

## THIS IS THE DAY

Tuesday, March 21, 2006. Assignment from my School Teacher: Write a report about yesterday's field trip.

### MY SPRINGTIME FIELD TRIP

by Verna Kwiatkowski

Yesterday was a different sort of a day for me. It was the first day of spring and I was scheduled for a trip to the ER at Phelps Memorial Hospital to have my leaking feeding tube repaired or replaced. I would travel by ambulette with a Sky View aide as an escort. My appointment with the doctor was for 1:00; the ambulette was scheduled to arrive at 12.

My aide got me up at 9:00, much earlier than usual. By 10 I was dressed and in my chair, ready to go! I had two emails to read: one from Leo, wishing me well and the other from George, saying in part, "We are praying that you will have smooth sailing with your outing today – a field trip to celebrate spring!" I decided to adopt that imagery. Yes, I was going on a field trip and I would enjoy it!

And I did. There was plenty of time to rest, to muse, to observe human nature, to get to know a new person, to appreciate. As I had no other pressing demands on my time, I tried to relax and be positive about the whole experience. It worked. Are you guessing that maybe the sailing wasn't all smooth? That all depends on your point of view. Let me tell you some of what happened.

As 12:00 approached, my bag was packed and I was ready to go. The nurse came in and told me the driver was here. But where was the aide? The nurse went to check, and I could do nothing but wait. At 12:40 Betty, an aide I did not know, came into my room, put a jacket on me and guided me to the place where the driver was waiting. Obviously no one had made arrangements for an escort for me until after 12. Betty was about to eat lunch when she was approached. "It won't take long," she was told. Since Betty did not have to be home to take care of her grandchild for several hours, she agreed to take the assignment. Thank you, Betty!

That the driver was still there was amazing, another point of gratitude. Clients are supposed to be ready when the transportation arrives! The man was kind to us. I drove onto the lift and then into place in the van. The driver adjusted my seat belts and took his place. By the time the ambulette headed up the driveway, it was 12:50. My field trip had begun!

Twenty minutes later we were at the hospital. Sky View had prepared a packet of papers on my behalf and had given them to Betty. She had obviously done this sort of thing before, which put me at ease during the registration process. It looked like everything was running smoothly. The doctor was involved in a procedure just then, after which he would see me, we were told. Then Betty found out through phone calls that her child care services would not be needed that day after all. That removed a lot of pressure from us both. Thank you, Lord.

It was after I was in a cubicle behind drawn curtains, lying on a bed and wearing a hospital gown that a strange realization came over me: I had been in this situation before, just a month ago. That time I ended up staying overnight! I knew then that we might be there for hours before our mission was accomplished. That was also when I decided to relax and enjoy the day as best I could. Many things are out of my control now, but I still have charge of my attitude!

The next five hours were productive ones. A special bonus was getting to know Betty. After I asked a few questions, she went on to tell me more. I felt so privileged! She is a remarkable woman! And she never did get to have lunch. Both of us couldn't help notice the human drama unfolding all around us.

The most poignant story for me was going on just beyond our curtains most of the time we were there. An old white-haired man had fallen in the home of his son, also white-haired, and had injured his back. Like me, he was lying on a bed in a gown, only he was waiting for x-rays. The man had a well-advanced case of dementia and wanted so much to get dressed and go home! He had one question he wanted to ask his son, having no idea he had already asked that one question twenty times. The son sometimes answered; other times he just wanted his father to lie there and be quiet. I could well imagine what their home life was like, with no end in sight. If there were nothing after the grave, how sad the end of life would be!

I remembered Marty's telling me the wisdom of not expecting everything to go right the first time (or the second or third, I might add). People, even doctors, are humans and liable to make mistakes. And inventors might build many models before their product is operating at the standard they want. A feeding tube is a wonderful thing! If it leaks a little because the caps don't close tightly enough, ways can be found to work around that. I had not been complaining, nor had I asked for this appointment. Yet here I was because others had worked on my behalf.

After a couple hours the doctor did show up, as friendly and nice as I had remembered from last month. He said he would cut off the feeder end of the tube and insert a different receptor that may seal better. I wondered if that wouldn't deflate the balloon at the other end of the tube, inside my stomach, but, of course, I can't talk. He knows a way, I figured. The doctor needed materials, said he would order them and return after they arrived. That gave Betty and me another hour to talk, observe and doze.

