the second time for six days. His throat was pushed all out of whack, and he simply could not cover the airway to the lungs when he swallowed. So he was allowed only IV fluids, and he simply was not receiving enough caloric intake from the IV’s. I don’t know if this is a fact, but I remember reading during this time that a brain injury causes the body to consume an enormous amount of calories trying to heal itself. I do know this: Jake was losing weight, a lot of weight, very quickly. At the time of his accident, he weighed 175 pounds. Six weeks later, he weighed 126 pounds – he had lost *50 pounds.* We were becoming extremely worried. The nutritionists assured us that he was not in any danger of malnutrition at this point, but the obvious change in his physical condition really had us upset. Finally, we were consulting with Jake’s managing physician and it seemed as though we weren’t really being understood. Vickie reached down and jerked the sheets off of Jake’s bed, revealing stick-thin legs. “He is wasting away”, she said, “it’s time to do something now”.

I felt kind of sorry for the doctor – I've been on the receiving end of Mama Bear's wrath more than once – but I figured he got himself into this situation and he could just get himself out of it without my assistance. He was obviously surprised at Jake's legs. He immediately began to consider other options, the first of which was a "peg tube". This was a tube inserted directly into the stomach which could be accessed from the front of the belly – kind of like an extended belly button. Semi-solid food could be loaded directly into the stomach, bypassing the need to swallow and thus avoid the danger of aspirating. While we certainly hated to submit Jake to another medical procedure, we felt it was urgent to get some nutrition going, so we agreed to the procedure. It turned out to be a fairly minor procedure – they stuck a light down his throat, and when it glowed in his belly they poked a hole and stuck the tube in it – and the next day they were working on a nutrition schedule to get some calories going. While he didn't gain any weight, he certainly didn't lose any more, and we were thankful for that.

In the midst of all this weight loss, we had another issue to deal with, and to us it was the most upsetting process that we had to deal with during the entire hospital stay. Jake was developing a fever, and he was limited to the types of medications that they could give him to reduce the fever. He was given several different types of antibiotics, and. the maximum fever-busting medicines that he could have, but the fever continued to climb. He would get to the 103-104 range and it just wouldn't go back down. Looking

back, it was probably some kind of meningitis attack, but we wouldn't even let them say the word. That was one thing we did NOT want to deal with, on top of all these other conditions – a dangerous infection of his spinal fluid. Regardless, it was some kind of fever, it wasn't going away, and it wasn't good. Since medications weren't helping, the decision was made to put him on a cooling mat. The next three days dealing with this cooling mat were the hardest three days of the entire ordeal.
A cooling mat is a thin flexible mat that fits underneath the patient on his bed that is electronically cooled. The idea is to cool the body externally to reduce the heat of a fever. I don't have any idea how it actually cures a fever, unless it allows the body the chance to heal in conjunction with the antibiotics and aspirins instead of fighting the fever. Jake had to lie on this 43 degree mat with no sheets or bedclothes separating him from the cooling. Fortunately, he was a little bit out it because of his fever, but it would just break our hearts to feel his cold body during this time.

We would run our hands under his body, between his skin and the mat, and just rub him and try to warm him. His skin felt like a package of baloney just out of the refrigerator. What hurt us even more was knowing that he was not a cold-natured person at all – he just hated being physically cold. They wouldn't allow us to cover him with a blanket, and he had to have a fan blowing on him. It seems so backwards – I don't know how in the world he didn't catch cold during the process. Good thing I'm not a doctor. In the end, it did work. His fever broke and they decided on a different antibiotic that really seemed to do the job. I know one thing – I am glad Jake can't remember that part. It was pure torture for us so I can't even imagine what it must have been for him.

The Angel of Death

One of the reasons that we had such favor from the staff was that Jake was actually beating the odds: he was surviving. The ICU group had had a rough summer so far that year. There were several tragic deaths, particularly with young men. When Jake was admitted, there were at least 3 other young men about his age who were in the ICU. One of these young men died soon after we were admitted, and another one died a few days later.

I have to describe what happened during these times, it was an absolutely terrifying event. I don't mean to describe these events to make this story seem hyper – spiritual. We're not the kind of people who look for demons behind every bush, and all that stuff. I just want you to understand what we experienced, and hopefully do it in a way to encourage your own faith.

We were sitting with Jake a couple days after he was sent to ICU, and all was quiet. There was an announcement of "Code Blue" over the ICU intercom, and all heck broke loose. It seemed like nurses were running everywhere, and doctors were being paged. Vickie and I just looked at each other with big eyes, and scooted closer to Jake and tried to be invisible. A nurse came by and saw us in the room, and she pulled our curtain closed and then slid the glass door closed. We had an idea what “Code Blue” was, but

had never been exposed to this type of situation. A few seconds after they closed the door, it seemed like a cloud covered up the sun and everything became darker. We could both “feel” something, and I can only describe it as it must be how a rabbit feels when there is a lion in the area. It was a heavy, ominous, terrifying feeling that something far beyond our comprehension was close by. We hunkered down over Jake, we prayed like crazy, and I kid you not our hearts were in our throats. It wasn’t really a feeling of something evil that was going to harm us, it was more of a feeling of being near something that was wielding enormous authority. After about a half hour, the nurses came by and opened our door again, and it was back to business as usual. We asked our nurse what had happened but of course she was not allowed to tell us. She didn’t have to; we could see it in her eyes. They had lost another one.

