

Chapter 13

Happily, Ever... After

Not long after we brought Jason home, Jenny started to develop problems of her own. She was on the track team at school and loved running. We tried to attend all of her meets. As we were watching her compete one day, we noticed that she seemed to be running slightly off balance. Before she could finish the race she passed out. When she came to, she insisted she was all right. The coach, however, had also noticed that she was running off balance and suggested that we take her in to see the doctor.

We took her to a doctor, but he couldn't find anything wrong with her. We decided to just watch her for a while.

Things didn't improve for her though. In fact, they got worse. She appeared to be running even more off balance than she had been before, and was feeling nauseous and dizzy. We decided that another visit to the doctor was in order.

The morning she was scheduled to go in for her exam, she woke up very dizzy, unable to hear anything in her right ear. We called the doctor immediately and he said to rush her right in. He ran more tests, including an MRI. His concern was that she might have a brain tumor. Those were the last words we wanted to hear from the doctor. He determined that more tests were in order.

Once again, Lee and I found ourselves sitting in the waiting room of a hospital, wondering what disastrous news we'd hear this time. Hospitals are very frustrating anyway, because it's a waiting game. "The doctor will call you when he gets the results," is the typical response.

We took Jenny home after the testing was completed and waited to hear from the doctor. Finally, the call came.

"I still can't find anything wrong that would have caused this to happen. I'd like you to take her to the University Hospital, and see if they can figure this out."

"Oh great!" I thought. Another hospital far from home, and one very frightened daughter to try and console.

When we arrived at the hospital, we were delighted to find that a renowned ear specialist just happened to be visiting from a hospital in California. He heard of Jenny's plight and asked to see her. He couldn't determine precisely what the

problem was, so he asked if he could perform some type of scope procedure on her. We said that would be fine.

When he finished his testing, he told us that for some unexplained reason, the blood had simply quit flowing to her right ear, resulting in permanent hearing loss. As a result, she lost much of her equilibrium, which made her very dizzy. She had a hard time just trying to walk a straight line!

Because she was still quite young, they believed that the equilibrium function in her left ear would take over and compensate for what was missing in her right ear. With hard work and good physical therapy, he was confident that she would eventually walk and run just fine.

Not long after this happened, her right eye began to develop problems. Once again, we took her to the doctors, and he referred us to an eye specialist. The eye specialist informed us that she had developed a cataract in her eye, and it needed to be removed.

The surgery took place, and a lens implant was put into her eye. This seemed to help her vision for about a year, when suddenly her eye quit working. More tests were run to determine exactly what had caused her eye to fail, but no answer or explanation was ever given.

Jenny was now nineteen years old and had lost her hearing and sight on the right side of her head, and no one could tell us why. But Jenny refused to let this get her down. She buckled down and eventually received a degree as a radiology technician and does very well in that profession.

Shortly after Jenny got her degree, I was asked by one of the doctors I knew, if I would help him set up his practice in a new building. He wanted me to organize the office, set up the operating room, and get things running. I was happy to do it.

Since Jenny had her degree and license, the doctor hired her to work in the operating room performing X-rays during procedures. It was fun having her around and a part of our pain management team. I loved working with her, and we became even closer than we'd been before.

One day, a woman, weighing about three hundred pounds, came in for a surgical procedure. She was very nervous about the surgery that was to take place, so when she came in, I took a lot of time talking to her, trying to ease her concerns the best I could. Jenny and I got her on the table, and I tried to make her comfortable. She told me she was hurting a bit. I told her that we could get started by giving her a shot that would help her relax so she wouldn't feel any pain. She

said she'd like that.

We administered the sedative, but she had an adverse reaction to it. Instead of settling her down, she became very agitated, almost combative. It was almost like she was having a panic attack. The nurse had left the room after the injection to get the doctor. Suddenly, she sat up, reached over and grabbed me by the neck, and jumped off the table. I was terrified. I didn't want her to fall and injure herself. I tried with all my might to support her, but there was no way that I could hold her up. I felt my legs buckle, and next thing I knew, I was on the ground with this huge woman on top of me. Jenny rushed to help me. I told her to go get more help. I remember feeling a tremendous amount of pain in my neck, and in my shoulders and arm... but my main concern was more for the patient at that time.

