
*If it were not for hopes,
the heart would break*

THOMAS FULLER



The Third Trial

It was a regular Thursday morning in May of 1995. We were all scrambling as usual; Steven and Karen needed to be out the door by 6:45. Andy drove them each morning to their bus stop, so they could traverse down the canyon road to their school. I was busy, orchestrating breakfast, school lunches, and thinking about my busy day ahead.

“Could I talk to you for a minute?” ,my husband asked quietly. “I need to go to the hospital this morning.”

My first thought was one of annoyance; it was his day off and I assumed he needed to attend a Hospital Board meeting in Hope or some such thing.

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But no, I was wrong.

“I need to go in for a biopsy,” he said.

“Biopsy?” The word hung heavy and unfamiliar in my secure world. “Why?... a biopsy?”

“I have a lump,” he said, “and I have to go for a biopsy. The doctor thinks it might be Hodgkin’s.”

I was stunned. I didn’t know about a lump. I didn’t know my husband had gone to the doctor. Hodgkin’s? I started to cry. I just didn’t understand.

He hugged me. “I’ll be Ok... time to go.”

“What’s wrong, mom?”, one of the kids asked.

“Ohhh, I’m fine...” I lied. There was no sense telling the kids at this time of the day. And I was in shock.

They left. The house was quiet. My life had seemed close to normal only ten minutes ago. And now it felt shattered. I went through the motions of getting ready for work. But my mind was in another sphere, trying to process what I had just heard. I had so many questions. Why didn’t I know about the lump? When had he seen the doctor? Was this serious?

And then there were the questions that I was too scared to ask. What would happen? Were our lives to change forever?

The fact of the matter was that Andrew had a far more dangerous cancer than we could have ever imagined. And it was good we could not possibly know what lay

ahead of us. The next four months were the worst we had ever experienced...and the best. It was life on the edge, when life hangs in the balance, and what is really important could not be more clear or vivid.

It was also as if the world as we had known it came to a screeching halt, and I was always amazed how life could go on around us. Our normal was shattered. Our dreams lay in pieces. We stared death in the face, and fought it with all our strength and with every resource we could muster.

That morning, although I could not possibly know all that lay before me, I became acquainted with the monster. It was a monster of fear that lay in the belly of my stomach and threatened my peace – my family’s peace and our very existence. I wanted to ignore this monster, but it followed me to work and everywhere I went. I felt sick all over. Sick with worry for my husband, sick with fear. But I carried on and no one knew.

I had this urge to hang onto the present, to stop the forces that were threatening to change our lives. We attended a wedding that weekend. As medical things go, there had been no results so far. We now played the waiting game and carried our heavy secret, hoping it was nothing. Just a little scare. I was the pianist at a wedding, and it took all of my courage and wits to concentrate on the songs. I had this urge to scream, “My life is falling apart”, but we carried on. When the couple said their vows, I listened as I had never listened before to those age-old words... “In sickness and in health, till

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death do us part". I was sobbing on the inside. Do they have any idea what those words mean? I didn't. Not yet.

And yet I remember watching Andrew that day. Looking handsome in the light blue shirt that suited him so well. I loved him with my eyes and wanted to hold him in my heart, to keep him safe, to pretend we were not having a nightmare. He looked well. How could he be sick?

*M*y mind wandered back to our first date – a seventies concert the youth group attended together in Vancouver. The Jesus movement was fresh in the air and we were all caught up with the music, the romance, the freedom, and the freshness of our Christian faith. On our way home we all stopped to attend an evening service in the Chilliwack area where Andrew had been attending church before he moved to Harrison. He was to give his testimony that evening, and freshly attracted to him, I listened attentively.

He talked about the hardships in life – about losing his parents and the loss of his fiancé. He talked about his new faith, about asking God for patience, and learning through trials. And he shared the verse that had come to mean a lot to him:

*But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; They will run and not
grow weary, They will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 40:31(NIV)

Although Andrew struggled with God for much of his life, this verse became a life verse for him. And it was a verse that became particularly meaningful after he was diagnosed with melanoma cancer. I must also say here that I never doubted Andy's belief in God. He was frustrated God did not answer his prayers. He had a hard time asking for help. And he found it easier to bury his inner pain with work, which often made me feel like I was second in line for his affections.

That was soon to change.