This happened to us three or four times during our stay, and we never got used to it. Each time we would run to Jake, and cover him up with our prayer. I don’t know if we were keeping an angel from coming to get him or not. I know that we were doing what we thought we were supposed to be doing, and that we weren’t in fear, just tremendous awe. There are things that happen in our lives that are simply unexplainable. This was one of those times in our lives. We know what happened, we just don’t know if there is any way to explain it. This is probably as close as I can get.

Turning the Corner

After 55 days of being in the ICU, after losing 50 pounds, after fighting off 3 days of high fever, and after being fitted with a feeding tube, it seemed like Jake was slowly beginning to recover. He was gaining strength, he was getting good reports of the air being removed from his spinal fluid, and the drain vent was doing its job. The last hurdle we would have to face would be, how do we keep the fluid drained from the ventricles? His neurologist suggested a permanent shunt to drain fluid off of the brain. At first, this did not seem to be a very good suggestion to us. We didn’t have any idea what a shunt was, and it seemed to be a temporary fix. The doctor explained to us that it was a permanent drain vent on the inside of his skull, as opposed to the temporary drain vent now attached to the outside of the skull. There would still be a tube to drain the fluid; however, it would be underneath the skin and would drain into his stomach. This still seemed to be a far-fetched solution, and we weren’t really sold on it until we got an explanation from a co-worker who had a nephew with a shunt. After she explained it, it seemed to be a more reasonable option. We now understood that it would be completely concealed, it would last a lifetime, and it was a fairly common procedure. So we agreed to have it done. The next problem? In order to perform this procedure, the spinal fluid had to be perfectly clear of possible infection. In order to determine this, they would take a sample of his fluid and test it for white blood cells. If there were any white blood cells present, it meant that the fluid was gearing up to fight off an infection and they could not risk additional intrusion of a surgical procedure. The test results would have to come back with a “0” white blood cell count in order to do the surgery.

The first test came back with a count of 3. We thought surely that was close enough, but no, it had to be 0. We waited a couple of days and took another sample, and it was 8. When they performed this test, they realized that they had done something wrong with the first test. The actual result for the first test was 0 – they could have done the surgery! It’s times like those that you just have to have faith that things happen for a reason. We were disappointed, but still confident that we were going to have our cure. And that’s where Mr. Jake decided to step in and lend a helping hand…

The medicines that Jake was taking would cause him to have different levels of alertness. Some days he was pretty normal, and some days he was pretty…well, not normal. Some days he was just loopy. We were out of the room one day, and Jake was awake but having one of his loopy days. The nurse had checked on him, and he seemed to be quiet and resting. At this time, Jake still had his external drain vent stuck in the top of his head. This was his 2nd drain – remember his first one had got knocked out of his head during a bathing session. At the time we were horrified – he basically had a stick jerked out of his brain, after all – but we found out later that it wasn't all that hard to knock out. And here's how we know…Jake was in his bed, heavily sedated, and he remembers the incident like this. "I was rubbing my head, and I felt these dreadlocks hanging down. I was just twirling it in my fingers, and then just started pulling on it. Pretty soon I had all of it in my hand, and I just wrapped it round and round my fingers. No big deal!" But his nurse remembered it like this: "I had just checked on Jake, and he was being still. I peeked in on him a little later, and he had this string in his hands. I tried to figure out what it was, and I realized it had some blood on it. And then it dawned on me – OH MY GOD HE PULLED HIS DRAIN OUT!!" The nurse had never had that happen before. She covered up the hole with a sterile cover and called the neurologist to find out what to do. The neurologist, who had just finished a long day at that hospital and was driving across town to an appointment at another hospital, had to turn around and come back to take care of Jake. He wasn't particularly happy about it, and Jake didn't help the situation any: "Hey Doc! I helped you out a little bit and got rid of this old thing!" "Doc" wasn't very amused, and had the nurse bring him a surgical stapler so he could close the opening. I guess he could have sedated Jake's scalp before stapling, but either Jake didn't need it or he wanted Jake to remember this. He pinched Jake's scalp together to close the wound and KA-CHUNK drove two surgical staples into the scalp to close the opening. “That oughta take care of it” he growled, and left the nurse to clean up. Even in Jake’s loopy state, he felt those staples and was feeling a little sorry for himself – “hey, that hurt…”- and the nurse had to console him a little bit. She told us later that it was the funniest thing she had ever seen in that hospital. So thanks to Jake’s expert intervention, the external drain vent was removed, and now we had to put in the shunt come heck or high water. They did one last test on his fluid – it wasn’t 0 but it was very low – and they put it in. Thank goodness they didn’t have to put him on the ventilator again. In and out in a short time, shunt installed. One of the things that Jake really liked was that it had a “primer button” to purge the fluid through the lines. He was supposed to push it once a day. It was a little bump behind his ear, underneath his scalp. He called it his “weed-eater primer”.

Let’s Get Outta Here!

The installation of the shunt was the final piece that sent him on his way to recovery. I’ve often wondered if it could have been done sooner, and if that would have helped him avoid the terrible days of weight loss and fever. But again, I am satisfied that things happen just like they are supposed to, so I don’t dwell on it too much. Three days after the shunt was put in, they sat him up for the first time in over 50 days. He had no strength at all. Two therapists wrapped him in a sheet, then pulled him to a sitting position. He was immediately light-headed – but no pain like he had had the first time, with the air bubbles moving around. He looked like a wet kitten – no strength, all skin and bones, dazed and confused – but it was a huge day for us, a huge improvement over laying helplessly in that bed. They let him sit up for just a few minutes, then they let him back down. The next day they sat him up, then moved him to a chair and let him sit for 25 minutes. Two days later they sat him in a wheelchair and for the first time in months, he went outside and soaked up some sunshine. He still had the peg tube, but he had passed a swallow test and was beginning to take solid food again. And so, on the 63rd day of his ICU stay in room 3105, Jake Dawson was released from ICU care to the 3rd floor to get ready for his release from the hospital.

