

CHAPTER 11

A MAJOR SETBACK

“What the Lord has put together ... let not man split asunder.”

October 13, 1989 was a normal day for me except that my father was on a business trip and a man from our home health provider was supposed to come and get me up. My Mother could no longer do this with her bad back. For whatever reason, he did not show up at his normal time of about 8:00 AM. Either he forgot or they failed to tell him. In any event, I woke up about 9:00 AM, which was about an hour later than usual, so I knew something was wrong. I figured Mom would get on the phone to call someone, so I would just enjoy sleeping late. Finally around 10:00 AM someone came by and began getting my clothes ready to help me to get dressed. Mom told him before leaving the room that I would not be able to help him lifting, since at this point I only had only about half the of the use of my arms and no use of my legs.

A common mistake of those helping the handicapped is to assume that they can help with lifting. Many can put some weight on their legs in order to assist. However, with my type of MD at this stage of development, this was not possible. It is up to the helping person to do all of the lifting. He was a friendly fellow, talking about the weather and homecoming. I told him I had tickets for the game tomorrow. He got my pants on, and got me up in the bed. The usual procedure was to bear hug me – wrap his arms under my arms and lift all of my weight. He felt that he could just put his hands under my arms and lift with his wrists thinking that I would be able to help. I told him that this would not work, but apparently I was not forceful enough. He lifted me, but when he began turning me toward the chair I slipped from his grasp and started going down.

He should have just let me fall. We could have handled that with no problem. Instead he instinctively kept trying to keep me from falling, which put more and more pressure on my right leg. Had I just fallen I might have been bruised somewhat, but that would have been it. I remember thinking during all of this: *"I am really going to have a sore leg tonight."* That turned out to be a major understatement. For, as he tried to balance me, more and more pressure went onto this single leg, and suddenly I heard it snap like a dry piece of kindling wood.

(At this point I am obligated by faith to explain the questionable use of scripture given above. I realize that the passage that I am slightly abusing has its immediate application to marriage – see Matthew 19: 3-9. However, it would seem not improper to generalize this concept. After all, if God put something together it is not for man to rip it apart. Now I can say that *God* put my leg together in a very real sense, and having it “split asunder” was certainly not what He had in mind. As much as the physical pain devastated me, however, I can imagine that it is nothing compared to the emotional pain that divorce causes to all who are involved.)

My helper finally managed to get me back in the bed. I thought that I was controlling my moaning and groaning, but it did not escape Mom who quickly came back to see what was going on. I knew now that it was a lot more than just being sore. We knew that I had to go to the hospital; the question was: Could we get there in the van or would we have to call an ambulance? I could not tell from lying down, so I got them to set me up in the bed. It was then that a new surge of pain shot

through my leg that was indescribable, and I started shouting: "Ambulance, Ambulance!" I could not allow my leg to straighten out on the bed. It felt like the bone was trying to come out the side of it, so I got the man to prop it up somewhat. Mom went and got the company that he worked for to call the ambulance.

As I was lying there broken and hurting I was trying to stay calm. The poor man tried to apologize to me, but I was trying so hard to regulate my breathing and such that I do not remember answering him. I feel bad that I did not respond, but what could I say? I know that he did not do it on purpose, but my leg was broken all the same. I never held any animosity toward him, but then, I never saw him again after that either.

The paramedics were the first to arrive on the scene – they came with sirens blaring, which was really not really necessary in this case. They made their way back to my bedroom, two of them. One of them seemed to be in charge – I will call him Mr. Hope. He had a mustache and thinning hair on top. They took a closer look at my leg. Unfortunately, the first thing that they do for someone who has a broken leg is to move the leg around just a little to see exactly where the break is. I tried to be nice and friendly to them, but anyone who has had a severe break of a bone knows the pain that such movement causes. Some people might think that because I cannot use my legs that I am paralyzed and feel no pain. I can assure you (as I did them) that this was not the case. I yelled: "STOP!!!" But, by the time the word got out they had mercifully completed the maneuver and were on to something else.

The idea was to get me to the hospital for x-rays without making things worse. They put a splint on my leg (a plastic air cast) so that it seemed that my leg was floating around in an air bubble. This enabled them to move me without putting more stress on the break. As they were getting ready to move me I recall that Mr. Hope was admiring the Alabama memorabilia that was placed all over my room. The ambulance finally came and they put me on a stretcher. Unfortunately my bedroom door was in the corner of the hall and they needed to raise my head up in order to get the stretcher out. When we finally got into the hall they lowered it and that was much better. As they were putting me in, Mr. Hope asked me my name, I figured just for the records.

They finally got me in the ambulance and they fastened the stretcher to the floor. Mom apologized that she could not ride in the back of the ambulance with me – she had to go up front. Not that I was concerned about that; my main focus at this point was what they were going to do to me once I got to the hospital. On the way I asked the attendant in the back what they would do to my leg if it were broken. He was quite non-committal, stating that the leg might not be broken. Of course at this point I knew better, since there was little doubt about what I heard. Before the ambulance arrived at the house, Mom had called our preacher, Curtis Pope, to tell him what had happened. Even though he lived further from the hospital than our house, he still beat us to the hospital.

Upon arrival they took me into the emergency room and removed the splint. A nurse then came in with a pair of scissors to cut off my pant leg so that they could get to the wound and x-ray it. She asked if I would prefer to have them removed, but I told her to go ahead and cut them. As Curtis said, they were not handing our medals for bravery in this hospital. I remembered then that I was supposed to teach bible class that Sunday, so I asked Curtis to get someone to fill in for me. He

said that there were not too many people who, after breaking their leg, the first thing they think about was who can teach their bible class. I did not have the heart to tell him that the first thing that I thought about after it happened was: "I am going to miss that football game tomorrow," but I guess I can be forgiven for that (not telling him, that is).

They finally took me down to x-ray and at the same time kept asking over and over if I had hurt my head or shoulder or anything else. I kept telling them no, no, no,... but they kept on asking. "Trying to run up the bill, I guess," I thought, but in fairness they were just trying to be sure that they did a thorough examination.

They were going to let one of the doctors on call for the emergency room handle setting the leg until they found out that I had MD. At that point they decided to get an orthopedic surgeon whose office was a couple miles from the hospital to come in. He had a very good bedside manner. He looked at the x-rays and said that since I was confined to a wheelchair anyway, they would not consider surgery. This was both a shock and a relief. I never thought that they would have to perform surgery. But on the other hand, since they were not going to do it, I was relieved. I thought: "Chalk one up for being in a wheelchair." In retrospect, had I not been in a wheelchair I would have not broken it in the first place, but who's counting?

They were going to put my leg in a cast. However, when they learned that I could not straighten my leg out even before the accident, they decided to use a heavy brace on it, which had a hinge at the middle that could bend when my leg did. Then there was the next shocker. Usually when someone breaks a bone they put a cast or whatever on it and say: "Come back in six weeks or so and it will be healed." To my surprise he said I would have to keep it on for three months. I now realize that much of the timing depends on exactly where the break is.

The doctor was going to send me right back home once they got the brace on. However, I wanted to be sure that everything was all right before I went back home, so he agreed to admit me for a few days. Meanwhile Curtis had to leave, but he came back to visit me over the weekend.

As I got into the hospital bed for a few hours and was lying on my hip I suddenly realized that this mattress was extremely hard. I was wondering how I was going to survive the weekend without tremendous bedsores. Fortunately, they were way ahead of me. They had an air mattress that goes on top of the other mattress and takes the pressure off so that you can sleep more comfortably.

Missy had been at work while all this was happening, so she was not there to share the excitement. Mom had not had time to leave Missy a note, so she called our neighbor from the hospital in hopes that Missy would not be so upset when she found the house empty. You can imagine her surprise when she pulled up the driveway to be met by our next-door neighbor who informed her of what had happened. After things got settled Mom phoned her to bring some stuff to the hospital for me. When she got to the hospital she handed me my glasses, which I had forgotten in all of the rush.