The doctor came in and we got her back up on the table and administered some different medication. When she was comfortable, we began the procedure.

I was in a lot of pain, but I kept telling myself to just work through it, at least long enough to finish this procedure.

As we were about to finish the procedure, the nurse dropped the controller for the table onto the floor. Everyone else in the room was in "sterile technique" and couldn't pick it up. So, I went around the table to do it. As I bent over, I experienced this incredible pain shoot down the back of my neck. It was so painful I passed out.

Jenny and all the staff were aware of my past heart problems and thought this could be related. They quickly grabbed a gurney and wheeled it in. They put me on it and rolled me out of the room. Jenny immediately called Lee.

They took me to the emergency room at the hospital, all the while thinking I must be having heart trouble. By now, I was coming to, and I kept saying "No, it's not my heart; it's my neck... my neck is what hurts. They examined me and told me my heart seemed fine. Duh!

The next morning, I awoke to a lot of pain but decided to go to work anyway. After a while, the doctor said, "Lin, something's wrong with you. You keep holding your neck. We'd better take some X-rays, and maybe an MRI."

The X-rays revealed that I had several ruptured discs. In fact, there were three levels, involving five different discs. They sent me for an MRI. After the MRI, they concluded that an operation was needed. They also decided that they wanted to do a little physical therapy with me prior to surgery to help things go better.

I agreed. The first therapy they wanted to do on me was some "electrical stimulus" to try and stop my muscles from having spasms. I objected, telling them that I wasn't comfortable having electrical stimulation that close to my heart, especially given the past history of my heart and the crazy heart rhythms I'd had in the past. They told me that the doctor had instructed them to go ahead with this procedure and felt it was safe. Again, I told them that I wouldn't allow it, not unless they first contacted my heart doctor and got his opinion whether or not it was safe for me.

The physical therapist assistant left the room and went in and asked another doctor, ***not my heart doctor***, if this procedure was all right to do. He said it should be fine. She came back in and assured me the doctor had approved it. Believing that she meant she had spoken to my ***heart doctor***, I agreed to go along with the procedure. I was still very nervous about them using electrical therapy on me.

My fears, as it turned out, were well founded. Within seconds of turning on the machine, I passed out. My heart was once again in V-tack. Immediately, I developed more problems, related to both my heart and my neck. I totally lost the use of my hands. I couldn't pick up a thing.

Now I needed a heart operation as well! The heart doctor wouldn't operate on my heart, because he said that I was in too much pain, and that my neck needed to be taken care of first. The neck doctor said that he wouldn't operate on my neck, because no anesthesiologist would ever put me under with that kind of heart rhythm. For three months I was in the most awful pain, in my neck, my arms, and my back. I was absolutely miserable and going downhill fast.

Lee was getting really upset with these doctors. He told me we were going back to the doctors and figure out once and for all what they were going to do for me. We went to see my neck doctor first, and I asked him to get the heart doctor on the phone. I told him that the three of us need to figure out right now what we're going to do.

While we waited for these two doctors to get together on the phone, the doctor I worked for at the time of my accident called. He'd been trying to fill out the necessary paper work to get Workers Compensation Fund to pay for my operation. My insurance company had refused to pay for it, saying that it was a work-related accident. I really didn't care, as long as it got paid for and I got operated on.

Then he dropped a bomb on me! "You're not going to believe this Lin. We don't have any Workers Comp;" he said.

Somehow, with all the changes in the office staff, the workers compensation fund premium hadn't been paid. So, not only did I not have Workers' Comp. coverage, but I would also not be getting any unemployment compensation while I was missing work as a result of this injury.

My heart sank. How on earth could I ever pay for these operations?

