

The Quarterly Magazine of Florence Christian Church

Abundant

Volume 2: Issue 1 Winter 2020

Break Through

Living Hope in Pain

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO NAME YOUR PAIN?

By Pastor Susan Diamond
Senior Minister, Florence Christian Church



Several years ago, I ran across a book that's title was so intriguing I just had to purchase it. *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants*, by Dr. Paul Brand and Philip Yancey, is about how our relationship with pain can be vital to life, not just metaphorically, but quite literally. Dr. Brand began his medical practice working in India in the mid-20th century with leprosy patients. Those of us who have grown up in the church have heard about leprosy and how Jesus healed the outcast lepers. Leprosy is a highly infectious disease that causes severe, disfiguring skin sores and nerve damage in the arms, legs, and skin areas around the body. One of the problems with leprosy is that the victim feels no pain and therefore does not know when they injure themselves, sometimes resulting in death.

Through his work, Dr. Brand came to understand how important pain can be. In our culture today, we tend to run and hide from pain, but Dr. Brand shows how a pain-free life can actually lead to disaster. He writes, *"Pain is not the enemy, but the loyal scout announcing the enemy. On my travels I have observed an ironic law of reversal at work: as a society gains the ability to limit suffering, it loses the ability to cope with what suffering remains...The average Indian villager knows suffering well, expects it, and accepts it as an unavoidable challenge of life. In a remarkable way the people of India have learned to control pain at the level of the mind and spirit, and have developed endurance that we in the West find hard to understand. Westerners, in contrast, tend to view suffering as an injustice or failure, an infringement on their guaranteed right to happiness."* (pp. 187-88)

Contrary to what society and the media tell us, feeling and naming our pain can be life-giving...for pain tells us when something isn't right. That not only applies to physical pain; it also is the important indicator of the dis-ease of heart and soul. That's why it is important to name our pain. It has the potential of bringing life.

In this issue of Abundant Magazine, we are going to hear some courageous stories of those who have struggled with pain. They are raw. They are real. In some cases, they are ongoing. But by naming their pain, each of these individuals is opening themselves to the possibility of finding deeper meaning for themselves and their journey of faith.

Songwriter Amanda Cook once said that "You can't heal until you feel." I hope these stories of pain will give you the courage and faith to name your own pain and journey through that pain with God.