It was about 3 PM when things finally got settled down and they hooked the TV up; so I was all set to start being bored. I tried to take a nap but kept picturing the entire events of the day over and over, so I had a hard time sleeping.

We had caught Dad right before his flight home to tell him what had happened. This must have been a long flight for him. Later on in talking about this, both of us had in the back of our minds that something like this was going to happen sooner or later. We both knew that Kevin had broken a leg at the nursing home. Whenever you have to depend on someone who is not familiar with your situation to help, they are bound to make mistakes. I never realized that an incident that took place in a matter of seconds would affect me so much of my life – it would have me down for the next 2 1/2 years.

It was Friday the 13th when all of this happened. Not that I am superstitious; I am not. But it was fun to joke about it. We all know that when you break a mirror that is supposed to be 7 years of bad luck. Some people seem to break a mirror every 7 years. What happens when you break a leg on Friday the 13th? To say that you are going to have at least 7 weeks of bad luck is a truism, regardless of whether it's the 13th or any other day. However, in my case the 7 weeks turned into 30 months. Not quite seven years, but, as I said, I am not superstitious.

Nighttime finally came, and Dad, who had come straight from the airport, needed to go home and unpack. So, Mom and Missy decided that they would stay the night at the hospital with me. I prepared to go to sleep after watching some MASH reruns. Things were bound to change now with regard to being able to sleep comfortably. Before I would sleep most of the night on my stomach until about 5:00 AM when Dad would come in and turn me on my left side. I could not lay on my stomach with this brace on. Even sleeping on my side was quite difficult, since this placed stress on my leg, no matter which side I was on. One of the nurses arranged a pillow between my legs, and that helped at one point to get me to sleep. But we never did figure exactly how she did that, and so for the most part I slept on my back.

That night I slept until about 3:00 AM and found myself wide-awake. To my amazement, Mom was knitting and Missy was watching TV. I was getting uncomfortable and not able to fall back to sleep so they called the nursing station and they gave me a shot to help me relax. The next day the medication was still working. They hooked up the radio so I could listen to the Alabama game. However, even though it was a really close game, I kept falling asleep all during it. When I found out that Alabama had won by only seven points, I was glad that I had slept through it. I did not need that stress at this point.

Before this incident I had always wondered in the back of my mind if I could live with pain. It was at this time that Mom was recovering from back surgery and still had a lot of pain with it. Also, my grandmother had been suffering with her hip for many years. But they both did what they had to do despite the pain. Every Sunday at church during the Lord's Supper we would talk about the pain that Jesus had to bear for us. I am definitely not comparing the pain of a bad back, hip, or broken leg to the pain that one must have borne in a crucifixion. However, this is a small sample of what Jesus went through when he was on the cross. My question had been: could I live with pain, could I accept it, or would I let it beat me? This incident enabled me to see that this was something that I could bear, and that alone was an accomplishment that gives me great confidence today.

I will admit, however, that I was not a glutton for punishment, and I did everything that I could to avoid pain. One thing I had learned was to prevent anyone from touching my leg, and to keep from moving it myself. As long as I could get away with it, this is what I would do. However, movement was unavoidable. I had to get up to go to the bathroom and also to sit in my chair. Sitting up in the wheelchair for a couple hours a day was necessary to keep the fluid from building up in my lungs. So, that Sunday Dad brought up my wheelchair, and two men helped put me in it. These men performed this service for many people who were disabled. One grabbed me under the arms and the other lifted my legs as they got me into the chair. It had been 48 hours since I had been sitting up, and since I was quite dizzy I made sure that they buckled me in good. After I had been up for a few minutes the dizziness cleared and I was OK.

For the past five and a half years I had been sore under my right hip from the cushion that I used in the wheelchair. I could usually get relief by placing more weight on my left hip. Now that I had the brace on there was no longer any way to relieve this pressure. One lady at the hospital who specialized in relieving bedsores saw my problem and recommended that I use a different type of cushion. It was an air cushion like the one that I had on the bed. This was great since it would take the pressure off the hip and before long the bedsore under my right hip had completely disappeared. Like everything else, there was a downside. My body was not used to this cushion, and it made the upper part of my body shift up. I began to get a rash between my hip and stomach because the air could not get to this part of my body. This lasted about six months, but we made some adjustments and were able to control this as well.

Even though I had lost much of the use of my arms, I could still push myself for short distances. However, the cushions also made me sit up higher in the chair, and my hands could not reach the wheels very well, so I could not push myself. However, just sitting up for an hour or so did not require much pushing so I did not pay much attention to this. I figured that once the brace came off I would go back to my old cushion.

Meanwhile, I had plenty of visitors; many of my friends from church and even one of my bible class students, which was somewhat of a surprise. I had doubts that I was getting through to any of them, but perhaps I was. One of the visitors was Mr. Hope, the paramedic who took an interest in my Alabama stuff. We talked for a few minutes and talked about the upcoming game with Tennessee. It was a very friendly conversation.

I was scheduled to leave the hospital on Tuesday. However, my left knee and right shoulder were really aching. We suspected that they had been bruised during the accident, and that it took a while before they started hurting. Perhaps the pain of my leg had overshadowed these other problems. The doctor came around on Monday morning and decided that I should stay overnight and get additional x-rays in the morning. They came out negative, but by the time that this was over it was mid-afternoon, and Mom decided that we should stay over until Wednesday.

The next morning the doctor came in and signed the discharge papers, and the ambulance came and transported me home. Upon arriving home the two men who worked the ambulance took me in to my room. As we were going back to my room I saw where my sister and her boyfriend

had printed up a sign on the computer that said: "WELCOME HOME MICHAEL." This was a pleasant surprise and I still have the sign hanging in my room today.

For some odd reason I had mixed emotions about going home, even though I was tired of the hospital. I hated to leave all of the nice, friendly, good-looking nurses behind. I also dreaded the thought of being cut off in my room (that was in the back of the house). I soon realized that these fears were ill founded since effectively they turned my room into the den. There was a rocking chair for Dad who brought his paper in, and another easy chair for Mom who brought in her knitting. Missy would also join us (she was young and did not need a chair), so we would talk and watch TV together, and the love and regard shown by my family overcame my fears of being isolated.

If you will bear with me, perhaps this is a point at which I can philosophize to some extent. There are many times in life that we fear the worst and that fear never materializes. It is good for us to learn from these experiences that we should not allow fear to dominate us. Some people go from one contrived crisis to another frittering away their lives in a state of artificial turmoil. In the end we are all dead, but that event is one that few of us seemed concerned about. And yet, it is the *only* one for which we should show real concern, and that by getting ourselves right with our creator so that we are prepared for eternity. With this perspective the temporal things of this life shrink in importance, as Jesus taught so effectively in Matthew 6 after which he came to that glorious conclusion: "But seek ye first his kingdom, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Indeed, the blessings of my family and my home were added to me, although I do not take any credit for this; I view it as a further indication of His grace.

In regard to what a family or friends can do to help one who is disabled, it is not that you have to do anything. Just be there. Most people do not like isolation. It is painful to hear the action and the fun going on in the other room and to be left out. I am thankful that my family was able to understand this. They could put all of the things in my room – the TV set, the stereo, the radio, the computer, the phone, the games, whatever. All this would help, but none of it would satisfy. What I really wanted – no, needed – was for them to be there. And they were.

When Kevin died I started thinking about my legacy – would anyone remember me? and just how would they remember me? I got somewhat of an answer when I broke my leg. As soon as I came home from the hospital, I was flooded with get-well cards. I was also getting birthday cards. There were so many that Mom hung long strings from the ceiling down to the floor and fastened the cards to them with multiple-colored close pins. So, when I would feel depressed I could look at the card and see how much I meant to everyone. One of them came from Oak Hill School, who had learned of my problem. They got a card and all of the students signed it. When Grandpa learned that I was putting the cards on display, he stated sending one every other week. These little things did not seem like much, but they did a lot to brighten my days.