Before the nurses came to get him out of his ICU room, we sat in the room and just looked around and remembered. This was the room where

my son’s life had been saved. There were dozens of pictures taped all over his room walls, to remind him of his good life. There were posters of scriptures taped to the wall, reminding us where to put our trust. People had signed the posters, to show Jake they had been there, even if he couldn’t remember them. I remember being overcome with emotion, so thankful that my son’s life had been spared, remembering all the long days and nights we had held on. Our lives had been touched in a way that we would never forget, in a little 10 x 10 room.

The nurses wheeled us out of the ICU room, and we went nurse by nurse hugging them and thanking them. They were thrilled for Jake, and for us, and very obviously touched by what they had

witnessed. We had a little parade through the ICU room and to the elevator, and it was off to the 3rd floor, where fairly normal people were living. Goodbye, ICU.

Houston, We Have a Problem

The next seven days were mostly spent trying to line up some rehabilitation care. The hospital was pushing us to go to a local rehab center, but we had learned by now that injuries like Jake's weren't very common in the Fort Smith area and we wanted to go somewhere where they were more familiar with his type of injury. While we had excellent care in Fort Smith, we also remembered the times when the doctors had never seen his type of situation before. We had done some research, and the top places to go were the Mayo Clinic, a place in New Jersey, and the Houston Medical Center. We chose Houston, because it was the closest to our home and was ranked # 4 in the nation for traumatic brain injuries (I believe it has since been ranked # 1). While Jake had made a remarkable recovery, we wanted someone to look him over and test him, someone who specialized in this type of care. So after a little bit of wrestling with the case manager, we wrangled an opening with the TIRR institute, in the Houston Medical Center. Plans were quickly made, and we pointed ourselves towards Texas.

The only thing left to do at St. Edwards was to have the peg tube removed. They had left it in, just in case it was needed, but he hadn't needed to use it for over a week. Dr. Steffens came up to Jake's room, and asked him if he was ready to get it out of there. Jake said OK, and 10 minutes later Jake was trying to

catch his breath while Dr. Steffens stood there grinning with a tube in his hand. All he had to do was give it a little twist and then jerk it out. Jake said it felt great.

On August 11, 2009, we left St. Edwards Mercy Medical Center on our 70th day. Tremendous care from the staff, couldn't have asked for anything more. But I don't ever want to go there again, thank you very much. We had one day to get ready, and then we were off to Houston. Jake wanted to sleep in his bed, he wanted to see his dogs, he just wanted to be home. Can you imagine? 70 days in a hospital?

Rolling Jake out of that hospital was one of the most emotional days of our lives, as you can surely imagine. We had worked hard to get an appointment in Houston, and hadn't really had a lot of support from the case manager to go there, but we felt it was the right place to be and we had held our ground. We got our release, gathered up our things, and got ready to roll Jake out of there. He was determined that he was going to stay in his own home that night. We really wanted him to come home with us, because we were going to go to Houston the next morning, but he insisted. So we took him to his house, and his brother Michael spent the night with him to watch over him. But before we took him home, he had to go have a victory dinner. Western Sizzlin was his request, and you should have seen what he ate. I'm surprised it didn't put him back into the hospital. A big steak and a baked potato, loaded with everything on God's green earth- including jalapeño peppers. After all this time on plain food and tons of medicine, I thought surely his stomach would stage a major revolt. But all went well, and we made it to his house.

His dogs were thrilled to see him. They must have thought that they had been abandoned. It was sweet to see, and you could tell that Jake was soaking up healing just by being back in his home with his “boys”. He puttered around a bit, and then did a bit of packing to get ready for the trip.

Houston

We left the next morning and drove the 8 hours to Houston. We took the back seats out of the Tahoe and made a bed for Jake. He was so weak that we had to lift him in and out of the car whenever we would make a stop. He still hadn’t gained any weight back (in spite of his Sizzling acrobatics…) and just had no physical strength. Vickie and I took turns watching over him and we just shot to Houston as fast as we could go.

Houston Hermann Memorial is a huge complex of hospitals that specialize in just about every area of health management – cancer, hearts, and brain injuries, just to name a few. The place where we went was called Hermann Memorial TIRR (The Institute for Research and Rehabilitation) and is one of the finest centers for brain and spinal injury rehab in the world. You might recall that the Arizona congresswoman, Gabrielle Gifford’s, was taken there after she had been shot in the head. Jake was making an amazing recovery, but we wanted to make sure we weren’t missing anything that might cause him trouble later on down the road. These people were the experts, and we wanted them to look at him. We were totally unprepared for the level of work that went on there. We pulled up to the entrance, and I got out to go find a wheelchair. As I was walking into the center, I passed a man in a wheelchair who was driving it by blowing into a mouthpiece. He was obviously paralyzed, and I was shocked by his appearance. Then I passed another one in a wheelchair, who was wearing a white plastic helmet. I found out later that these helmets were for patients who had undergone a procedure to remove part of their skull to allow the brain to swell. I found a wheelchair, took it back to the car and told Vickie and Jake that Jake looked like an Olympic athlete compared to the people that I had seen. It made me feel a little better to know that this place was working on people who had even worse injuries than Jake had.

