

## Being Refined by Fire

Yvonne Hoekstra, Grandville, MI

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Sunday morning was difficult. Anyone from church who said good morning to me was probably thinking, "What's wrong with Yvonne?" The answer is that Satan had whispered in my ear that morning and I was having a hard time combating his words. Allow me to back up a bit and explain.

You see, March 3 was 1 year ago that Al started to display symptoms following his first cataract surgery. He had lost much of his memory and was overly euphoric. The doctors told us it was an unusual reaction to Versed, so they did the 2nd surgery two weeks later with a different sedative. He *seemed* to come out of this surgery better. He had 2 more weeks off of work so we invested in them by traveling, visiting family, and working on our marriage. We even went to appointments with Set Free Ministries, a "refresher course" you could say, to follow-up on counseling we received years before. It seemed to us that the memory loss had actually been a blessing to Al. He felt like negative voices from his past were silenced, and we were excited about where God was leading us.

However, his memory loss was soon joined by other symptoms that jerked his right arm, and within a week ran down his body like a train engine till his foot kicked and ended. Our family doctor sent us to a Neurologist on April 1, and he diagnosed it as "Jacksonian March." At the time we did not realize they were seizures, likely because he said it as if it were so common. He scheduled us for a 1 hour electroencephalogram (EEG). Of course, Al did not have a "jerk" in that hour, so no seizures were observed. The doc said he would follow up in a couple of weeks. In the meantime, Al's "jerks" started to involve some facial twitching, and by April 19 they affected both sides and were taking place at least once an hour.

It was during the one hour church service on April 19 that he had 6 "jerks," and they began to be so strong that they made him stumble. He insisted that he was fine and wanted to drive home, but I knew that we needed help. I enlisted my friend Roxanne who is a nurse, and together with a few others, talked Al into being taken home and calling the emergency line. God's hand was in it all...don't miss that...because the doc who seemed so unsympathetic to Al's condition was not on call, and the one who answered said our hospital was not equipped for this type of emergency, but that Mercy had a whole floor dedicated to Neurology with an Epilepsy monitoring Unit. He called ahead; they were ready for us in the ER, and before we knew it they were hooking Al up to an EEG machine that showed he was having a seizure approx. every 10 minutes! More tests followed as Al's condition worsened, and following 2 stays in the hospital he was diagnosed with Creutzfeldt-jakob disease or CJD. Hospice was called in, and we were told Al had 3 weeks to maybe a year to live.

BUT...God did not agree, and neither did we. The prayers of hundreds of people from all over the world went up to heaven, and what the head neurologist called a "nagging-voice" or "intuition" kept her up all night doing research, we knew as the Holy Spirit leading her to the truth. The next morning she called to explain that there was a chance that he might have a rare disease called "Voltage-gated potassium

channel antibody Encephalitis.” This would explain the lesion on his left temporal lobe, memory loss, seizures, and much more. So, back he went to the hospital for steroid treatment, and before you knew it he began talking again and the seizures, with medication, lessened in both frequency and severity. He was back...but was he?

One year later, even though Al has recovered much, he is not the same “Al” he used to be. If you ask him, he does not want to be either. He is much more chatty and free to speak his mind. And yes, to some degree this is a good thing. However, he is MUCH more chatty and speaks his mind freely, and sometimes that is not a good thing. One Sunday morning I struggled with that. When I heard someone call out, “Here’s Al!” I ducked into the bathroom and cried out to God for help. I asked for an attitude adjustment. “I should be thankful Lord, because Al is here. My husband is very much alive and so many widows I know cannot say the same thing.” I started thanking God that Al’s here and went to him, stood next to this man I no longer knew, with his hands lifted high, and together we sang “Great is Thy Faithfulness” with all the gusto and conviction our hearts could muster.

I’ve struggled to write this. Al gave me not only permission, but his own words. “I’m like your kid. Suddenly all the rules and norms have gone out the window. Nothing’s in its place. I’m actually like someone else’s kid. Unruly, bouncing off the walls, throwing fits. Unaware of the program. One morning I didn’t know who “Clinton” even was for a second, what an odd word I thought, and Yvonne helped me find the word I wanted, yeah dementia, that’s it. How else could I not know who or what Clinton is.”

And so it goes. Heeeeere’s Al. Talking to everyone he meets...literally believing there are no strangers...having coffee with people he’s just met...calling family, friends, others...”shaking the trees” as he calls it. Giving his testimony to anyone who will listen. Definitely not the guy I married, (but by the Grace of God, we have both changed)? Not the guy who went in to have cataract surgery 1 year ago anyway. I’m mourning the loss of my husband and my children’s father, but still celebrating his life every day. I’m holding on to God’s promises, as is Al. Knowing that He wants to prosper us and not to harm us, yet struggling with how to walk this path. Every day I tell Al, “I choose YOU because I Do!” I want to remind him, for better or for worse we are in this together, and sometimes I need to remind myself. Sometimes I need to remind Satan. Often I need to declare it before God.

So how can you help? Keep praying. Visit by phone or in person. Be understanding when he says something that might offend you. Try not to be embarrassed by his actions, yet don’t excuse it either...sometimes he needs us to set him straight. Don’t keep away from us, he misses everyone more than usual and like many dementia patients he’ll tell you so. I need you too. This is too hard alone. If you have yard work or need a car detailed, he’s your man In fact, he hopes to start working a few hours a day for the city cleaning up the cemetery, you can pray about that too. Grandville is blessed to have him, and he them. Pray for our family as they learn to adjust their roles, and for strength and wisdom for me as we go forward. Finally, and most importantly, pray for healing. Al says he’s a new man. He doesn’t want to go back...we are praying that we come out of this fire, recognizing that God wants to “prosper” us (3 John 2)... refined. In the meantime, we are praising God, hands lifted high. He has not abandoned us! “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not

overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.” (Is. 43:2) We’re coming through! Amen.