Two men came out from the hospital twice a day to get me out of bed and allow me to sit up in my wheelchair. Since the man who had caused the problem had worked for the hospital, and they were liable for it, they furnished these two assistants free of charge to us. They came at about 10

AM and put me in my chair. I could then go out into the living room and visit with everyone for about an hour, and then they would put me back in bed. They would repeat the entire process around 4:00 PM. Part of me wanted to stay up a lot longer, but the other part was glad to be back in the bed since the chances of additional injury were minimized there. We did this for three days until Saturday. On Saturday when I got back in bed my leg was hurting so much that I had to take pain medicine for it. We decided that it might be better to get up for a two-hour span in the middle of the day rather than getting up twice a day. Gradually I would increase the amount of time that I could be up.

Probably the biggest thing that I hated was not being able to get into the bathtub any longer. All that I could do was to take a sponge bath. During the winter this was pure torture. There was no way to stay warm during this process. I had always suffered from coldness of my extremities, and taking a warm bath was one way to solve this problem. Now, not only had this been taken from me, but I had to tolerate the coldness of being sponged off.

I believe that the problems described so far were minor. They were inconveniences and I could handle most of them readily. However, there were also some major problems, at least in my mind. I had trouble feeding myself for one thing. The first few days in the hospital I could not lift my arms up, but I thought that once I got home I would be able to do this myself. Not so. In order to feed myself I had to lean forward and that put extra pressure on my hips and legs. It was just impossible with the brace that stuck me in the stomach when I leaned forward. So, as much as I hated to, I had to let my parents feed me.

Clothing was also another problem. The brace prevented me from pulling my pants on. Since I was only going to be up for a couple hours, I just stayed in a robe. During the winter this got quite uncomfortable with the cold air. I augmented this with a sweater and some blankets, including an electric blanket.

I quickly found that you can predict weather with broken bones. As the barometer dropped my leg would swell up and get quite painful since there was no place for it to expand to in the heavy brace. Meanwhile, the knee on the other leg was still acting up. Pressure seemed to help, so we began wrapping it each day in an ACE bandage.

Being confined to the bed most of the day made even the smallest of events seem much more significant. For example, after Kevin died my Grandfather and I had many more phone conversations. One of them occurred a couple of weeks after my accident. Granpa was saying that he and Grandma were going through the countryside looking at the leaves as they turned during the fall. I told him how much I liked to do this, and let it go at that. But, a couple of weeks later I received a note from him and in it was this picture of a tree with all of its beautiful leaves. This was a small event, but it seemed quite large considering my condition at this time.

Since I was limited as to what I could do while in bed, I tried to do everything that I had to do while up, such as drawing or writing. It was clear that two hours was not enough, and getting my hair washed everyday cut into the two hours. I tried writing in bed, but it required that I reach out to the tray. I wrote one short letter but felt exhausted when it was done, so I resolved that I would

write only when up. All I could do in bed was to read and watch TV. I had ordered a number of college football books, and there were still several of these books that I had not read.

The books I was reading on the history of college football kept me enthused about Alabama's team, and 1989 turned out to be a good year for Alabama football. They won 10 games and a share of the conference title, for the first time in 8 years. Thanks to TV, I was able to see most of the games. I invited people from church to come over and watch it with me. We would have snacks that they could eat anytime. I was usually so nervous during the game that I could only eat at half time.

One Monday morning the phone rang and Mom picked it up and told me it was for me, but she would not say who it was. When I used to sit up in my chair I could hold the telephone receiver as long as I could prop my elbow up on the table. Then I could lean my head toward the receiver and talk that way. However, now that my leg was broken and I was confined to bed, I could not hold the receiver, so Mom propped it up with a pillow. (Later on we got a speakerphone that solved this problem.)

To my surprise it was Bill Curry, the head football coach at Alabama. This was the second time that he had called me this year. He heard that I had broken my leg, and he called to wish me well. I told him to go get those Vols, and he said that he was on his way to do that right now. Which they did, by the way, beating them 47 to 30. This was his last year at Alabama, since he left and went to Kentucky that year. Despite all of his efforts in making the transition to Kentucky, he still took the time to send me a letter enclosing a Wildcat picture. Needless to say, I was pleasantly surprised at this gracious act of kindness. We corresponded for another year or so before losing contact, and my admiration for him only grew despite the fact that he was playing against Alabama. This might seem such a little thing, but to the recipient of such acts of kindness, I can assure you, it is huge.

At one of our football parties, Alabama was playing Penn State. It was a great game – the lead changed several times. Then with Bama leading by only a point and a few seconds to go, Penn State had the ball on the five-yard line. They lined up to kick a chip shot. Somehow a Bama player managed to get through and block the kick, which set off our celebration.

On another occasion I was surprised by the color commentator over the radio who said that they wanted to say something special to Michael Mason who was listening to us on the radio, and he said a few words about my getting up and being back with them soon. This lifted my spirits tremendously. They also sent some of the players over to see me one time. One of them was the quarterback, Gary Hollingsworth. He had been making me eat crow all season in that in the second game (the last one I saw in person), he had come in to replace the first string quarterback after he went down with a broken knee. From the stands he looked like a lanky, skinny kid who had little chance of doing anything. I figured that the coaches would not let him pass ... he would just hand off and let it go at that. But to my surprise he threw on first down and the receiver caught it for a first down. Not only that, but he went on to set all kinds of school records for passing. I got him and the other players to sign my scrap book, where I had pictures of all of them.

Toward the end of the season, as I was celebrating my 23rd birthday, who should come by again but Mr. Hope, the paramedic who helped me when I broke my leg. He presented me with an autographed football from the 1989 Alabama team that he had been able to get. He also brought by some players a week or so later. One of the defensive players took up the entire doorframe when he entered my room. The other one was the punter who was also recovering from a broken bone – in his wrist. A few weeks later I got another autographed football from one of my bible-study students. All of these things were very instrumental in keeping my stress under control.

Ten days after I returned home from the hospital (October 20, 1989), about four o'clock in the evening there came a knock at the front door and Mom went to see whom it was. I had already been put in bed by the men from the hospital for the second and final time, so I was unaware of who our caller was. I heard the knock and shortly thereafter heard someone coming down the hallway toward my room. To my surprise a life-sized skeleton entered my bedroom. Donna Davis, one of the members of our church had ordered this ugly specter of doom from a gift store in town and had it delivered to me to get me in the spirit of Halloween. I immediately named him Igor. Along with this fleshless creature she included some assorted candy, but it was Igor that impressed me most. It was inflatable, but it looked authentic enough to have some real possibilities ...

So we decided to let our newly arrived friend grace my wheelchair, and turned it toward the door that faced the hallway. We put Igor in a sitting position and put the foot pieces on his feet and rested his hands on the tray. The next step was to shut the door, turn out the lights and wait for Dad to come home from work. Dad usually came home around 5:30 PM, and on this particular night he was right on time. As was his custom since I had come home from the hospital, upon arrival Dad headed straight for my room, where we were waiting for him. He popped open the door, saw nothing but the skeleton, his eyes bugged out and he dropped his briefcase to the floor and caught his heart with his hands. No doubt he was surprised, but his reaction bordered on hyperbole as he tried to turn the tables on us. We would not be taken in by his foolishness, as we all were swept up with laughter. I guess had he actually fallen on the floor it would have been a different story, but that was not his style.

This worked so well that we decided to gaslight Dad using Igor and see how far we could push it. The next evening around 9:00 PM after everyone had been watching TV in my room they all left and went their separate ways. Missy went to her room and Dad to the den to take it easy on the couch. He kind of dozed off a bit, so I got Mom to take Igor out of my room and put him on Mom's side of the bed and pull the covers over him. At about 10 or 10:30 Dad realized that he would be more comfortable in bed, so he made his way in that direction. He poked his head in my room to say goodnight and then went across the hall to their room. I listened intently for the reaction. I guess he figured Mom had retired early, but when he pulled the covers down to get in they slipped away and Igor's ugly face emerged.