We checked in, and they took us to our assigned room – a semi-private room, which I didn't really like but wasn't going to complain about. Our neighbor was apparently gone for treatment, so we at least got to have the place to ourselves while we got settled in. We unpacked, and I turned around to see what Jake was doing just in time to see him falling down. I lunged for him, but didn't catch him, and sure enough in our first 5 minutes in the building we had our first incident. He hit awkwardly, but at least not on his head. I got him right back up on his feet in a split second, and I remember being really scared that if the staff had seen that they would have put him in a plastic helmet or a straight jacket or something – a pretty irrational thought I admit, but remember I've been through 70 days of heck and maybe I just wasn't myself…

We got past that and met the doctors for his assessment. They weren’t really sure why he was there. They told us that they usually send people home when they get to Jake’s level of recovery. We explained that we just wanted him to be looked over good by people who were familiar with his type of injury, and they understood our position and began to check him out. They designed a series of tests and exercises for him and within a couple of hours had him in his first rehab session. Vickie and I got to go along and watch, and we were terrified. We were on the 3rd floor and the therapist told him he was going to have to walk down the stairs to get to his session! We protested, but to no avail, and Jake headed down the stairs. The therapist took every step with him (as did we, emotionally!) and step by step, he made it down. We were just astounded. Here we had dragged him to Houston, rolled him into the building in a wheelchair, and in just a few hours he was walking down stairs. Just mind-boggling. The aggressive approach that the Houston staff took just did wonders for Jake. They tested his reasoning skills, they tested his comprehension skills, and they worked his physical butt off. He slept pretty good every night, I’ll tell you that. Vickie spent the first night in the hospital, then spent the second night with friends in Houston and had to fly home after that. She was out of vacation time and had to go back to work. I spent the night in Jake’s room. I don’t think that it was really allowed for me to do that, but I was quiet and stayed out of the way and they let me stay.

I slept on a fold-out chair made of plywood and foam, and took my showers there while Jake was in classes. I kept an eye on Jake every minute, except when they came to get him for classes. He was moving very well, but still didn't have his balance under control and I really didn't want him falling and hitting his head.

The first night we were there, Jake was worn out from his big day and asked if it would be OK to take a shower and go to bed. Sure, they said, we'll send somebody right up. We weren't sure what that meant, but we shrugged our shoulders and started making preparations to take a shower and get ready for bed. There was a knock at our door, and a VERY large female nurse came in and said, "You ready for your shower honey?" I immediately pointed at Jake and let him take control. No sense in letting her be confused about who the patient was, I figured… "Yes ma'am, but I'll be OK by myself", Jake tried to assert. "Oh no honey, we got to help you in the shower. Now get them drawers off and let's get in there!" Jake was mortified, but there was nothing to do but let the nurse help with his shower, so in they went. Pretty fast shower, as I recall. I laughed till my belly hurt. Jake informed me that there would be no need to let the staff know our showering schedule from that point forward.

So I was Jake's man-servant from then on for the rest of our trip. I managed to help him take a shower and get him dried off while maintaining his dignity (try it yourself sometime, if you think it's easy) and when he was worn out from classes and such he would have me roll him around in a wheelchair to get a change of scenery. “Alfred, I’ll be ready for a drive now”, he would say, and took great joy in using me as a butler. On one of these excursions, he was enjoying himself just a little too much at my expense, so I parked him in a dead-end hallway and got rid of some excess gas. I left him there inside a green cloud for awhile, and after he had gagged and laughed for a few minutes he toned down his demands and changed his behavior. Amazing how that works.

We spent 7 days there in Houston, and that staff literally worked miracles in him. They pronounced him mentally capable, and gave him some exercises to continue his physical rehab and sent him home. He walked out of that hospital under his own power, climbed into the passenger seat of the Tahoe without any help, and helped me navigate home. The changes I had seen in him were just amazing. We drove the 8 hours home, and the first person he met was his Mom, who was just astounded at his recovery. He got out of the car and walked up to her and gave her a big hug. She just wept.

Roommate in Houston

Team Jake

During his time in the ICU, when Jake started improving and feeling better he wanted to do something for the nurses who had taken care of him, and for all the folks who had supported him and prayed for him. He came up with the idea of making a T-shirt and started calling it his “TeamJake” shirt. We had some friends make up the shirts, and when we were getting ready to be released from the ICU Jake rolled around to all the nurses who had taken care of them and presented them with a T-shirt and a heartfelt “Thank you” for all they had done for him. They were all really touched by his appreciation. After we had outfitted all the nurses, we started handing them out to family and friends to thank them for all they had done. So if you ever see a dark blue T-shirt with a Firebird on the front, and scriptures on the back and “TeamJake” on the front, then you know where it came from.

The Benefit

After Jake was home for a few days, his uncle Ricky put together a benefit to help Jake with his expenses. A pie auction was organized and a date set, and one night in Rudy, Arkansas, some of the most wonderful and giving people we have ever known gathered together to raise money to give to Jake. Hundreds of pies and cakes were auctioned off, many at astounding prices, and by the end of the night over $7,000 had been raised for Jake. Jake's great-aunt Marilyn came from Sapulpua, OK, and many others brought friends and family as well. We had never seen such an event, and we were astounded at the generosity and the giving from all of the people. I am fairly certain that there were many people there who gave who hardly knew Jake at all. I pray with all my heart that all of these people who gave will be remembered by the Lord for their giving. It totally blew our family away.