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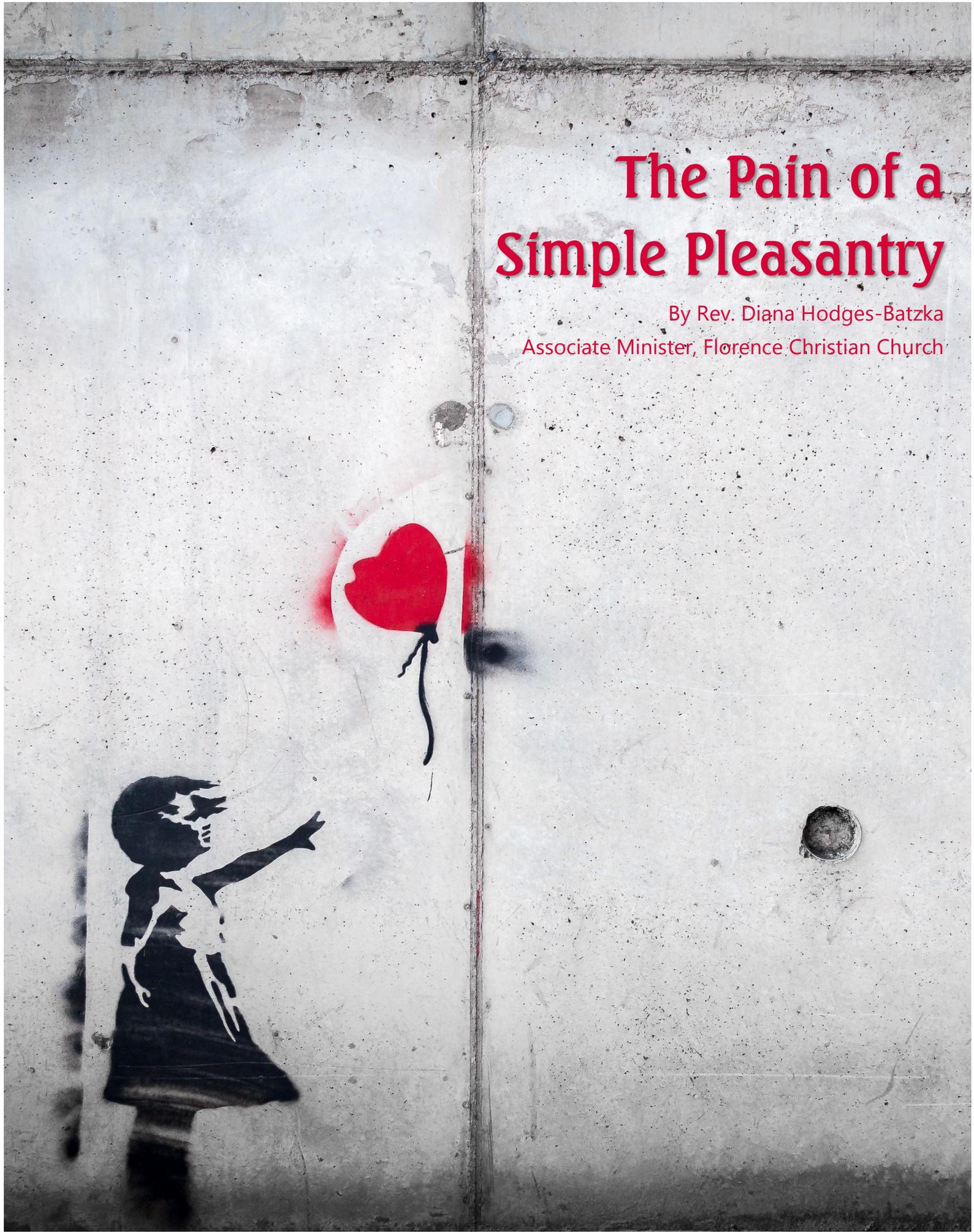
In this Issue

- 2 Why Is It Important to Name Your Pain?
- 3 The Pain of a Simple Pleasantry
- 6 A Broken Heart
- 8 Pieced Back Together
- 10 When You Are Left in the Question
- 12 Worden's Tasks of Mourning
- 13 Taking Care of the Environment Is Taking Care of Yourself
- 14 Living on the Margin

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The Pain of a Simple Pleasantry

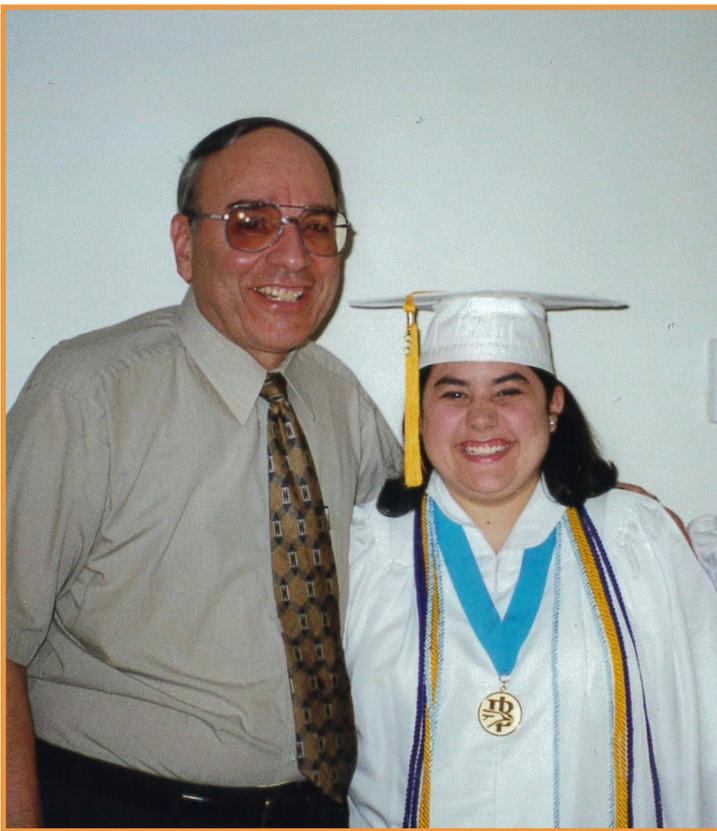
By Rev. Diana Hodges-Batzka
Associate Minister, Florence Christian Church



Them: “How was your Thanksgiving break?”