“Good gracious, who put that ugly thing in my bed!” was his reaction. Gotcha again.

Mom rushed into the room to save Igor from the decisive definitive deflation.

The next evening Dad got ready to go in to take a shower. While he was in the shower I got Mom to drag Igor into the bathroom and place him on the john. Dad reached for the towel to dry

his eyes, and as he focused them there was his old friend. Something about being in the altogether makes you feel particularly vulnerable ...

“Every time I turn around there’s that old spook staring up at me!” Gotcha a third time.

But I had one more trick up my sleeve. Later that night after Dad went to bed, I had Mom take Igor into the kitchen and place him in Dad’s chair at the breakfast table. Dad, being the only early riser in the family, could conceal his reactions on this occasion. Question: if a person is frightened by a skeleton and there is no one there to see it, is it still just as funny? I think so, but I am sure that my imagination of the event could not have been as funny as the actual sight of Dad staggering into the kitchen half asleep only to realize that Igor had beaten him to it. But after that we took it easy on Dad, who had certainly suffered enough on behalf of our levity. Soon Igor became camouflaged into our other Halloween decorations as we placed him in the easy chair in the Den and placed a blanket over his legs and Missy put a spider and its web around his neck. So Igor became a mainstay in our Halloween décor for many years to come.

That year Mom let me pick out our Thanksgiving menu. I am not that fond of turkey, dressing and cranberries, and since there is usually so much of it left over and we have to eat it for days and weeks, I got pretty sick of it. So, I chose that we would eat hamburgers, baked beans and potato salad. Short work of that and Mom appreciated it too.

Christmas of 1989 was the first time that I could not go shopping or running around looking at the lights. However, my folks decided that they would put the Christmas tree up in my room. I was getting to where I could sit up for four or five hours, but going to bed was still the hardest part. With the Christmas tree in there I would get someone to plug in the lights and it would lift my spirits.

Of course, we could not go to Louisiana, so my grandparents came to see us, which was a gift all its own. Last year Grandpa had been recovering from his stoke, but this year he seemed almost back to normal. They say that something good can come out of everything bad, and I believe this was the case with my broken leg. Before when they came to visit we spent most of our time on the go at the malls or whatever. Now, that we could not do that we actually had some time to talk and visit. I became much closer to them at this time. Every night around 9:00 Grandpa would come in and we would watch some type of nature show that we both enjoyed immensely.

Taking down the Christmas tree is always depressing. It marks the end of one era and it never seems that the beginning of the next is exciting enough to overcome this nostalgia. Mom had really anticipated this, and since the tree was artificial, they left it in my room and applied different decorations to it for the different times of the year. In retrospect all I can say is: brilliant. The first thing she did was to put in blue light bulbs and replace the Christmas ornaments with snowflakes that she had crocheted, and suddenly the Christmas tree became the snow tree. In February she put in red bulbs and decorated it with hearts. In March it was green for St. Patrick's along with Shamrocks. The Easter tree had pastel lights, and in July she decorated it with small flags and red, white and blue lights. In October it was gold for Halloween. Thanksgiving was red and gold with pictures of turkey and pilgrims. All of this was a tremendous spirit builder.

Stringing the cards and the infinity tree are just two examples of things that parents or guardians of the shut-ins can do to bring a little variety and excitement to the lives of those who are bored and tend to get depressed. They might seem little to others, but they spell the difference between staring at the same four walls and being able to anticipate something new and different. For those who are not able to visit, just sending a card can be a big plus.

January 1990, was the start of a new decade. I began my long journey to recovery. It had now been three months since the accident, and it was time to get rid of the ugly, heavy brace. I went to the doctor's office in the ambulance. I came on a stretcher and it was my theory that they got to me first thing so that the other folks in the waiting room would not get the wrong idea as to what they did there. They got it off with no problem and I was sent on my way.

It was exciting to get into bed freed of this terrible burden, but the real work had not started. It was going to take a while for me to get any kind of movement in my leg. Of course, I could not walk, but having some control of the muscles in your legs is still of great benefit. I recall that when the men would lift me into bed, the leg would shake uncontrollably. (At this point without the lift it took two men to do this.) At times, it did not even seem that it was my leg. It was quite stiff and hard to bend, so I had to keep it elevated while in the chair. Tight corners were hard to take. Also, I could not feed myself since I could not lean forward with the leg straight out like this. It also made going anyplace impossible. So, something needed to be done, and that was called therapy.

My therapy was started once I got settled down at home, about February 1990. A physical therapist came over and instructed my parents on exercises that I should do to strengthen my joints. One of the first things was to wear my shoes. (I never wore them since I figured there was no place to go, but she said that if I did not get them on there would be real problems.) In fact, when I first put them on blisters started showing up just from the slight movements that were occurring. Eventually my feet got used to the idea.

I had still been having trouble with my right shoulder and left knee. After a few days of exercising as recommended, I noticed that they were not bothering me anymore. I realized then that the pain was not due to the accident – it was due to their not being used during the recovery process. I felt kind of stupid realizing that this could have been handled earlier by the right exercises.

This is when I fully realized that my recovery was not going to be as quick as I had thought. I began to look for other ways to relieve my boredom. One of the magazines that I had collected had to do with the academy awards. It had a list of the old movies that had won. I decided that I would attempt to look through the TV Guide and see if I could see all of them. As I did I would check it off. I also got Missy to see if she could find some of them at the movie rental. That kept me busy for almost a year.

While this helped somewhat, being in bed most of the time was boring me to death. It was also bringing back those occasional bouts of depression. I was on anti-depression medicine, but the combination of Kevin's death and breaking my leg was clearly getting to me. The best way that most people have to battle depression is in getting interested in something else, but this was nearly impossible while I was confined to bed. I had often concentrated on some future event to keep my

mind off my current problems. At this point, however, I had no idea of when I would be able to get out of this bed, so I could hardly plan on anything.

My prolonged recovery created many other things that I had to get used to. Not only had my parents arranged to have the men come out to get me up during the day, they also got a man to come and spend the night with me in case I had a problem during the night. This was one of the hardest things to get used to – having a stranger sleeping in the room with you. I feared that I might talk in my sleep or other embarrassing things. My other fear was that I would not be sleeping very well at all, since my sleeping habits were now all turned around. I had fear of waking up and not being able to do anything except stare at the four walls. The first night that he was there I had trouble communicating with the man. I would tell him where to put my leg so it would be comfortable, but he would still move it a couple more inches. I had to get my timing right with him.

The medication that they gave me for sleep was quite powerful, and this generally helped. However, there were times when it would put me out when I did not want it to. One time I was having a conversation with my mother about 5:30 PM and I fell asleep right in the middle of the conversation. Another time on a Saturday afternoon I had just gotten back in bed at 2:00 PM and thought I was going to get a quick nap only to find myself not waking up until almost 8:00 PM. I was afraid that I would have a lot of problems sleeping that night, but apparently the medicine was so powerful that I had no problem getting to sleep. Thus, after a few days they decided that the all-night sitter was no longer necessary.

The medication was beginning to affect my short-term memory. Days were running together. I wanted to watch a special on the final days of Richard Nixon, but before I knew it the week had gone by and I had forgotten all about it. I soon learned that whenever there was something like this that I wanted to watch, I would get Missy to write a message to this effect and place it on the table in the den so that I could constantly remind myself. It also affected my longer term memory as evidenced by an incident which occurred about a year after this. Mom and I were watching a special about old-time actors, and we were discussing the ones who had died. She mentioned one and I disagreed stating that this person was still alive. She told me of a conversation that she had had with me about this very thing, and went and got a magazine about the death of this actor. This was quite confounding in my mind, and I now realize that it must have been the medication.