Finally, the doctors got together and decided that they would locate the anesthesiologist from the heart transplant team in Salt Lake to help us out. He was aware of my arrhythmia and knew how to take care of me. If they could line up the right anesthesiologist, they would do my neck surgery first, and then follow up with my heart surgery. I was happy that at least now we had a plan to proceed, but I still didn't know who was going to pay for it. It was frustrating for all of us. I spoke to the surgeons and told them of my dilemma. They agreed to proceed with the surgery and figure out the financial details later on.

The neck surgery didn't go as smoothly as I'd hoped. I had an adverse reaction to the anesthesia, and became very nauseated, causing lots of pain and a large hematoma. It was pushing on my esophagus making it very difficult to swallow. I still have some problems with that, but other than that, I think it was successful. I feel much better now and have most of the use of my hands. Opening jars is still difficult, and I tend to drop things on occasion.

My injury took place in April 2001, and I had the neck surgery in July. Then in October they felt like my neck was sufficiently healed to allow me to have my heart surgery. I went in and had my heart surgery. This time the ablation was a fairly easy procedure. However, there was a lot of bleeding. They ruptured a main artery again. My heart, however, responded very well.

Now that I'd finally had the surgeries I needed, I settled back into a more relaxed lifestyle. But I noticed that Jenny had lost that sparkle in her eye. She was looking very tired and stressed.

The boys complained that they thought she was acting more like a mother than a sister, and they wanted me to do something about it. I believe that she was getting worn down mentally. Lee and I decided to talk to her about going to live in the City. We felt it would be good for her to get away from the stressful environment we were all living in.

She looked in the newspaper in the help wanted ads and found an opening for a technician that was just what she'd been looking for. She faxed off her resume, and within fifteen minutes got a response. They wanted her to come in and interview for the job the following day.

Jenny informed them she was still working. She told them she couldn't come up the next day, but she could come up on Friday if that would be all right. They agreed to postpone the interview.

I drove to the City with Jenny. The clinic wanting to hire her was located just one block away from my grandmother's house in the Avenues. This would be perfect, I thought. She could live with my grandma in the very same house where I'd stayed so many times before, when I was growing up. She could even walk to work every day.

We went to the interview. She was only in the building for about fifteen minutes, when she emerged all smiles. They'd hired her right there on the spot. They wanted her to start immediately.

I told her how nice it was going to be for her to live with grandma and be able to walk to work every day. She stopped me and said, "Mom, I really love grandma, but I really don't want to live there. I'd rather rent an apartment with some other girls more my own age and be able to experience some fun times while I'm here. Is that all right?"

I could understand her feelings. She went to the University to look on some of the bulletin boards and see what might be available. While she was looking at some of the ads on the boards, a young girl approached her and asked, "Are you looking for a room to rent? I know the perfect place for you." Jenny checked the place out and it was perfect. The amazing part was that it was even closer to the Clinic than my grandmother's house was. This way Jenny could still walk to work and visit my grandma whenever she wanted to. And she would still have the freedom she desired.

Jenny moved in with three other girls and they really started to have a good time. After a while, Jenny became very good friends with one of the girls. Two of the girls eventually moved away leaving only Jenny and her friend to pay all the rent. In an effort to eliminate the financial stresses this caused, the two of them decided to accept my grandmother's invitation to move in with her.

"You just come and live with me for nothing!" Grandma said. "I'd love to have you come and keep me company!"

And so, they did. I think this was really good for everyone involved. Jenny and her friend got to live rent free, and Grandma loved having these young enthusiastic girls around.

In fact, one day a neighbor came over with a "souped-up" Jeep, with big tires and no top on it, to take the girls for a ride. They asked Grandma if she'd like to come along, so she did. It was so much fun for Grandma to be able to do things with Jenny, and I could see that Jenny was finally getting that sparkle back in her eyes.

One day Jenny called to tell me her head was really hurting. She asked if I would please come to be with her. I drove to the City and took her to the doctor to see if they could figure out what the problem was.

While I was sitting in the waiting room, my phone rang... I answered it. It was Jeremy, sounding very upset. "What's wrong?" I asked.

"Mom, a semi-truck just ran over my Toyota and I'm hurting. I don't know what to do!" he said.