Me: “My father died. How was yours?”

Them: “Uh . . .”



Pastor Diana with her father at her High School graduation.

I tried so hard not to reflect my pain back at their well-meaning greeting. I couldn't do it. I now feel badly for all those people who casually encountered me on my college campus the week after Thanksgiving and before finals. They were politely engaging me in commonplace pleasantries. In response to their everyday question, I responded with snark, anger or just burst out into tears. It was not what they expected, to say the least.

Of course, they had no way of knowing that over Thanksgiving break of my senior year of college my father suddenly and unexpectedly died a few days after a routine surgery. While my professors had been notified, we couldn't notify the whole campus or everyone I ever knew or the whole world that my life had been so significantly changed.

There I was at age twenty, having had a parent die, and not knowing how to handle the immense pool of grief, sorrow, anger, and fear. And every time someone asked me how my break went, or, even once they knew about my Dad's death, how I was doing, I had no idea what to say. And it hurt...Every...Single...Time. Having to say again and again that he died. It was like pouring alcohol on an open wound, again and again and again.

There was such pain in the simple pleasantries because my life had been turned upside down, but theirs had remained the same. How could I ever find a way to even have simple conversations with people again?

“For me, my entire world has changed. For others their worlds are still the same. I just want to lash out at people around the silliest stuff... The grief is there all the time just below the surface. You never know what tiny little scratch will pierce the pain and set off a volcano of emotion. Although, a volcano is not quite the right image. Volcanoes are hot, flaming. Pain, as I experience it, is more like feeling a bitter cold wind. The cold is all you can focus on. It is all encompassing. Every day is filled with a dull ache. Does it ever go away?”

Pastor Diana's Journal

Fortunately, I slowly found a way to recognize the pain was there regardless of their ignorance of the situation. And slowly I didn't need to take that pain out on them.

I remember encountering one of my college chaplains a few weeks after returning to campus, and she asked how I

was doing. In the middle of the campus deli, I exclaimed in a loud angry voice with tears filling my eyes and running down my cheeks, "How do you think I am doing? My dad just died. I hate that question. I don't know what to say. I know you care about me. But, it's just not helpful!"

Fortunately, she was used to big emotions and calmly asked, "What question can I ask which would be helpful and show I care?"

After I took a deep breath, I replied, "Well, ask how I am today. Right now. It changes from moment to moment, day to day." And from that moment on, she showed her care by asking how I was in that moment, that day.

And I began to reframe the simple pleasantries other people asked in this way. Even if they didn't know that my dad had died or if they had forgotten or asked, "How are your parents? Are they coming to graduation?" I replied with how I was in that moment, that day or just about my mom.

As I began to appropriately journey through the grief of my father's death, I began to have enough space in my life to move beyond my own emotions and experience. I realized that just because people didn't know all my story, it didn't mean they didn't care or that I could respond in anger or take my pain out on them.

As we journey through life, we will cause people pain through pleasantries and others will do the same to us. Yet, even in the midst of pain, connection can happen, and we can acknowledge where we are today, this moment, and it is through that human connection that pain becomes more bearable.

Be Careful What You Say

By Phyllis Reed
Health Ministries Coordinator

As my brother and I walked up the steps to bed, the lady who had us by the hand (I don't remember who she was, though I will always remember what she said) said, "Everything's going to be OK." My 6-year-old brother immediately brightened and said, "You mean Daddy's not really dead!?" Because, you see, the only way anything would ever be OK again was if Daddy were still alive. At twelve, I knew our lives were changed forever. In the seasons that followed, there were many other memorable messages, but few were comforting.