Being confined to the house all day, it became even harder for me with the arrival of spring. Mother Nature had been hibernating all winter, but she was alive again and I wanted to be out there with her viewing the newly budding flowers and feeling the warm sun on my face. But I knew that my leg had a long way to go in healing before I could take on the task of going outside. I was also still unable to get into my regular clothes and would not be appropriately dressed to sit outside.

As spring came, Dad decided that if I could not go see Mother Nature, he would bring her as close to me as he could. He put up several bird feeders, and it was interesting to watch them feed, followed by the squirrels who would get their leftovers. The squirrels attacked the bird's food and started chewing everything in sight, including the bird feeders. Dad decided to shorten the rope so that the squirrels could not reach them. I enjoyed watching the squirrels more than the birds, but

Dad did not want to waste money, throwing birdseed down the bottomless pit of the squirrel's mouths. Even after he raised it, however, a squirrel came along and tried to jump to reach it. He missed several times and finally was able to hang on and pull himself up. Dad could not believe what I told him about this, but eventually he saw it for himself. Squirrel 1, Dad 0.

Dad went back and this time he tied the bird feeder directly to the clothesline. The problem is that there were some times when the clothes were on the line. So the squirrel just walked up the clothes to get to the feeder. Squirrel 2, Dad 0.

Dad was determined not to be outwitted by a bunch of squirrels. So, this time he took drastic measures and moved the bird feeder completely away from the clothesline. Our house has a gable roof that was low on both ends. Dad went to the peak of it and lowered the bird feeder from there on a rope, making it low enough to the ground where I could see it, but high enough (at least he thought) so that the squirrels could not jump up and get it. We both thought that this would do the trick. Obviously we found out otherwise. Indeed, this tactic did not faze the squirrels one bit. They simply got on top of the roof and climbed down the rope to get the bird feed. Squirrels 3, Dad 0.

Dad did a little research and found out that some of our friends at church had had the same problem but had solved it with a slick application of motor oil. So, on the fourth round Dad climbed up on the roof and coated the rope with some motor oil as far as he could reach it. It did not take the squirrels long before they gave this a try, but as one of them climbed down the motor oil did its trick and he slid right on past the bird feeder onto the ground. He was not hurt but was puzzled as to what had happened, apparently not familiar with the wonders of modern automotive technology. So genius had overcome persistence and the motivation for an easy meal, as Dad had lost several battles but had managed to win the war. On the other hand, you had to admire the persistence and creativity of these tree rats, as they refused to go down without a fight.

I took courage from them and resolved that I would persist. I would come back from my broken leg and re-establish my capabilities or die trying.

Along with the nighttime sitter, my parents also arranged a sitter to come in the afternoons three days a week to allow my mother to run errands and do other activities. One thing that bugged me so much about all of my "sitters" is that I felt that they were visitors and that I had to entertain them. So I could not just get off in a book or a TV program and ignore them. I felt they would consider me a snob. Perhaps if they stayed long enough to become "part of the family" this would not be a problem, but under the current circumstances it was really psychologically painful. Like everything else, some of the sitters were quite good and others just saw it as a job. Sometimes they would send men and other times women. I enjoyed the women, since they were not obsessed with sports. That seemed to be all the men wanted to (or could) talk about. However, with the women it seemed that we could talk about almost anything. I feel strongly that a good sitter will determine quickly just what the patient wants and needs. But perhaps I could have been more proactive in this regard myself in making it clear that I needed some time to myself. Perhaps I should have invited them to bring a book or encouraged those who were taking classes to bring their homework and not feel that part of their obligation was to keep me entertained.

There was one sitter who was the exception. Kelly was young and full of energy. She was intelligent and had a great sense of humor. For her this was only a part-time job. The rest of the day she was going to school to get her degree in nursing. It seemed that we enjoyed being together, and from my point of view it was no longer a sitter who was coming over but a much-welcomed guest. She came at least once a week, and as often as three times a week. The main reason that I enjoyed her company was that I did not know that many girls over the years. I knew a few from school and occasionally I would talk to them; but from the most part I was in a guy's world. I don't want to leave the impression that I had romantic delusions. In the many conversations that we had I learned that she was engaged to be married this upcoming summer. It was just that I enjoyed her company immensely and we had many interesting conversations, and it surprised me how much I could relate, seeming much more effectively and enjoyably to someone of the opposite sex. Sometimes she would bring her knitting over and we would watch TV and talk.

I knew that when she finished school in the spring she would be gone. So, even from the time that I first got to know her in the fall of 1989, I was already dreading the coming of spring. I knew that she was enjoying my company as well, since a week before Christmas she was not able to come over to the house because of another appointment that she had to keep. However, she made a special trip to come over to the house just to wish me a merry Christmas.

Before I knew it spring had arrived and she received her degree and went on to bigger and better things for her. However, during the next several months she would come over to the house on her own time. On one occasions toward Easter she brought over a toy chick, which when you warmed it in your hand would chirp like a real chick. It is one of the main things that I put on display each year at Easter time.

It is easy to tell that my fascination with Kelly was not totally platonic, and I make no excuses about it. I do not think that this emotional attachment would be any different from that experienced by any normal man whom a pretty, friendly and sensitive nurse is taking care of. Some kind of bond will always take place. My mother had an uncle who was wounded during WW2 who corresponded with the nurse who took care of him long after he had returned to his wife and family. Fortunately, knowing that she was engaged to be married pre-empted any of the big fantasies that I might have had. It was early August of that year when I encountered her picture while looking through the paper – there she was with her new husband as they announced their marriage. Even though I had known this for over six months, the sight of the picture produced mixed emotions. For although I was happy for her, I was depressed to know that our time together had come to an end.

That was not the end of the story. She came back a month or so later bringing her wedding photos, and we looked through them. I enjoyed this immensely, since she was sharing with me one of the most exciting days of her life. I did not see her again until February 1991 when she stopped by the house early one morning to tell me that her husband had been transferred and that she would be moving to Texas. Though I was disappointed to hear the news, I derived considerable satisfaction out of knowing that she thought enough of me to come over and let me know, as busy as she must have been at that time.

Perhaps some people resist growing relationships with those who are disabled for fear that it will lead to an emotional attachment that cannot play itself out as it could under normal circumstances. It is true that there was pain associated with her leaving and the happy ending that could never be, but I would hate to think of the alternative to her. Perhaps a stand-offish type who, for fear of establishing an attachment herself used the sparing of my feelings as an excuse not to bond as most normal people do. No, I would have her to be no other way than she was, and I urge those who are taking care of the disabled to be as loving as your personal limitations can allow. If you never have a friend, you can never lose a friend ... but what a terrible price to pay to avoid such a loss. In my case I can almost say that my friendship with Kelly was worth breaking a leg for.

One of the biggest losses that I felt during my recovery was in not being able to go to church every Sunday. Each week I would wake on Sunday depressed that I could not go. The rest of the week did not matter nearly as much since I did not usually go out on other days. However, this was soon overcome, as some of the members began coming over to me. They brought the church to me. A few of them would come over after church and would pray and bring me the Lord's Supper. We soon added bible reading and singing, which made it seem much more like the actual services with the entire church. This also made us think more about it, and it became quite real to me.

On one occasions there was a thunderstorm moving through town. I was picking out a song to sing and just as I told Dad what song I wanted, POW!!!! – lighting struck a tree and split it down the middle out in the yard. If I were superstitious, I would have picked another song, but we went ahead and sang the song anyway and my lack of superstition was once again confirmed to be acceptable. Often they would bring new members, and that would allow me to meet and get acquainted with them.

Other members who would not come on Sunday came to visit during the week from time to time. It was very encouraging for them to show their concern in this way. I really enjoyed their visits a lot. It gave me a chance to catch up on what was going on and to break up the boredom of the long days in bed. It was about this time that we realized that the church building had become too small and they were adding on. I felt like I was still part of this effort even though I was unable to attend.