The Support Network

We were just astounded by the support of family and friends and co-workers during our ordeal. Our family did everything they could – physically, emotionally, financially – to ease our burdens. Friends were there at every step of the way. Our workplaces were tremendous – Jake's co-workers sent constant donations and cards and visitors, Vickie's work was so gracious in their support and time to allow us to take care of Jake, and my workplace was tremendously supportive. One of the things that happened that really touched me was an information and support network that arose in my workplace. The kind of work that I do involves a network of folks all over the United States and abroad, and these folks supported us with constant encouragement and prayer during this time. The following pages are a chronological timeline of emails, support, and prayers during this time. I have no doubt that the prayers of these folks, along with those of many others, are the reason that our son is alive. We can never thank you enough. In particular, many thanks to Alex Masotti, our corporate director, and Chris Campbell, my direct supervisor at the time, for their incredible support.

June 3, 2009
Email from Chris Campbell to Randy Waltman, Alex Masotti, and James Penick
Sad to report that Greg's son was very seriously injured in a wreck last evening. I have spoken to Greg on three occasions since. I believe this son to be in his mid 20's and he is in ICU at St. Edward Mercy Hospital here in Fort Smith. Initially this morning Greg had told me the doctors did not expect him to live through the night, nor to have any brain activity. Fortunately, both have occurred. At last report his pupils are responsive and his limbs seem to be responding. The real problem is the very serious closed head injury. Greg states there is a critical 72 hour window that determines survivability. There are no current plans to medi-vac him anywhere. Greg is at the home of a friend near the hospital right now, attempting to rest. I will go out and visit with him after lunch today and report back to you on any developments. When asked what we can do for Greg and his family his only response has been to "please keep us in your prayers".

June 3, 2009
Email from Chris Campbell to Randy Waltman, Alex Masotti, and James Penick
I visited with Greg at the hospital just now. We had heard rumors today that it was a motorcycle accident

but those proved incorrect. He was driving his pick-up. Witness said he was under some type of duress right before the accident. The brain injury remains the number one problem and the neurosurgeon is not optimistic. He does have some associate facial fractures and I think Greg said a broken collar bone. The family physician has warned them that cardiac arrest is certainly a threat in this scenario as well, as well as future infection. Greg seems to be doing “fair”….I’d say, at best. Obviously an emotional roller coaster at this point. I asked again if there was anything at all we could do for him and he replied “only keep us in your prayers”. A church group is picking up the tab on a local hotel so they will have a place to stay close to the hospital. I’ll let you know of any further developments.

June 4, 2009
Email from Chris Campbell to SWD co-workers
I just spoke to Greg. He stated they “had a pretty good night”. He is encouraged by the fact that Jake had responded when the neurosurgeon asked him to curl his toes. He had to be placed on medication post accident to keep his blood pressure up and he is now off of that and B/P stabilized. The hospitalist caring for him states that cardiac arrest continues to be a threat. Greg says that they are now 38 hours into the 72 hour critical time period for brain swelling. To sum it up he (Greg) seems a bit more optimistic than yesterday but certainly does sound tired….as I am certain he is.

June 5, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators
All,
I just spoke to Greg and the prayers are continuing to work; Jake's brain swelling is down, his blood pressure is strong and steady and he just raised his eyebrow and looked at Greg! In terms of prayers, Greg has four specific requests; (1) Jake's heart remain strong throughout the stress that it is under during the healing process, (2) his kidney function stabilizes, (3) his blood count increases and (4) Jake's body remain free of infection.
Greg and Vicky's faith is STRONG and they appreciate all your prayers! I will send more information as I receive it.
Regards, Alex

June 8, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators
All,
I just spoke to Greg and the specific prayers are working; Jake's kidney function has stabilized and his blood count is good. The results of his third brain scan show about the same amount of swelling as the second scan, however Jake is responding very well to commands and reflexes, etc. They are hoping to take him off the ventilator soon.
Continued specific prayer requests; (1) Jake's heart remain strong throughout the stress that it is under during the healing process, (2) Jake's body remain free of infection, especially the brain (meningitis is possible due to small skull fractures) and (3) return of all brain functions in due time.

Greg sounded much more upbeat and appreciates all your prayers and support! I will send more information as I receive it.
Regards, Alex

June 9, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators
All,
Greg just called and said the neurologist has given the order to begin weaning Jake off the ventilator. Greg was very excited and again expressed his appreciation for all your prayers and support! I will send more information as I receive it.
Regards, Alex

June 10, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators
All,
Chris Campbell just spoke to Greg, who stated they had a "really, really good day yesterday". Jake is off both the ventilator and sedatives. He is verbally responsive and plans are underway to address his orthopedic injuries. Still in ICU and will probably remain there a while.
Regards, Alex

June 18, 2009
Note from Dad to Alex

Good reports on Jake today. His CT showed no air on his brain. They believe that he is drawing air into the brain thru the fractures in his face, so they are putting him on no cough\no sneeze\no straws\raised head restrictions. The CT showed that there is an area in the brain, called the ventricle, that is enlarged. This is on the top of the brain, between the two hemispheres. The purpose of the ventricle is to handle the exchange of fluids into and out of the brain. It appears that the ventricle is doing its job, and has a pretty heavy load of fluid right now.
So, next on my prayer list…
The places where air is infiltrating the brain would be sealed off
The places where spinal fluid is leaking would be sealed off
The ventricle would operate properly and get the fluids and air properly distributed
Thank you! Sorry you missed the dinner invitation, but I bet you didn't mind being home!
gd

