

A HOSPITAL AND A SURGEON MET A LADY NAMED LOIS

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I was introduced to the Fairview Hospital system when I was born at the “Old Fairview” facility in Minneapolis on December 10, 1946. As I recall, things went very well. Dad was a student at Luther Theological Seminary and, as he described it, most seminary students (all men at that time) went to Fairview for medical treatment – and many also found dates with the nurses. In the 1970s, both of our children, Jeff and Jason, were born at Fairview Southdale, the newer facility in Edina, a suburb of Minneapolis. That was the end of my “routine” experiences at Fairview.

On Monday, December 29, 1997 **(sixteen years ago today!)** my wonderful and beautiful wife Lois collapsed in the shower and was rushed by ambulance to Fairview Southdale Hospital. She was desperately ill and no positive outcome was predicted by the doctors. I kept a journal of the following awful/wonderful days. This story focuses on the hospital, the nursing staff and physicians – in particular Lois’s surgeon, Dr. Hames. An equally important telling of this story would involve more about family and friends, but that’s a great story for another day. The ***BLUE italicized*** quotes below are just a few of the entries in my journal and have been taken directly therefrom.

I rushed from my office in downtown Minneapolis and into the emergency room at Fairview Southdale where Lois was undergoing intense and feverish care. It was a ruptured brain aneurysm which led to a life threatening brain injury and stroke.

December 29, 1997: Sit and wait - nice young Chaplain - We want Pastor Holm to show up - he shows CT scan - ruptured aneurysm in brain probably - massive bleeding! (I hate that word “massive”) - long wait in ER - Doctor Hames says not good! - Too bad! - no real chance for my wife and best friend! This isn’t just a bad dream after all - I pinched myself to check (really!). To ICU on floor 3, talk feelings, anger - but mostly scared, and we tell Lois we’re scared - maybe we shouldn’t have?

Fairview’s spirit and personnel began to intervene to help us get through this nightmare. Late that night, as we waited in ICU, an excited nurse named Paula came running down the hall to fetch us. They had tried to induce a response from Lois by causing a small amount of pain, and guess what happened. She woke up. I often wonder where Nurse Paula’s life went after our paths separated. Her competent and gentle kindness and concern made quite an impression on us.

December 30: 4:30 AM - LOIS IS AWAKE - a miracle - Lois is scared and confused - excited nurse (Paula) - Thanks! We tell you what happened - where you are - certain it doesn’t register - it means more than anything that you hear us and have a response to us.

Later that day we were reintroduced to Dr. Hames who had given us such a heartbreaking assessment the night before. He had a wonderful way of showing confidence and competence. He said there was hope! He seemed to say to us "Somebody needs to worry and pray – you do that while I take care of the technical part." He was just what we needed.

Later on December 30: Dr. Hames the neurosurgeon now says most likely outcome is full recovery - compared with "no hope" 24 hours ago - he has no idea how Lois got this far, but who needs explanations. Best day of my life! - no matter what happens from now on all the prayers paid off. Slow recovery at best - still critical - lots could go wrong - a roller coaster going forward must be expected I've concluded that this is an effective but totally unsatisfactory way for Lois and me to go on a diet.

Then, through the help of Dr. Hames, his assistant, ICU doctors and nurses, we began to learn what we would have to deal with over the following days, weeks and months.

December 31: Pastor Holm and Pastor Saul - lots of prayers today Doppler did show mild vaso spasm - they have started! - from what Dr. Hames and others have told us, we know they will inevitably cause some problems!! in the next week.

Doctor Hames encouraged us in many ways. We tried to follow his advice, but ... The roller coaster continued. But many of these moments kept us positive. The wonderful atmosphere at the hospital let us focus on the important ebb and flow of events and emotions, rather than being distracted by unimportant concerns. We started to develop a different philosophy of life – painful as that can be. And we began to learn what a "bee hive" of wondrous activity this hospital is.

January 1, 1998: Sent down for another CT scan then will talk to Dr. Hames We view all the films with Dr. Hames - fine report - much change from original DNR Doctor Hames says I should go to work tomorrow and get everyone on a schedule

Jeff reports that at 10:40 P.M. Lois said first word "Hi" to Jeff - trying hard - Leanne and Jason get a "speeding ticket" in the hallway.

January 5: Lois had a bad day! We got "knocked off our wheels" - Pastor Holm helped a lot as always - I wouldn't want his job! I think the message is that we shouldn't be selfish or smug - I don't like lessons being taught at a time like this.

ICU - 25 rooms - (not all occupied by any means) - lots of stories - lots of crises - nurses go from one to another - how do they make each one seem like they are the "number one" priority? - these nurses are doing it! - God! They see a lot of anxiety and sadness - why don't they get jaded by it? They really get "into it" - and then have to go off duty and go home - who will be there when they return? One asked me for the obits from my paper - important patient died. The rhythm of a hospital

We now saw how lucky we were to have Dr. Hames as our surgeon and "drill instructor"! There were more roller coaster rides and more changes in the philosophy of our lives.

January 6: For several days Jeff (then in medical school) has shown confidence in and respect for Dr. Hames the neurosurgeon - he talks to Jeff as another professional - that doesn't hurt at all.