One particular friend who visited me on a regular basis was Jeff Armstrong. He started recording the sermons for me and made sure that the tapes were brought over. This gave me something else to look forward to as I could listen to the preacher's topic for that Sunday. All of these efforts went a long way to ease my pain at not being able to attend church.

Being in bed for hours day after day brought its own set of problems. The first one was boredom, which we have already discussed. However, it also brought about some medical problems. Beginning in late March of 1990 (about five months after the accident that broke my leg) my stomach began giving me problems. It cycled radically between being upset and constipation for about a month. Finally in mid-April I decided to put a call into the doctor to see if she could help. I was getting a little hungry at the time so mom fixed me a great pop-tart snack. I was about to eat it when the doctor called back and told me to go to the hospital. "And, by the way, don't eat anything."

I was still unable to travel in the van so we had to call an ambulance to come out to get me. The hardest part was leaving the pop-tart behind. At the hospital I had to wait for quite a while since my doctor had her normal busy schedule. Strange things go through your mind at times like these. I was actually concerned that they would not find anything wrong. Then they might refer me to a psychiatrist who might say that I hated my family or something weird like that. Of course, I realized how silly such thoughts were, but when you have nothing better to do thoughts like that run through your mind. Fortunately, the diagnosis was that my intestines were impacted; in simple language, it was a severe case of constipation. This often afflicts people who are forced to be inactive. Anyway, I will not go into details as to the treatment. If you have been through it you would know that it cannot be pleasantly described anyway, and if you have not, there is no way to adequately describe it. All I will say is that it was not as bad as breaking a leg, but that is about all that I can say for it.

For the first couple of days it was hard to tell if the cure was not worse than the problem. However, the treatment was also accompanied by a change in diet – more fiber, of course. I would have rather tried the diet change by itself before getting into the treatment that they applied, but that was over now. They also put me on some medicine that tastes pretty bad – I know because I am still on it today. I got home from the hospital in time for Easter that we celebrated with my grandparents who came over from Louisiana.

A month later in May I began having problems with my stomach again, but this time I did not feel like eating at all. My stomach was swollen and bloated and I was sick as a dog. At first I was afraid that I was going to die, but after a day or so, I was afraid that I was not going to die. It felt like if I could just get it over with – vomit, whatever – things might improve. But it just would not happen to the extent necessary to relieve my discomfort. Once again we had to go through the ritual of meeting the doctor at the hospital. A vampire nurse whose job it was to take some of my blood met me early. This was followed by a shot to relieve my nausea. Tests showed that my body was fighting an infection somewhere and that I was dehydrated, so they put an IV in me. Then they took me down to x-ray for several pictures. Then, back to the examining room where I waited for my doctor to finally put in an appearance.

When she did come in, she brought in a surgeon to get additional expertise on this. They said that I had *pseudo-intestinal blockage* (which I guess is not as bad as the real thing, but you could not prove it by me). He did say that if it were true blockage they would have to do surgery. So I guess I was lucky. But nothing was moving on through, and it was quite painful and nauseating. They took a tube and slid it down my throat as I was gagging and trying not to throw up. The nurses were saying relax, relax – easy for them to say. Once they got that in place they connected the other end to a pump – the old stomach-pump treatment that we have all heard about but never realized it was something that they actually did to people. I will admit this, however: the second they turned that machine on I began feeling better and realized that I was not going to die (actually to my relief at this point as well).

The problem is that they decided to leave the tube down my throat for the next couple of days. It irritated my throat and made it hard to swallow and talk. It irritated my chest and made me feel like I had a bad cold. I also had to go 48 hours without food. Did you ever realize how many

commercials there were on TV advertising food? No? Try going 48 hours without food and having nothing to do but watch TV. Then there was the family going down to the cafeteria and bringing the food back to my room so that they could spend some extra time with me. I hate to be ungrateful but ... Anyway, the purpose of this treatment was to give the intestines a chance to heal themselves. If that did not work, I would have had to undergo surgery; but fortunately, it did not come to this. On the other hand, probably one of the best treatments that they give you in a hospital is the discomfort that is the highest of motivations not to want to go back. If that does not keep you from getting sick, nothing will.

After a couple of days I was able to get on a liquid diet – chicken soup and jello and other boring stuff like that. However, I was able to get ice cream during the day. On the third day I moved up to a soft diet – broiled chicken, mashed potatoes and such. They still left the tube in my throat just in case. On the fourth day they removed it, and that was a great relief. I began eating regular food and was back to normal.

Unfortunately, this was to be repeated a few more times as I continued to recover from my broken leg. Having to spend so much time in bed caused the digestive system to slow down resulting in the problems. As I spent more time sitting up these problems occurred less and less. Once I recognized the symptoms I would stop eating and get to the hospital earlier and I could get the whole thing over much quicker. On some occasions I did not even have to use the tube. This must have been repeated about eight or nine times altogether.

Going to the hospital that often was not something that one looks forward to. However, there was one fun event that occurred between the first two trips to the hospital. I received a call from Mr. Hope who told me that he had been teaching CPR to the coaches on the Alabama football team. He had developed a real good relationship with them and asked if he could take me over to observe some of their spring training. Needless to say, I jumped at the idea. (Not literally, of course.) He borrowed an old rescue truck and my parents hired a helper to come from the hospital. They just lifted the wheelchair with me in it onto the truck. I was a little nervous of this procedure, since my leg was not completely recovered yet. But the excitement of watching a practice game and meeting with the coaches and players was more than I wanted to pass up, so I would tolerate the danger. Fortunately, everything went without a hitch.

When we got over to the practice field I noticed for the first time just how sunny and hot it was, and I had forgotten my cap. This is almost a necessity in the Alabama heat at this time of year, at least when the sun is out. But not to worry, one of the assistant coaches saw my plight and quickly got a new Alabama NCAA logo cap for me to wear and keep as a reminder of this day. I met Alabama's new head coach – Gene Stallings. I had many questions that I wanted to ask him, since he had been an assistant coach under Bear Bryant and Tom Landry. However, once meeting him in person, I could not think of anything to say or ask. It was about the second or third day of spring training and there were a lot of newspaper people there. Mr. Hope and I had almost gotten our pictures in the paper, but the Governor showed up and they splashed his picture all over the paper leaving out all of the peons like us. If I had known that he was going to pull a trick like that, I would have never voted for him.

But all was not lost. Mr. Hope took a picture of me with Coach Stallings, and later got it autographed by the coach and brought it over to the house. I tell people today that Coach Stallings is a tough man to see – I had to break my leg to get that picture with him.

The summer months brought with them a spell of depression. We came up on the one-year anniversary of Kevin's death, and I was not at all happy with the progress of my leg and other medical problems that were accompanying it. Spending more than half the day in bed and not able to feed myself did not help the situation either. I began worrying that my MD was finally catching up with me.

As I was growing up with MD, I always felt that I was one step ahead of it. Even when I found out how difficult the disease was and what the end result would be, I still felt that I had an edge. I was for the most part reasonably healthy, and I could push myself around for short distances. So I would lose sight of the handicap and just get on with life, even to the point of forgetting that MD is fatal. Now it seemed that it was catching up with me. All of the things that kept me free before were now closing in on me because of this broken leg. Other than the spring practice outing (and the trips to the hospital, of course), I had been confined to the house now for about six months.

The spells of depression never lasted more than a couple days each, as I seemed to be able to cope with it better than I had in my early teen-age years. God gives us what we need when we need it. In late July two couples from church decided to throw me a party at my house. They invited all of the college students to come over. Only a few had been to visit since I broke my leg, and this would enable them all to see me and catch me up on what was going on. We had barbecue off the grill, and they served all my favorites – hamburger, baked beans and potato salad. Needless to say I had a great time, and I made sure that everyone saw my picture with Coach Stallings.

At this time I was staying up for about six hours. The men from the hospital came by and put me back in my bed. Most of the students left but a few of them stayed around and we continued visiting until late that night. Needless to say, this was the highlight of the summer of 1990.