June 19, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators

I had the privilege of meeting Jake on Tuesday. He was still in ICU, but had been given the OK to eat solid (soups, applesauce, ice cream, juice, etc.) foods the day before. He wolfed down a small chocolate shake, juice box and vanilla ice cream in short order while I was there. I let him know that there were people from China, England, Mexico,

Canada, and all over the United States praying for him and he was very appreciative. Please see the latest update and specific prayer requests from Greg.
Regards, Alex

June 24, 2009
Note from Dad to Citizen’s Bank and Alex Masotti
Update on Jake…
Tuesday he had a drain put in his skull to help get the fluid off of his brain. His brain is functioning very well and is trying to move the excess fluid and air out in the normal fashion, but the neurologist decided it needed a little bit of help.
He is scheduled to have sinus cavity repair surgery on Friday. This will be to close off cracks in his sinus cavity that is allowing air to leak into his skull. Until the air quits leaking into his skull, he will be in ICU. The doctors are very optimistic that this surgery will cure the problem.

When the leaks to his skull are repaired, and a sufficient amount of fluid\air has drained from his brain, we will be expecting dramatic results. His memory, speech, and personality are all intact. His motor skills are all present. He has been lying in bed for 3 weeks, and will be weak as a kitten, but they will be looking to start moving him out of bed as soon as the fluid\air situation is under control.
Thanks to all of you for your prayers and support. We appreciate you so much.

June 29, 2009

Letter to Marilyn
Hello favorite Auntie and Unk,
Mom gave me your email address, so let’s see if it works…
We’ve had a bit of a rough week this week, but it looks like things are going to start shaping up fast. Last Tuesday they put a drain in Jake’s head to try to let some of the pressure off of his brain. There wasn’t enough pressure to push any liquid or air out, so they didn’t really get the results that they were looking for.

Thursday nite the drain got knocked out of his head while they were giving him a bath. Friday morning we were trying to find out if they were going to replace the drain, and they decided not to. Friday evening Jake had surgery to fix the cracks in his sinus cavity. They found a place where spinal fluid was leaking into the sinus cavity, so they sealed it off. The surgery itself was relatively minor, the doctor said it would have been out-patient surgery for a normal person.
They did a CT scan Sunday, and the air in his brain has improved, so they were pleased with the results. He has been on 100% oxygen for a couple of days to promote healing in his sinus cavity, and to help remove any excess air in his brain.
It looks like they may be able to take him off of the vent today. We are so ready to get it out. They have had to keep him knocked out since Tuesday, and we are really missing being able to talk to him.

When they get that vent out, they will let him wake up and start eating again. Then the plan will be to start moving him around, and getting him out of bed. I am ready to see that!
As far as getting him into a regular room, the only reason they are holding him in ICU now is because of the air in his brain. Once they get that controlled, he will be looking for a new place to roost.

Thank you so much for the gifts you have given to Jake and to us. You have been such a big help to us, and such support, and we really appreciate you.

June 30, 2009
Reply from Marilyn
Yes, my address worked! Such a good surprise this evening to find a wonderful e from you. You and family are on our minds 24-7. Everyday, we look for good news from Jake--just the only way it can be! You are certainly welcome for any gifts from us--like I always tell my family--wish it were more. I told Jo about the humming bird coming into my cabin last Fri and while I was there. It seemed like Grandma A was surely hovering over us--she loved her humming birds and she certainly loved all of us. You, Kelly, Brent and Page are wonderful parents, such a tribute to Grandma A. She was very talented and hard working and it certainly passed on to us. I am so glad for the high standards she instilled in all of us.
We are praying for Jake and all of you every minute. I believe he will show fast improvement now that the

surgery is over and he is able to exercise a little to build his strength. He is so nice to us always and so good looking! More later. Thanks for the update. We love all of you. Hi to Vickie and boys for us. Auntie Marilyn

July 3, 2009
We had a really good day yesterday. Jake is off of the vent, and off of all sedatives. He visited quite a bit yesterday evening. He can talk, but in a very weak whisper.
Next step is to get him eating again. When his voice strengthens, they will let him eat. The vent passes thru the voice box, and spreads it open a little bit, so until he has full control of his voice, it can be a liability for him to try to swallow.
Things are starting to look really good. His CT's are much improved, all of his doctors are very pleased (and amazed) with where he is at.

July 7, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor Safety Coordinators
I just spoke with Greg and last week was a good week. Recall that Jake had surgery June 26th to repair some fractures in his sinus cavity where air was leaking into the brain. They just got the results of a cat scan and there does not appear to be any more air leaking into his brain. However, his ventricles (the part of the brain that manages the flow of air and fluids in the brain) are swollen. They believe this is all part of the healing process and therefore

Jake is not on any medications; just IVs, as he still has not been given the release to begin eating again.