Platitudes do nothing to validate our profound sadness, sense of loss and anger. You have heard them and probably have said them. They come with the best of intentions and a sincere desire to do SOMETHING to help. These are just a few:

- * *Oh, he's in a better place.*
- * *God needed another angel.*
- * *You can always have another baby.*
- * *He lived a nice long life.*
- * *Be strong. She wouldn't want you to cry.*
- * *It's God's will.*

Regardless of the rationale, theology, or belief behind these statements, they are simply not helpful.

When you want desperately to help someone who is experiencing a loss, here are some alternative messages to provide comfort and care:

- * I am so sorry for your loss.
- * I'd be happy to bring you supper on Wednesday.
- * May I check on you later this week?
- * I'm usually up really late/early; please call me if you need someone to listen.
- * I promise to keep you and your family in my prayers.
- * May I just sit here with you for a while? We don't have to talk.

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A Broken Heart

By Damian Wallace
Ministry Partner, Florence Christian Church



Damian, Mollee, Abby, Lucy and Delaney

My life was stable. I've always lived in this area, even my college years were at home. Mollee and I got married in 2001, bought a house later that year and found out we were going to have Lucy. Two years later we had Abigail. By 2010 I had been at the same job for about 12 years and very happy there. It was family owned and the place you could really see yourself retiring from down the line. The only thing I guess that didn't fit into the cookie cutter mold was that I had gotten married at the age of 21 and divorced by the age of 24. That was tough but I thought I had rebounded nicely.

Then in 2010 everything got shook up.

At my annual checkup, the doctor said that they needed to take my EKG again; something didn't look right. It came back abnormal. I was born with a hole in my heart that never closed up, but it had never been a major worry. So I went to see my cardiologist about this new development. After more tests, I was

I always joked that I was going to pass away at the age of 38, based on a dream I had when I was young. That joke was starting to feel less funny.

diagnosed with **Hypertrophic Cardiomyopathy**. This is a thickening of the inner wall of the heart - the heart does not have as much room for blood in the chambers causing pressure to build up until the blood forces its way through. As this happens the heart creates scar tissue. My heart was thickening and also damaging itself - a catch 22.

This hit me like a ton of bricks. The docs told me that I had to quit working out - my only real hobby and outlet. And, in the back of my mind I thought about my Grandfather who passed away at my age, 36! I always joked that I was going to pass away at the age of 38, based on a dream I had when I was young. That joke was starting to feel less funny. In the middle of all this my company was bought out, so my livelihood was up in the air also.

For someone who doesn't like change this was too much to take. I felt lost, lonely, scared and angry. Everything I had worked for felt like it had been a waste of time. I would look at my girls Abigail (6) and Lucy (8) and all I could picture was what I would miss out on. I wouldn't see them go to high school, have first dates, fall in love. I wouldn't be able to walk them down the aisle one day, which is something I always thought was a big daddy-daughter moment. When I would look at Mollee all I saw was what would happen to her and the girls. I was the bread-winner. Mollee had stayed home with the girls while they were young to give them a solid home life and was working part time in the evenings. They would not be able to stay in the house we were in. The girls would have to switch schools and leave all their friends. Everything we had

built would go away and Mollee would be left with two small girls and no solid income...and it was all my fault. I had made a promise to them and I was not going to be able to keep it. I was the cornerstone of the family. The one everyone counted on and I wasn't going to be here. But it wasn't my choice, and that made me angry.

My Mollee tried to fix it by reading and researching, but I didn't want to hear it. I was too angry; thinking "poor me." In my mind I had 2 years left and I was going to enjoy them. Well, when communication breaks down, and one person is in a devil-may-care mood, relationship breaks down fast! I started hanging out with my ex-wife. Life is fun again, like old times. Life at home is sad and things, of course, got rough. I know, I know. I was selfish and quite an a**.

In my mind, no one understood me. I risked losing my family, my parents, my sister and extended family. I was running wild because I didn't believe anyone could understand me. One day I had a bad heart episode that put me in the hospital. Mollee helped me get settled in. After she left I waited the whole night and no one came to see me. My family had always shown up before. But not that night, no one came at all. I had never felt so lonely and unloved by people who had been with me my whole life. Well that of course made me mad because that was the state I was already in.