There were a couple more bouts with the stomach problem late that summer. One around Labor Day and another a week or so later. I began getting really concerned that this was going to go on for the rest of my life, and I began questioning whether this was a sign that my condition was worsening. I never heard of MD affecting the stomach, but I was not sure. However, the doctor put my fears to rest, indicating that these were not related, and that this stomach problem could be treated. We just had to get things fine-tuned, and she suggested that I go 24 hours without eating one day a week, just to sort of get things cleared out. I tried this, and it seemed to work, so I kept it up until I fully recovered from my injury.

The fall of 1990 marked one-year anniversary of my accident. I celebrated my 24th birthday, and that put me at the same age as Kevin's last year. This was a strange feeling since from here on I felt that I was on borrowed time. However, I got into football season and looked forward to Christmas, which got me away from being preoccupied with my age.

Christmas of 1990 was special as I got to visit with some new friends. Mr. Hope made several visits around about this time. He brought some athletes with him that he knew with him, which I enjoyed immensely. My grandparents also came to visit. However, what I remember most is getting to see some old friends, including Coach Wilson and my former bible teacher Russ LaGrone. I decided to send out some Christmas cards this year. One was to Russ, who was now living in Georgia. He, along with my father, brought me to see that the bible was not a difficult book to understand *if you approach it with systematic study*. Another card I sent was to Coach Wilson, who had helped me during my senior year at high school to get my mind off of losing Brad. As I thought back I could not recall whether I had thanked Coach Wilson personally for those Special Olympics trips. So I felt that I would send him a card and take care of this piece of unfinished business. So, I enclosed a brief letter in the card that I sent to him. I did not expect that they would respond, but both of them responded by paying me a personal visit.

Russ LaGrone happened to be visiting relatives over Christmas in Northern Tuscaloosa County. On their way back they stopped on by to see me. Coach Wilson came in the middle part of December. He had left coaching and was now in administration. He left me his card with his home and office numbers and told me to call him when I got better and he would take several of us bowling. This gave me a major incentive to get myself back on my feet (again, appreciate my simile).

As the New Year, 1991 began, an event in the Near East was unfolding which would certainly make the history books. Iraqi soldiers had invaded a little country called Kuwait, and the USA and UN had demanded that they withdraw immediately. Through CNN, I was able to watch the events as they were occurring and this kept me occupied for several months in this particular time. As the USA built up its forces in Saudi Arabia, I knew that the situation was serious, but I did not believe that we would go to war. It was 17 days into the New Year when the war began.

The friend of mine who had helped me in turning my sister's toy sink into a real one (at least as far as the presence of real water was concerned) had joined the National Guard. As this crisis began he received word that his unit was called up and he had to go over to fly cargo planes in and out of Saudi Arabia. Even though this was not in the heat of the battle it was still a hazardous situation. As the war began I did the best that I could to support it. I got Mom to get a yellow ribbon outside of the house on the lamppost. Mom did me one better, since she knew that I would not see the one on the lamppost. So she got another one and tied it in my room so I could see it.

The war did not last too long, but I had to watch it play itself out on the TV in the hospital. It was February 1991 when the old intestinal bug bit again and I had to go through another cycle of this, which was about the fifth time. Just going to the emergency room this time was an adventure in itself. We went up around 8:00 PM to the emergency room. I started feeling bad around 5 PM but kept putting it off until I knew something would have to be done. Anyway, going to the emergency room at 8:00 PM is about the worst thing that you can do. It must be the time when there are a lot of the bloody types of emergencies that require immediate action. I could hear a lot of things going on outside of where I was being isolated, and although I could not witness the exact nature of the injuries that were being addressed, it was clear that some people had more immediate problems than I did. I did not get into a room until 5:00 AM the next morning.

While I was waiting I was dying of thirst, but they refused to give me any water because of my nausea. In some way this bout with the intestinal blockage was worse than the previous. I was more dehydrated and my potassium had gone down. This affected my breathing. They said that once they got the tube in and started the IV it would relieve my thirst, but it did not. I got so desperate for something to drink that I got Mom to place the cold can of Dr. Pepper next to me so I could lick the beads of condensation off the can. When the doctors were not looking I would suck on a piece of ice. Once they increased the fluids from the IV it did seem to relieve the problem somewhat.

To combat the potassium problem they added that through the IV, and my hand began burning all over. They put an ice pack on it. Problem is, I fell asleep and the ice pack just about froze my hand solid by the time I woke up. They reduced the potassium supply, but I started breathing heavily. The doctor decided that they needed to try something new. They put the IV into my neck instead. It seems kind of brutal but it was only like getting stung by a couple fire ants. Not fun, but not nearly as bad as having your toenails pulled out. Once they got it under control there was some semblance of comfort, and I was greatly relieved that I could breath easy once again. The best part of the IV in the neck was that when the vampire nurses came around for blood (always at the most accommodating hour of 5:30 AM) they did not have to stick me. They just drew it out of the IV tube that was already there. Not exactly like they show it in the movies where two tooth marks are left.

Missy, my sister, suffers from Asthma that quite often leads to pneumonia, and on this particular day she had gone to the doctor for a check-up after an Asthma attack. The doctor found that she had contracted pneumonia and had to be admitted to the hospital. So the two of us were in at the same time. Unfortunately, hospital rules prevented men and women from being in the same room (without the obvious exceptions – leave it to bureaucracy). But my parents fought through the red tape and they did make an exception in this case. This made things quite a bit better since misery loves company. We enjoyed fighting over the TV set, since Missy did not appreciate the news as much as I did, and I had to bargain with her in order to keep up with the Gulf War. Another problem with her was that I could not eat for 48 hours, while she was indulging herself in what seemed to be the ultimate in French cuisine. Of course, it was lousy hospital food – including some salad with French dressing – and we both knew it, but somehow at this point in time that did not really matter. We were there only about five days, entering and leaving both on the same day.

There was always something that I did not like about coming home from the hospital. Since I was still heavily confined I could not realize a whole lot of difference. I had to just keep telling myself – you are better now, you are well now. I could be as bored at home as I was at the hospital, and, being the center of attention at the hospital, coming home was somewhat depressing.

To keep from going totally out of my skull I developed other hobbies to keep myself busy. While keeping in touch and having the members graciously provide the Lord's Supper to me, I felt that I was not really studying the bible the way that I should. I kept thinking that I would return shortly and did not initiate anything. However, now it got to be late February or early March of 1991, I was not exactly sure of when I would get back, and I had not been to church in about a year. So, instead of putting it off any longer, I asked the preacher about the possibility of coming over for a bible study. He was quite eager to get started with it, and my good friend Jeff Armstrong joined

us each Sunday afternoon for quite a while after that. This also gave me something to do during to week as I prepared for the lessons.

I also continued to try to see all of the academy award movies, and was checking off quite a few as they would come on TV, some on the Nostalgia channel. I also started a project with Missy to collect all of the number one songs from about 1955 on. I thought about this myself earlier but had given it up since it was going to take considerable money to do this. However, once I learned of her interest I realized that this was something that was quite doable if we worked on it together. We divided the years since she was working on 1968 on. We went into our rooms and dragged out all of the songs that we already had. There were a lot of them that we already had and we marked them off of our list. I then gave the list to Mom to be on the lookout for when she went to the record shops. She had also joined a record club, and we checked out the tapes that she was getting and found quite a few of them there.

There are a lot of songs that they play over and over today and these are easy to find. The problem is the ones that were a flash in the pan – they were quite popular but no one even thinks about them today. Some, for example, like Disco Duck and stuff like that, were novelty songs and people would not get caught dead even listening to that silliness today. (Not that what they do today is not equally as silly, but that will not be seen for ten or twenty years.) There was a radio station which played the top four songs of a give week on a weekly basis and I got my tape recorder going, which helped with the hard-to-find songs. It took about three years to collect all of the songs from 1955 through 1967. When I finally succeeded, I gave the list to Missy, who quickly turned it into confetti as we started to celebrate. Then I began to help her with her list.