Greg asked for continued prayers that the ventricles are working properly and that Jake remain infection-free.
Thank you for all your support.
Regards, Alex

July 14, 2009
Well, we need some help. We are to the point to where Jake is pretty much all fixed up, except for the fact that his brain cannot remove the amount of fluid that is being produced. We are considering having a shunt put in on Friday. A shunt is a permanent device that can carry fluid off of the brain and deliver it into the stomach to be absorbed. It is completely concealed and does not have any external exposure or maintenance.
What we need to know is, what is the right way to go. We are perfectly fine with whatever way God wants us to go, but we don’t want to make a foolish choice. I asked the neurosurgeon what he needed to see in order to not have to put in a shunt. He looked at me, and got quiet for a second, and then said,”you’re going to do that prayer thing again, aren’t you?” I had to laugh. Yessir, I am, I told him. Jake is alive, isn’t he? He had to agree with that, and said again how amazing it was that Jake had survived.

So he made a deal with me. He is going to test Jake one more time, on Wednesday. He is going to clamp his drain again. If the fluid makes his ventricle swell, then Jake will drift off again. What he has to see, in order to not do a shunt, is to clamp him and see him stay alert (or even improve).

Here's what we ask: that you join with us and simply ask that God's will be done. We are perfectly OK with any type of healing he decides to do, and whatever way he decides to do it. We just want it to be prayed over.

Thank you all for your tremendous support, you have all blown us away. We appreciate you so much.

July 15, 2009

Note from Carole Sponza, Baldor Quebec

Hi! Read your message and thought I would share with you. First off, Jake will be a special request in my prayers. Also I would like to tell you that my nephew had a shunt put in when he was an infant. Because he was so small when it was put in he had to go back at the age of 12 to lengthen the tube. It was done without any problems. It did all what the doctors said it would. He is now 19 years old and a very healthy young man. At the time our Dustan was in need of an intervention we also asked the Lord to watch over him and for his help. And I know He did….for I am sure He gave the knowledge and skills to man so they could give Him a hand someday,(he does have many demands to handle) and perform such delicate interventions. We all know He works in many different ways….

God bless Jake and all your family.

Carole S.

July 16, 2009
Reply to Carole Sponza
Thank you so much for that encouragement. The test was completed today, and the decision is to put the shunt in tomorrow around noon.
We feel very good about it – I am ready to see him get up and about!
We appreciate your prayers more than you will ever know.

July 20, 2009
Jake is doing pretty well, we have had 3 really good days with him the last 3 days. He has talked a lot and interacted a lot. He was scheduled to have a shunt put in last Friday, but his white blood cell count was too high and they didn't want to risk an infection. As it turned out, the test for his white blood cell count was a couple of days old, and when they retested him his count was 0. So they could have done it Friday, but we just believe it all worked out for the best.
He is supposed to have the drain put in early this week, hopefully Tuesday. Once he gets that put in, he is only supposed to be in ICU for a couple more days, and then he can go to a regular room and start working on getting well!
So we are ready to get him well, and trying to be patient and let things work out in the best way. He is still very weak, but much better than he was a week ago.

July 24, 2009
Jake is doing extremely well right now. Amazingly alert, has his voice back, requesting Sonic slushes. We are waiting on the right timing to put his shunt in. He has had the procedure scheduled for 2 Fridays in a row, and both have been cancelled due to high white blood cells in his spinal fluid. The high count is not significant for any reason except that to do anything on the brain, everything has to be absolutely perfect.
So we are waiting on a window of 5-7 days with a white blood cell count of “0” to be able to put the shunt in.

However, the neurologist saw him this morning and wondered if a shunt was even going to be necessary. Wouldn’t that be something?....

August 5, 2009
Jake got out of ICU Monday, and is progressing so fast that we can hardly keep up…
Walked 24 steps Monday, rolled around in a wheelchair to visit nurses, took a shower Tuesday (1st one in 9 weeks, don’t think he didn’t appreciate THAT…), walked 70 feet Tuesday with a walker, made 3 trips to visit nurses, ate 3 big meals…and I know I’m leaving things out.
We’re just on hold now, waiting on paperwork to take him to a rehab that specializes in traumatic brain injury. It doesn’t look like he is going to need a lot of help, but we want someone who is familiar with his type of injury to look him over really good.

He says to tell everyone thanks, the outpouring of support has just amazed him.
Attached are a couple of pictures, one from day 3, and one from day 63. If you ever doubt that prayers are answered, think back to Jake.

August 6, 2009
Note from Baldor Employee in China
Hi, Alex
Please help convey my congratulations and blessing on GET BETTER SOON to Jake Dawson, Thanks!
Best Regards,
Jack /Deng Zhuming
EHS Officer
Baldor Electric
160 Song Sheng Rd,SongJiang Industrial Zone,Shanghai,China,201613

August 6, 2009
Note from Alex Masotti to Baldor employees
All,
”A picture is worth a thousand words." You will see a modern day miracle and a thankful dad.
Thanks, Alex
Safety, Environmental & Security

August 7, 2009
Note from Dale Gooding, Baldor employee, United Kingdom
Hey Greg,

Many thanks for your updates on your Son's progress. I have been praying in the UK for you and Jake – and it's been a real encouragement to see your faith love and openness in the middle of this chapter. It reminds me of a loving dad waiting for his son to come home – now where have I heard that story before…..
Thanks for reminding me that He hears every prayer.
Dale Gooding
(UK)

August 13, 2009
We're at Houston, they are working his butt off. He is eating like a horse. Included are some pix, from going home to working out at the rehab.
They are very pleased with where he is at, they are going to work on specific exercises and help him with his eyesight.
They are really giving him a good going over, we are happy with the program.

He may get to go into a pool soon, he is looking forward to that. Looks like they will probably send him home sometime next week.