The night before my surgery was rough. I was scared, angry and so disappointed in myself. I was trying to sleep but couldn't, constantly tossing and turning. I started talking about all the broken relationships in my life and faithful, honest Mollee started pointing out that I had put myself where I was. Well of course I didn't want to hear that so I headed outside at 2 AM to take a walk. I was so lost, I took the time to talk to God as I walked. I talked about how I didn't want to be here anymore. How I had messed my life up so much. I had hurt everyone that I had ever cared about and I didn't see any way to fix it. I wanted to die. I wanted to go into that surgery and never come back out. I would be leaving a lot of loose ends but I wouldn't be able to make anything worse if I just wasn't here. I hoped that God would take my deal. I had already said goodbye to

my daughters, they stayed at my sister's so they could go to school, and I would be able to say goodbye to Mollee and my parents at the hospital. After that I went into the house and finally fell asleep.

I'm here today to tell this story, so God obviously did not take my deal. The story of my recovery and the restoration of my family is one for a future issue of this magazine, for I have been restored to a life full of grace, love and beauty because of the forgiveness my family showered upon me.

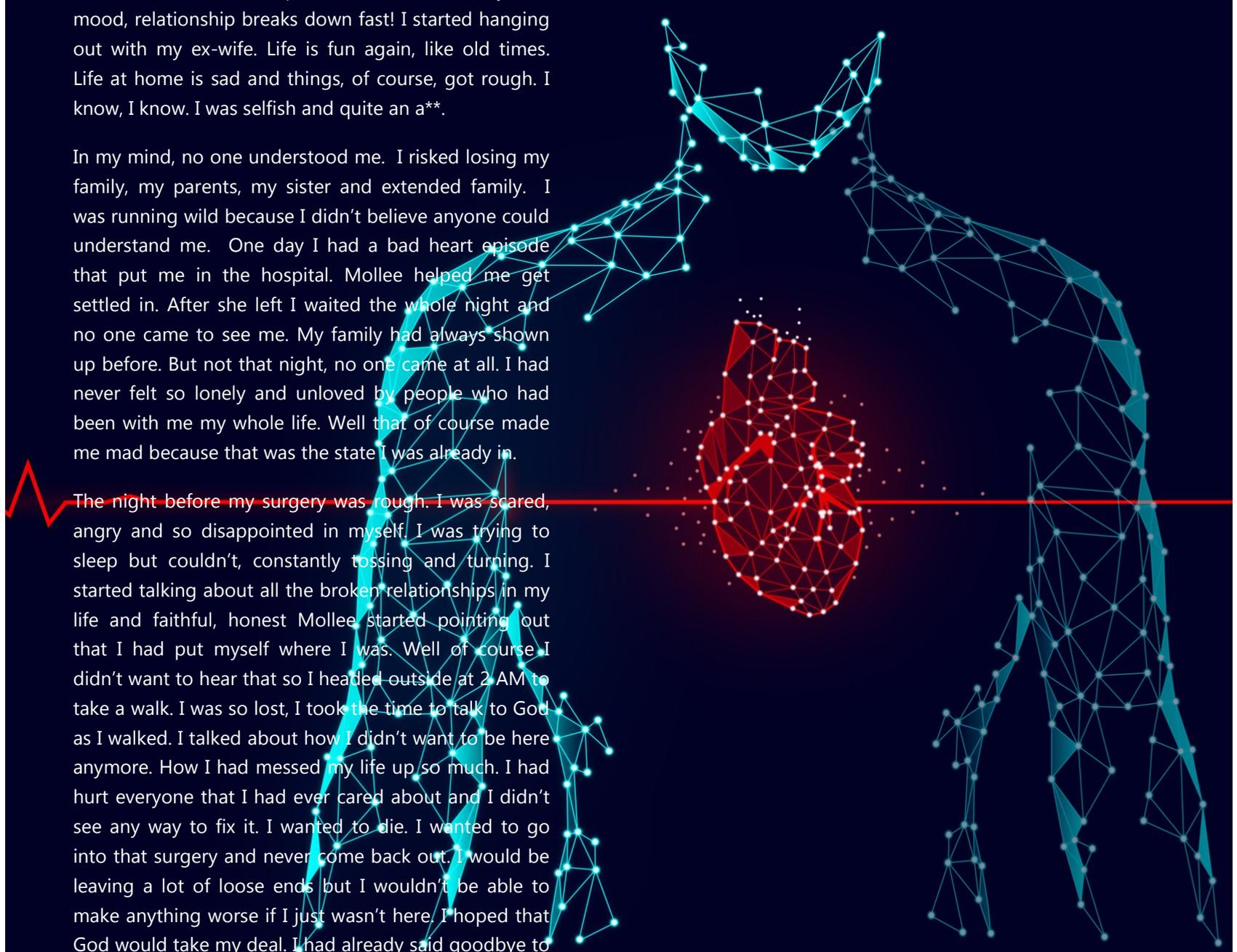


Image courtesy of stockvault by Jack Moreh

Pieced Back Together

By Kris Moreland
Ministry Partner, Florence Christian Church



October 4, 2017 started like any other work day, but it sure didn't end like one...

On my way to work at Florence Christian Church Discover Zone, where I was an Administrative Assistant, I was hit head on by a distracted driver.

My life would forever be changed. I had multiple open fractures of my left forearm and wrist, meaning my bone broke the skin. My left upper leg bone, the femur, was shattered above the knee, which was also broken. My right arm was broken into multiple pieces including the end of my elbow. The first 6 ribs on the right side of my chest were broken by the airbag. I also had lost consciousness and had a brain bleed.

In the first 4 days, I had four surgeries and was constantly sedated. When I woke up, I learned I would

be non-weight bearing for 12 weeks on both arms and my left leg.