This kept me somewhat busy during the spring and summer of 1991. It was also a memorable one for other reasons. For one thing we had an addition to our family. We realized that, after having several losses to the highway, we could not keep an outdoor pet for very long – the highway was just too much of a temptation. While Mom was dead set against any animals in the house, Missy and I had decided to go in together once she was out of school. By the spring of 1991 Missy had finished up her degree in education at the University of Alabama and she was going to get an apartment with a friend nearby in Tuscaloosa. It was only a short time later when we started looking for a kitten in earnest. It did not take long to find one, and I videotaped Missy as she brought the new addition into the house. The kitten was black and white and the name Sylvester seemed to fit. This was arrived at after a long process of eliminating various alternatives – we considered the French and German names for cat as well as other cartoon characters, but finally decided to name him after his cartoon look alike.

Sylvester played a huge role in the final stages of my recovery from my broken leg. Whenever I was beginning to get depressed I would get someone to bring the kitten over to me and we would play together. I would get him to chase things around or just watch him by the window as he made efforts to stalk the outside birds and squirrels. Missy would chase the cat and get the cat to chase her, and they would play hide and seek. With all of this entertainment I had little time to be depressed at this point. Pets are like little children who never grow up. They mature but never to the point that they do not have to be taken care of to some degree. Perhaps it is this dependence that shakes one out of depression. It is hard to be depressed when some being depends on you for life

and delights in your presence. Depression often afflicts those who are tense and stressed. Relaxation plays a vital role in fighting depression, and this is where pets are so beneficial.

It was not long before Sylvester started getting big – growing into his oversized feet. We found out that Sylvester was of the Maine Coon breed, which was a particularly large variety. He grew to the point where he is now often mistaken from a distance as being a dog. He could certainly hold his own with a dog, and on a couple of occasions actually chased a dog.

It was only about a month before Sylvester began to earn his keep. Mice had plagued our kitchen for some time, and although we had caught several in traps, a few of them were too smart for that. One day we were all sitting at the table eating supper when we heard noises in the walls that were the unmistakable sounds of mice. Missy brought Sylvester into the kitchen and he began to sniff his way around under the cabinets and around the trash area. Suddenly the mouse dashed across the floor right toward Dad who quickly seized a broom and made quick work of the little pest. Unfortunately, Sylvester did not see that action and was convinced that the mouse was still in the vicinity. It took us a while to convince him that the crisis was over, but he finally settled down.

Toward the end of the summer both my sister and Sylvester moved out. This had been the plan, and, in fact, I doubt if we would have gotten Sylvester had this not been the plan. I had mixed emotions about this. I was glad that Missy was gaining her independence, but I was depressed that I was the oldest still dependent on my parents. She was also taking the cat that had given me so much enjoyment and enabled me to better cope with my depression. Many of my friends asked me if I missed my sister when she moved out, but for the most part I had to say no because for the most part she was on the go and I did not see that much of her. And, because she still came in at all hours of the day or night, nothing had changed that much. Usually when she came for visits she would bring Sylvester with her, so I got the benefit of at least some of this blessing as well. And, as a divorced father paying alimony, I would chip in from time to time with Sylvester's expenses, as I had agreed. Not the best arrangement, but at least I got some "quality time" with my cat.

One of the first things that the experts tell you with regard to an indoor cat is to get it fixed as soon as possible. If not they tend to spray around the house and cause a real odor problem. We got Sylvester taken care of at six months. When he came home he was growling and mean, and resigned himself to sleeping in the closet for a few days instead of on Missy's bed. But it did not take long to get him back to normal. Shortly after this he got out unexpectedly, and Missy went out to look for him. He had managed to get himself up on the roof and just as Missy was wondering how he would get down, he jumped, landing in the bushes. Wasting one of his nine lives, he came out of it unscathed. I told Missy that Sylvester had confided in me that he was going to commit suicide after what she had done to him. However, I had ignored it since cats are notorious liars.

In late July of 1991 my stomach began acting up from the intestinal blockage again. I knew from past experience that I would get more sleep by staying at home and going to the hospital the next morning. I was concerned that Sylvester would forget me, so I took my hospital gown that I had been sleeping in for the past couple days and put it in Missy's room where he stayed. That way even though he did not see me he could remember my smell. Sounds silly, but when you are confined to the house for so long you start doing crazy things. If nothing else it showed how much I had gotten attached to that crazy cat (blame it on him).

The ambulance finally came and took me to the hospital where they did a lot of tests, even though I was convinced that this was the same old intestinal blockage that had been plaguing me for months now. One of the doctors tried to convince me that I had eaten too much, but the x-rays proved me right. Little consolation. I had rather have been wrong, so that I could have gotten out of there, but no such luck. So, once again they took me to a familiar room and brought out my old friend Mr. Toobey, the stomach pump tube. Down, down, down he went until reaching his pay dirt. Such great fun. Got to stop eating for a couple days and also got off my medication. Most of it I did not like anyway, so no loss. However, one thing that I did need was the anti-depressant medication. When I got off this I would go into a deep blue funk, which, coupled with having fun with Mr. Toobey stuffed down your throat for a day or so really made my day.

While I had repeated this process too many times to number in the past, this particular time sticks out as producing the worst case of depression that I can remember. I had a horrible time controlling my emotions, and the doctors gave me a different kind of medication – Prozac. I started taking it once I left the hospital, but at first it did not seem like it was going to work. However, after a couple days it seemed to click in and I was able to regain control of my emotions at that point. After this great ordeal I realized that it might have worked out for the best. Prozac turned out to be a Godsend for me in getting me not only back to normal, but back to a point where I was actually having a positive outlook once again.

Over the years I have read about depression and learned quite a bit about it, although I do not claim to be an expert. Depression is not abnormal – there are times that we all get depressed. Just because we are feeling down does not mean that we need medication. However, when depression has a crippling effect and you don't want to get out of bed in the morning, then we need to do something about it. It is when it affects your performance at school or at work that you need to seek professional help. There are some things in life that will bring depression on all of us – ill health or the loss of a loved one. However, some people get depressed at little or nothing. This is the danger signal. I have had the type that is caused by external events, and it can be expected that these events will be mourned and that time will heal those wounds. However, I have also had the type where there is no event that triggers it off – I was just sick of life in general.

Studying about depression helped beat it. For one thing, knowing that everyone goes through it at times assured me that I was not abnormal. Knowing that most bouts with depression are won just by patience and persistence helped me considerably as I toughed it out. Also, knowing that it was caused by a chemical imbalance was helpful, since I could be assured that I was not going crazy. Not that I thought that they would put me away in the psychiatric ward, but you cannot help but wonder about such things. I still have bouts with depression as we all do, but they do not control me – I still want to do things, and I have a lot of things I want to do. Before Prozac it might take me a week or so before I could regain this attitude. Now with it I am pretty much in control, and my bouts with depression are usually over in a day or two. Most importantly, with Prozac I feel that I am in control.

Prozac is not without its critics, and it is important that you have a good physician who is monitoring the process. Some have said that people become machines while taking it. As for me, I am convinced that it is highly effective in restoring normalcy, and this "machine" stuff is nonsense.

It does not deny one of normal emotional responses, as I can attest to, since I have spoken in public at church both with and without Prozac, and the fear factor is there either way. I have, like most other people, a natural fear of speaking in public. I noticed no difference whatsoever in this highly emotional response.

I have been somewhat reluctant to tell people that I was on Prozac, not knowing what their reaction would be. In fact, I made up my mind not to include it in this book. However, in late 1996 I read an article in which several well-known and respected public individuals had chemical imbalances that were being treated by Prozac. This really surprised me that they would admit to this and thereby perhaps risk their careers. I realized that if people of this stature can admit to this, then why should not I be able to do the same thing?