

December 8, 2011

I Was Blind But Now I See

The lady from hospital social services told me that patients who had been through the kinds of major surgery that I had just experienced would often have unexplained bouts of crying. She was standing next to my bed at Emory last Monday morning, helping with any emotional issues before I was released. The surgery had been on the preceding Monday and had taken a few hours longer than the neuro and plastic surgeons had expected. They had predicted surgery of 6-7 hours, 2 days in the intensive care unit, and another 3 days hospitalized. The surgery was 9 hours and 33 minutes, 4 full days and nights in the ICU, and 3 days in the hospital. I came home Monday afternoon.

I hadn't experienced any bouts of crying, but Tuesday morning the Italian tenor, Andrea Bocelli was singing Amazing Grace on ABC-TV, and I wept as the great blind singer sang; "I was blind, but now I see." The social services lady was half right – I had my bout of crying, but it was not unexplained.

We have been chasing Melanomas for 3 years. I discovered the first one "accidentally" because I bumped my head. It didn't look like Melanoma. It was amelanotic – normal skin color - as were the next 3. One nurse said your melanomas are like secret agents, and are hiding. We started calling them 007, and the surgeons would excise each as it showed up. We didn't think we were ahead of them, but we thought we were keeping up. Then we had another "accidental" finding. A big pimple showed up on my scalp, and I went for a biopsy. A surgeon looked at it, and said it was a suture from the last surgery being ejected, but he felt my scalp, and told me there was another area that might need a biopsy. There was nothing on the surface, but something that felt like it could be a tumor under the surface. So he did the biopsy, and found another Melanoma - because I had gone in to have an innocuous pimple checked ... another "accidental" finding.

The Melanoma surgeon thought there should be a PET scan before surgery, and I am grateful he did, because if he hadn't, the surgery would have started without a neurosurgeon in the operating room. 007 had tricked us, and was now ahead. The PET scan showed the Melanoma had gone down into the skull. Old 007 had gone through the skull, dura, and a few cells were resting smugly on my brain. We are very confident that they will not be smug for long, because the oncologists have lots of arrows in their quiver to war with them.

Meanwhile, I am feeling great. My head is covered with a full bandage, I still have lots of staples and sutures as well as a couple of drains from skin donor sites, but I can handle all body needs without assistance.

Dozens of my friends have marveled at how fast I have bounced back each time. I have been back on the golf course, and traveling within a month after every surgery. I have heard terms like; "You are a trooper; you are tough, you have a great attitude, etc."

I think the underlining theme is that folks are amazed that I don't seem to be worried about death. Well, I am worried about death ... but not mine. I am worried about the slow death of the greatest nation in the history of the world. I watch and listen to the political midgets who are running, or vying to run our country, and I grieve. I have nothing else to say about that except our only hope is the intervention of almighty God.... God have mercy on us.

My future is secure – I know where I am going whenever this earthly phase of my life is finished. I grieve for my friends who don't know what is next. I can't imagine the terror of wondering if one just goes to sleep and never wakes up, or suppose there is a Hell, have I been good enough to escape eternal punishment?

I have had wonderful support from my family, my Emory family, and my friends. Thanks to all of you for your prayers!

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land." 2 Chronicles 7:14

Merry Christmas,

Gene