I was devastated. I couldn't do anything for myself. I had to depend on others to be fed, bathed, dressed and put on a bedpan. The rehab was grueling and painful, but I was determined to get better. I had to learn new ways to dress myself and brush my teeth. I was set on learning how to tie my one shoe so I could navigate to therapy, propelling my wheelchair down the hallway using only my right leg. My one good limb, my right leg, got very strong. Four+ hours of physical and occupational therapy will do that.

When I came home to my family room, we adjusted to a new normal. The room was transformed into a hospital room. My days were filled with PT, OT, and home health. My husband and my sisters bathed me,

fed me and entertained me and so much more. They preserved my dignity. They made me laugh. Jeff was so very patient. With great effort, he would undertake what should have been a simple task like a drive, packing me and the wheelchair into the car, so I could feel like a part of the human race again. We all became much closer and now there is a bond that will never be broken.

“I couldn’t quiet my thoughts and kept re-living the day of the accident.”

Most days were fine, as I had visitors and sunlight to cheer me. But when Jeff and my grandchildren went upstairs for the night, I was left downstairs by myself. I was lonely and depressed. I couldn’t quiet my thoughts and kept re-living the day of the accident. I couldn’t sleep more than 2 or 3 hours at night. My granddaughter Elizabeth started sleeping downstairs on the couch. It worked out beautifully for both of us.

Every step (more like shuffle) was excruciating, but I was walking by that Christmas and had a wonderful day at my daughter’s house surrounded by my family.

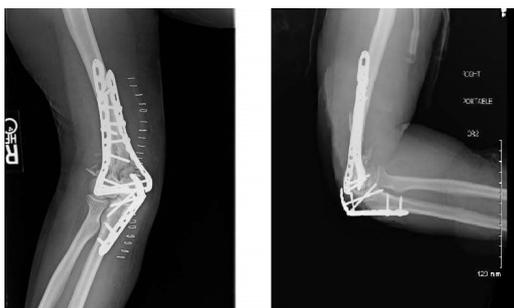
Now, in early 2020, I have had a total of 11 surgeries. My elbow deteriorated and I needed an elbow replacement in August 2018. In March 2019 my upper left leg was lengthened because my left leg was over an inch shorter than my right. (My husband actually

found the piece of my thighbone in the dashboard of my car!) That surgery was the most painful of all, but I am back to my 5’1” height. In March of this year another surgery will be done to remove the rod that helped lengthen my leg. I have rods, pins and plates in both arms and my leg.

