



Life is Not an Emergency

By Debbi Stumpf

I was privileged to be at an event with both Mark Victor Hansen and Jack Canfield in the early spring of 2007. Jack was speaking when suddenly a cry came from the crowd indicating that one of the event attendees was in need of immediate medical attention.

A handful of medically trained attendees emerged from the crowd and went right to work attending to the lady who needed their help. Jack quieted the audience and asked if, in the moment, we could direct our thoughts to those of healing for the person in need and instantly a quiet calm encircled the audience.

A room full of strangers suddenly joined together for the common good of the woman in distress. Some prayed while others quietly meditated. There was a feeling in the room of such compassion and stillness that it made an indelible mark upon my memory that I would carry with me always.

I remember thinking how the serenity of the room was in stark contrast to the busy hospital where I worked the night shift and where the call for help was often accompanied by stressful moments of uncertainty. In that moment, at the conference, I made a mental note that 'Life is not an emergency'. I determined within myself that when an emergent situation in my life arose, I would meet it with the same peacefulness that I felt in the conference, allowing the expertise to come forward and handle the stressful circumstance while remaining tranquil. Little did I know that within a few weeks, I would get to put that lesson to the ultimate test.

This particular Saturday started out like any other ordinary Saturday, packed with the activities of a busy family. Ken filled his morning in typical fashion, working at our rental properties to ensure that our tenants were well taken care of. His to-do list could have been completed within a few hours except that he loved to spend time with each family, catching up with the activities of their lives and listening to the adventures of their children.

We met up in the afternoon at a family birthday party in which many of our extended family members gathered together for a bar-b-que. Then, we returned home where Ken worked on our own home projects, including painting our bathroom. We didn't notice that the sounds of construction had stopped overhead until I went to find Ken and he was slumped over on the floor and barely breathing.

My own first aid training kicked in immediately and no sooner did I make the call for help than I remembered the moment at the conference when a similar call for help was made and the incredible feeling that accompanied it. In an instant, those feelings of peaceful calmness washed over me and quieted my racing mind. Though I could not see the outcome of the situation, in that moment I knew that we would make it through by allowing the experts to come forward and remaining calm in the crisis.

Once at the hospital we faced many hours of tests while they worked to determine the cause of Ken's sudden debilitating illness. Twenty-four hours later it was determined, that at forty-four years old, my sweetheart had suffered a severe stroke. During the emergency, we were supported by caring family members, friends and the medical staff.

We gathered together in the hospital chapel for a group prayer where I was able to provide a bit of information on Ken's diagnosis and we began to form a plan for this sudden new chapter of our lives. It was in the chapel where I realized that our lives would never be the same. Everything in our lives had changed in an instant and the future was completely unknown.

We lived in the moment, taking each piece of information and every temporary setback as they came, yet remained calm inside, knowing that we would be taken care of and that against all odds Ken would return home to us. It was during this time that we realized we were, in fact, living in a miracle.

I'm not sure most people would view their most difficult and tragic times as miraculous, but that is how we chose to view our circumstance. We determined that we were being given a great test, one that as a family we would need to endure together, yet in the middle of the test we also knew that we were experiencing a true miracle.

Five long months and many sleepless nights later, after rejecting the notion that Ken should be placed in a nursing home to live out his life, he finally returned home. Ken was as weak as a kitten and this once strong, independent man had to rely upon us for his every need. My kids were stellar in attending to their dad as he struggled to do even the most basic things for himself while reclaiming whatever pieces of his life he could. He received therapy for a short while until it was determined that he had come as far as he would ever come and would not get any better.

The last day of therapy was the day I bought Ken watercolor paints and brought him home to our own brand of therapy. Though we aren't trained in Physical Therapy, we worked Ken's muscles and his mind. Each family member shared in the responsibility of providing Ken with the attention and stimulation he needed to improve. The greatest ingredients in home style therapy have been patience, creativity, and lots of love.

Over the course of the past two years, Ken has made monumental progress. He can walk using a cane when he was once wheelchair bound. Where he was virtually blind in one eye, he now can see. He can say about thirty whole words, with "I love you, forever" and "Thank you" at the top of his list. He can sing the songs of his heart and the songs that have been the soundtrack in our lives together. He gives us hope that we can do anything we set our minds to doing. His determination teaches us never to quit. Ken's courage inspires us to better our lives and to reach for impossible goals. We don't take even a single breath for granted. He is our own living miracle.

Our lives have been so richly blessed in the midst of this most difficult time. Our family has received such strength in the adversity as friends and family have supported us and cheered us on. Though we wouldn't wish this on any one, we can see that in the moments of deepest despair we have been given the comfort of peace. In the dark nights of doubt we have been given the light of optimism. We have come through the storms of turmoil with a calmness that I learned to draw upon in a moment when I was taught a most valuable lesson, that 'Life is not an emergency'.