January 8: Nurse woke me (while sleeping in the family lounge) at 4:30 AM - can't wake Lois up - to CT scan - kids arrive - Lois comes back upstairs - alert - talking - CT scan OK - Good God! Dr. Hames in early just to see Lois's CT scan - Dr. Grube, nurse, and ICU Doctor all reported to me - CT scan better, all very pleased! - Hames not committed absolutely to surgery - he's emphatic about that, says Dr. Grube and Dr. Grube agrees with the caution I'm more than ready for a quiet day - fewer visitors and fewer scares.

January 11: Dr. Hames is delighted - wants to get her out of ICU to more therapy before any surgery if that is necessary - talks to Lois about having angiogram tomorrow..... I/we need to simplify our life - short term and long term - not do less - do better, smarter A very good day - believe it or not I've had a lot of good days the last 2 weeks - a tough but important time in my life - somehow a real privilege that I don't yet understand.

What was that about therapy soon? A different opinion is offered by Dr. Hames - not so positive. **Whiplash!** And more of the sadness that comes from an extended stay in ICU.

January 12: Angiogram - hard to wait one more time - Is Lois a little nervous? - looks good and can ID the aneurysm - decide on surgery tomorrow - finally something that can bring us to knowing the problem and solving it - mid afternoon tomorrow probably - after Dr. Hames explained it, I told Lois this is good, what we all have been hoping for, something to fix and we'll fix it obviously this will set progress back a bit temporarily I tell Dr. Hames to get a good night's sleep.

Mr. Anderson (83) died late today - came in 1 day after Lois - got to know the whole family over 2 weeks - nice - so sad!

Perhaps Dr. Hames didn't take my advice to have a good night's sleep. I like to believe/pretend that he took Lois's "pictures" home with him and stayed up studying them. When he arrived in the morning, he made a fortunate decision - to not stay on schedule nor wait for the family to get there - he needed to get started right away or was sure it would bleed again. I remember that after it was all over he came to the family lounge and even drew pictures as he explained the procedure to us.

January 13: I walk in as they are starting to wheel Lois out - going to surgery early - they tried to reach me - I'm a little rude Wait and wait - report comes over telephone that "Dr. Hames has clipped the aneurysm."

Long wait again - Dr. Hames comes up to report everything went well - should be fine - "We've been to hell and back" he said surgery from about 10:00 to about 4:00.

10 hours since we saw Lois this morning - peaceful - sleeping - breathing tube back in but not hooked up - head wrapped like a turban - we go home to eat and rest Praise God!!

Male nurse said, as I was leaving, that he is “delighted with the progress” - that first night he didn’t expect Lois to last through his shift - he was there when she woke up.

Dr. Hames saw the end/beginning in sight and so did we.

January 15: Dr. Hames visited - surgery didn’t set her back as much as he expected - out of ICU tomorrow, subject to being stable.

January 16: Dr. Hames ordered her out of ICU this PM - I can’t express my emotions!! One of the nurses talked to Lois - said to come back to visit when up and walking - nurse started to cry - I’ll always remember her for that. (An ICU nurse reminded us that not all their outcomes are as positive as Lois’s) 18 days and 3 hours since Lois had the ruptured aneurysm - all in intensive care - I expected I’d cry when we walked out - I didn’t because I was beaming so much!

Thus ended my account of Lois’s stay in at Fairview Southdale Hospital. There were more days and weeks in the hospital at Fairview, and at Sister Kenny Institute for rehabilitation. There were months of therapy, but getting out of ICU was really a major goal set by the hospital, medical staff and all involved.

Sometimes events and personalities converge in a chain of experiences and relationships that make a difference in one’s outlook and future. Regrettably, sometimes the outcome is not what you hope and pray for. Other times the best outcome does occur. That happened to us and we are immensely thankful to God who provided immense talent and judgment to the incredible doctors and nurses.

Even now as I write this I can’t avoid major tears! Several years after this event, I wrote a note to Lois as the final entry in my journal. Here is part of that entry in which I tried to sum up the experience and the change in our attitude resulting from the experience.

December 1, 2006: It has been almost 9 years since the last entry in my journal No matter what, this is all really great and I really believe all that happened to you, as difficult as it was for all of us, is an important part of who we all are today. I wrote the following in the journal entry for January 1, 1998: “..... whatever the outcome, there is something awful and good about this – somehow this is an opportunity for something, but I don’t know what just yet. . . .” I think I now understand a little better – but not completely.

We are now well entrenched in retirement and dear Lois has taken up the cruel game of golf – mostly to accommodate me. Among many other things, she has served two terms as President of the Kelly Greens (Florida) Garden Club. She enjoys excellent health and is living life to the max!

In this life changing event, we were joined by Fairview Southdale Hospital, ER personnel, the Chaplain, Pastor David Holm, Nurse Paula, ICU doctors and all the nurses and staff. And the maestro for this “orchestra” was Dr. Edward Hames **using the valuable gifts God gave him**. All these joined with family and friends to make a wonderful difference in our lives. **It was a God given miracle.**