My right hand remains mostly numb and my pinky and ring fingers are numb along with my thumb. I have difficulty gripping objects and holding onto them. I drop things daily, have a terrible time turning doorknobs and fixing my hair. Printing is very difficult but cursive is worse. I grieve for the beautiful handwriting I once had. I grieve for the job I gave up because I can no longer type and perform the duties of an Administrative Assistant. I grieve for my Salsa Red VW Beetle...a car I wanted most of my adult life. I grieve that I can no longer walk 2 miles in 27 minutes, or walk easily around the zoo, which was my happy place.

I am thankful for every day, no matter how difficult some can be. My faith was tested and strengthened because of the accident. I am thankful for the paramedics, the trauma surgeon, the best nurses, assistants, physical therapists and occupational therapists who encouraged me every step of the way. I’m thankful for Pastor Susan, Pastor Diana, the Elders and my friends at Florence Christian. Their visits and prayers of encouragement meant the world to me.

I am thankful to my entire family who put their lives on hold to help me get better. I don’t know why my life was spared on that fall day in 2017 but I can’t wait to find out!



Right Arm



LEFT ARM



Upper Left Leg



When We Are Left in the Question

By Lori Potraffke
Parent, Discover Zone Preschool & Childcare Program



Jax was 2 years and 3 months old when my dad, his “Pap” died of cancer. Pap had been sick for 18 months prior, most of Jax’s short life. Jax didn’t get to experience Pap at his best, but they still enjoyed their time together. They both love animals, and they would sit together on the couch scrolling through pictures of whatever animal Jax was interested in at the time. Dad was rejuvenated when Jax was around and could muster up strength for walks in the woods or a game of toss.

Though he had some short lived experiences with Dad, most of Jax’s experience with Pap is through the stories we tell and the pictures we have. We explain that Pap isn’t here anymore because he died. We say that Pap lives in heaven now with God and Sullivan. (Sullivan is my sister’s toy poodle who died before Jax was born.) Jax sees pictures of him and has formed false memories of him. Pap and Sullivan were inseparable in life, so most pictures of Pap also have Sullivan in them, usually on Pap’s lap or, as seen here, on an afternoon walk.

At some point Jax learned about the concept of spirits, which he seems to understand as invisible beings without bodies. Spirits are “lucky” because they can do things that people can’t, like fly way up in the sky. When Jax sees interesting cloud formations or colorful sunsets, he remarks that God and Pap made those just for him. He explains that God taught Pap how to make clouds and colors in the sky. They serve as communication between Jax and Pap.

“Is my Dad a spirit? Is he with God in heaven? Does heaven really exist?...I just don’t know, and not knowing is painful and scary and sad.”

I am incredibly envious of Jax’s ability to process and exist with his understanding of Pap’s death and how at peace he is with this new relationship he has with Pap. When Jax talks about this, it’s all very matter of fact. He’s formed these explanations and now they are his truth, and he can explain it to other people. Jax can look

up at the sky, and see clouds and colors and immediately know that Pap is there, painting the sky for him. He has Pap all the time, every day.

I, on the other hand, have lost my Dad entirely. I don’t have him in the sky or on the other end of the phone or any place tangible. And I am not at peace with that. I’m envious, but also incredibly fortunate to have this little 4-year-old window to the afterlife through which I can see and continue to experience my dad. It’s heartbreaking and comforting at the same time, which is confusing for me, even at 37 years old.

I think the source of my envy of Jax, is that while Jax knows that Pap is still “here” in a way, I really don’t. I tell myself that Daddy is with God in heaven, but there’s a certain cynical, science-minded, beaten-down part of me that wonders, is that really true? Is my Dad a spirit? Is he with God in heaven? Does heaven really exist? Does God really exist in the sense that we understand? Will I ever see my Dad again? I don’t know these things for sure in my heart, so I have no peace. I have no certainty that my Dad isn’t completely gone. I have no assurance that the last time I saw him - the morning of my 35th birthday when he died in a hospital bed in my parents’ bedroom - wasn’t the last time that I will ever see him. I just don’t know, and not knowing is painful and scary and sad.