August 17, 2009
Good morning sweetheart,
I ordered some school books from Amazon, so we will be getting dinged for about $135.
Jake was excited to hear about the hog, I wish you would have taken a picture and sent it to us.

He has 3 hours scheduled today. We thought it would be more. Usually they throw in a few unannounced sessions as well. He is supposed to get to get in the pool today, he already has my cool swim trunks on. He is slightly disgusted about them.
He's doing good, we are ready to come home. I emailed work this morning and took another week off, so I have vacation time until next Wednesday.
I love you and miss you, my bones are tired.

August 17, 2009
I just had to pump my own gas, and it made me love you even more. It is very hot today. How are you guys doing? Tell Jake I bought his babies some dogfood. I fed them too. They acted liked they were starving. I also turned the fan on them. Like I said it is hot.
LOVE YOU BOTH
VICKIE LYNN

August 17, 2009
Hi there. Maybe you will start appreciating me now…. Just kidding. Jake is doing occupational therapy, and it sounded like he was going to get hot packs and stretches, so he was excited. The therapist was in a wheelchair. Lauren and some of her girlfriends have made him a banner for his room and brought him some Mexican food today, so he's not exactly pouting. Becky brought him two boxes of cinnamon toast crunch and a bottle of Febreeze. Such a spoiled brat.
Love you and miss you,

Thoughts

As we went through this ordeal, and then again as I wrote this story, I learned about so many other people who had gone through life-and-death struggles of their own. So many times these struggles didn’t turn out as ours did – they lost their loved one. I experienced a small piece of the pain that my Mom and Dad lived through when they lost my brother Brad at the age of 32. And so many others – Vickie’s brother Eddie, who we lost at the age of 32. My precious Grandpa, who I lost when I was 16 – the first time in my life to lose someone I was close to. People that I went to school with. Sons of my parent’s friends. People that I worked with. As we were in the hospital with Jake, even people who were going through their own struggles would come to see us. One of my co-workers came to see me on the anniversary of his own son’s death in a car accident. He could barely speak, but he wanted me to know that he cared for our situation. All of these things made me realize that, just like Psalms 23 says, we will most certainly walk through the “valley of the shadow of death” in our lifetimes, and most assuredly more than one time. I think that most of the time we don’t heed the warning that is in that Psalm of peace. We will walk through days that take nearly every bit of life and strength out of us, and if not for the love and compassion of God we would surely just die. But His word says, “Yea, tho I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me”. It is just part of being human that we experience times of nearly unbearable pain. I wouldn't even presume to try to figure out why it must happen, but I do know that the scriptures tell us that all things work to the good for those who are in Christ

Jesus. Somehow, some way, this good God who watches over us will make all of these things turn out all right. I learned something when my Grandpa passed away in 1977. I was 16, and I had never experienced death, and when we lost Grandpa I was just terrified. I could not believe that someone that I loved so much could just disappear and not exist anymore. How could that just be the end? How could you have someone in your life one day, and then lose him forever the next? I remember walking around in a daze, devastated, trying to make sense of it. I wandered out to the back patio at Grandma & Grandpa's house, and sat in the old glider (the one we have on our front porch today) and tried to get a grasp on it. About that time, my brother Brad came out of the house, apparently dealing with exactly the same thing, and sat down beside me. We were quiet for a moment, and then we both just broke down and fell into each other's arms and bawled our eyes out. The hopelessness we felt just overwhelmed us. I will never forget the emptiness that I felt that day.

What I want you to understand about that story is that while I did have some faith at that time (meaning I did believe that God existed, but that was about it…) I did not have any knowledge. I had no idea what God said His plan would be, or how things were supposed to work. The lack of that knowledge is what caused such hopelessness in me when Grandpa died.

When my brother-in-law Eddie died in 1992, he was the first person to pass away since my Grandpa that I remember being close to. And while his death was a terrible tragedy, and a huge personal loss, there was not a feeling of hopelessness like there had been when I was a child. This time there was a peace that things would eventually be OK. I had learned what God's intentions were – plans to prosper us, and not to harm us. Death will be a part of this life, but death will eventually be banished from existence. This life seems so permanent, but it is actually very, very temporary.

And so there is something about this story that I really want you to understand. In our situation with Jake, God made things right for us the next day by allowing him to live through the night. It was still a long struggle, but God did something for us quickly. In many of our situations, we will not get His response quickly – but never lose faith that you will get his response. *His response is GUARANTEED.* Let me explain it this way – we lost Jake on June 2, 2009, and we saw him again on June 3, 2009. I lost my brother Brad on September 15, 1995, and I haven't seen him yet. *But I will.* And that is the difference between the unschooled faith of a 16 year-old boy and a 50 year-old man who has spent some time learning about what God's word says. It gives you an anchor of stability to be able to weather all storms, because you know that you know that all things are going to work out for the good – you just don't get to pick the time. That's God's business.

Well, that's our story. I will confess that I cry every time I read it, just remembering God's faithfulness to us. It makes me think of the scripture in Timothy that tells us to "fan our faith into flames". Every time I read this I am stirred up by what God has done for me. I write this so that I will remember, and so that our family will remember. I write this because I hope it becomes a record for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren to know and remember what went on in our lives in 2009. And I write this to give thanks to my precious heavenly Father, who heard my cry and reached down from heaven and pulled my son out of a miry pit that no one but God could rescue him from.
The End
"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away".
Revelation 21:3-4