"What? Are you OK? Have you called 911 yet?" He said he hadn't. "Listen to me Jeremy. You need to hang up and call 911 and get some help now!"

I tried to call Lee but couldn't get through to him. I finally got a hold of Jason, told him what had happened to Jeremy, and gave him the address where the accident had occurred.

"Jason, you need to go over there now, and see if he's all right," I said.

It got quiet on the line for a moment, then Jason said, "Mom, do you realize what you just told me? Do you know where it is that Jeremy's in an accident?"

Just then it hit me. Jeremy was in the same spot, the exact same intersection, where Jason had got run over. I knew it would be hard for Jason to go back there. Just knowing that this was where he nearly died brought back uncomfortable feelings to him. I could tell he was hesitant to go.

"Take Stephany with you," I said. "You keep trying to get ahold of Dad, and so will I."

I called Lee back and finally reached him. I told him what had happened. He told me everything would be all right, and that he'd call me as soon as he had any news.

When Lee arrived, emergency personnel were already on the scene. The truck driver was yelling at Jeremy, telling him it was his fault. Fortunately, there were eyewitnesses who would testify that the truck driver had his *left* blinker on,

yet made a **right** hand turn and ran right up and over the front end of Jeremy's little car.

Jeremy was taken to the hospital and X-rayed. Miraculously, he had no broken bones. The doctor was amazed, especially considering how terribly thin Jeremy looked. However, he told Lee that there was something strange about Jeremy's X-rays. He said it almost looked like he might have bone cancer in some of his leg bones.

Just by coincidence, an orthopedic surgeon happened to be walking by and overheard their conversation. "Mind if I take a look?" he asked. He looked at the X-rays for a moment, and then said, "It's not cancer. I'm not sure what it is, but it's not cancer. You don't need to worry about that."

Lee called and assured me that Jeremy was going to be fine. Jenny came out of the doctor's office and asked why I was upset. I told her and she started to cry. "Mom, when will it ever end?" she sobbed.

They'd given Jenny some medication for her headaches, so I took her to Grandma's and left to go back to St. George. I felt awful leaving her, but I knew I needed to be with Jeremy too. I felt like I was being pulled two different directions and seriously began to wonder if it would ever end.

Jeremy made a slow recovery, but this episode really traumatized him. He lost a lot of his desire to drive and started spending most of his time in the house alone in his bedroom.

The accident seemed to cause him to slip into a state of depression. Ever since the accident, it's been difficult for him to get out and enjoy life as much as I know he'd like to. He still has a great sense of humor, but now it seems like he looks at life in a much more serious, subdued way.

As time went by, Jeremy got feeling better and things started to settle down. Jenny, however, was still suffering from too much stress and anxiety, which was probably the main cause of her headaches. She felt like she needed to be home with the family, to help relieve some of our burdens.

I think that in her mind she believes that she has to be the one to help keep the family from falling apart. I don't believe it's a conscious thing, but because she's been living in the shadows of our misfortunes all these years, and because we're so close as a family, she feels like it's her responsibility to step up and help out whenever there's a family crisis. It's kind of a "Catch 22". When she leaves home and tries to live her own life, her thoughts are consumed with her family back

home, especially if we're having some problems at the time. Yet, if she's home with us, I think she feels a resentment towards our situation and wonders if she'll ever be able to have a life of her own. I've spoken to her and told her she doesn't have to worry about us, assuring her that we'll be fine.

I think I got a glimpse of what she might have been feeling in a letter she once wrote. Here's a portion of it:

"I 'm drowning in a sea of hopelessness and can't see the shore. Imagine being 21 and not knowing if your mother and brother will be in your future. This is a reality my family has to face. My mother is the anchor holding the ship from floating away, but recently the ship has sunk and we are all drowning, hoping desperately to be rescued.

My name is Jenny Llewellyn, and I am seeking help for the Heroes in my life... my mother and my oldest brother Jeremy."

This was just a part of an open letter that Jenny was writing, in an effort to help raise funds to help with some of our medical expenses. It doesn't seem fair that any young person should have to be preoccupied with so many serious problems in life.