Talking with people about my questions hasn’t been especially helpful. My mom and my sister are certain about these things, and so is my brother, but not in the same way. Are my mom and my sister right about the existence of heaven and the afterlife? Is my brother completely right in thinking that when we die we’re just gone? How can that be? How can three people who I know and love so well have such dramatically different positions on this incredibly important topic that eventually affects all of us? And why can’t I make up my mind like they have? It seems that being certain one way or the other would be far more peaceful than the constant confusion and wondering that I experience. Or maybe I’m wrong about that too; maybe we can never actually be at peace with the death of a loved one, no matter what we believe.

Worden's Tasks of Mourning



Task #1: To Accept the Reality of the Loss

This means knowing that the deceased person is no longer alive and won't be part of our everyday lives.



Task #2: To Work Through the Pain of Grief

This means that we may experience a variety of intense feelings and begin to work through them as part of the grieving process.



Task #3: To Adjust to an Environment in Which the Deceased is Missing

This is where we struggle with all of the changes that happen as a result of the person being gone, including all of the practical parts of daily living and all of the effects their loss has upon our sense of who we are and how we see the world.



Task #4: To Find an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Embarking on a New Life

This means that we begin to value the relationship we had with the deceased and all that we learned or loved or respected or disagreed with about them. We recognize that we don't 'forget' them and that it is okay to care and connect with other people and continue to live our lives even though we miss them.

Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, J. William Worden



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"A TRADITION OF SERVICE SINCE 1937"



This is a fish-eye view of the plastic floating
in the Pacific Ocean.

Taking Care of the Environment Is Taking Care of Yourself

By Glenna Galbraith

Green Chalice Church Coordinator, Florence Christian Church

One day I stormed into Rev. Sue Bishop's office complaining about all the cigarette butts that people were dropping outside the front of the church. Rev. Sue said, "You can't expect people to take care of the earth when they don't take care of themselves." In all our human brokenness, we must make changes within ourselves before we can change what is happening to our environment.

Richard Rohr says this about change: "Jesus' first recorded word in at least two Gospels, *metanoia*, is unfortunately translated with the moralistic, churchy word *repent*. The word quite literally means *change* or even more precisely "Change your minds!" (Mark 1:15; Matthew 4:17). Given that, it is quite strange that the religion founded in Jesus' name has been so resistant to change and has tended to love and protect the past and the *status quo* much more than the positive and hopeful futures that could be brought about by people agreeing to change. Maybe that is why our earth is so depleted."

During my career at Procter & Gamble we did an archetype study of behavior patterns. We concluded that the United States is an adolescent society. As you know teenagers are usually self-centered and focused only on their needs! You can see this adolescent

attitude at play in the way the United States uses natural resources and the way we do not prioritize protecting the earth. Our poor habits, our greed and our short-sightedness have taught us to be, as one of my friends said, "a throw-away society." We think all of those resources will always be here for our use. We have to move away from this thinking as Christians. China, for example, is making sweeping policy changes; they are banning all one-use plastics by the end of this year!

In "*The Kentucky Christian*," our regional Disciples of Christ newsletter, Rev. Carol Devine, Minister of Green Chalice, wrote: "The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) recognizes change has to happen and has responded by calling our denomination to go carbon neutral by 2030 (GA 1724)...We are justice people who strive to live out our faith by caring for 'the earth and everything in it' (Psalm 24)."

We have a challenge ahead of us but we can make changes as we continue our spiritual growth and allow Jesus to heal our brokenness. It is our calling as Disciples of Christ to strive for wholeness in a fragmented world. We were created on purpose for a purpose – to take care of God's amazing earth (Genesis 1:28). Let us take care of ourselves, take care of each other and take care of our earth.

If you are interested in helping to make a change in our oceans, go to <https://4ocean.com/>



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