He returned, cut the end off the tube and inserted another kind. "If this still leaks," he said, "I'll replace the tube next time." No sooner had he said that than he sheepishly said, "I'm going to replace it right now. The water coming out is from the balloon." I smiled at him and he grinned back. It was a tender moment of shared understanding. The doctor said he would go get a new tube himself and return in perhaps twenty minutes. I was much closer in estimating an hour. During this time Leo arrived, having spent over three hours in a dental chair that day. It was good to see him.

The doctor returned, removed the old tube, inserted the new and inflated the balloon. Both tubes looked the same, though he said the new was from a different lot. He thought my chronic coughing had something to do with the leaking, suggesting that there ought to be some way to alleviate the cough. Strangely, I had not considered that possibility.

Then I asked him to give me a drink of water, as I hadn't had any since morning. He gladly gave me six ounces, wished me well and then left. Betty helped me get dressed and soon I was back in my chair. Before Betty zipped my jacket, I noticed that my shirt was wet. My new tube was leaking – badly! Leo notified the nurses, who in turn had the doctor paged. Meanwhile Betty and the staff were running into problems arranging transportation home.

The doctor and a nurse arrived. There was nothing much the doctor could say except to promise that next time he would use an entirely different kind of tube that he wanted Leo to order and have on hand. He also said the next visit would be in his office, not in the ER. The nurse, however, had an interesting tip to offer. She bent the tube and held it in that position with a rubber band. "This will stop the leaking," she said, advising us to move the site of the rubber band at times and not to make it too tight. "So it is not unusual for a feeding tube to leak!" I thought. As a precaution, the tube was inserted into a plastic bag as well. I left the ER with a generous supply of bags and rubber bands. Thanks!

In the waiting room we continued to wonder how we were going to get home. Betty was calm and that was reassuring. At 7:00 a driver came in, looking for me. At the entrance to the ambulette, Leo kissed me goodbye and returned to Drum Hill. The driver had a Christian radio station playing softly all the way home. The hymns washed over me like a benediction, a gift from God who had surely been with me all day. When the driver was unbuckling my belts, with gestures I was able to let him know of my connection with God and him. We had a moment of worship, a love gift to the Lord.

Betty and I arrived at my room in Sky View at 7:30, where Janet and Andrew were waiting to visit with me. Betty hung up my jacket and then left. I hope she had a delicious meal that night! Janet, Andrew and I had an enjoyable visit, a fine conclusion to a different sort of day. I went to bed about a half hour earlier than usual. All cozy and tucked in, I reviewed in my mind my springtime field trip. My conclusion? I had had a good, profitable day.

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I suppose a person could look at my day and call it a total waste. After all, I started out with a feeding tube that leaked and ended up with a feeding tube that leaks. All afternoon and evening I was unable to write. What's more, the day was very expensive for our family. Transportation alone is a good example. Para-transit costs just three dollars each way. Sky View wanted us to use an ambulette, which was MUCH more expensive. Now that we know there's hardly any difference between the two, we will be able to negotiate more intelligently with Sky View should a similar situation arise in the future, a positive outcome from this adventure. Another thing I learned is that the ER is not the place to go for a routine doctor's visit. Even when I am trying to view my day through negative eyes, I can't help finding positives! That's because of the way I've trained myself to think.

For many years I have sung this verse: *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Psalm 118:24)*. I like to respond to the Psalmist by saying, "I will rejoice and be glad in it." Once my mind is made up to enjoy each day as it comes, it is not easily shaken by changes in circumstances. My resolve is much too deep for that. What's more, it's cumulative and habit forming. I don't have to repeat Psalm 118:24 at the start of each day, though if doing so helps you, then by all means, do it.

A New Testament passage that is similar has also influenced me: *Be joyful always; pray continually: give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18)*. These are not merely suggestions! Paul says it is God's will for members of his faith family to have a positive, thankful attitude and to live in constant connection with God. That's the way he lived and that's the way I (and many others) live. That doesn't mean there are no tears or pain for us, that things always run smoothly, but the perspective is such that these things seem like nothing in comparison to the joy set before us, both here and There.

As for money, I have already turned mine over to my children to manage for me. What if I should live long enough that our money is all used up? My Lord Jesus in his sermon on the mount said I don't need to worry about anything, for my heavenly Father knows what I need and will take care of me. "*Do not worry about tomorrow,*" Jesus said, "*for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own*" (Matthew 6:34). I will do that. I will live in the present, one day at a time. And I will rejoice and be glad in each one.

Join me, won't you?

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