

# Chapter 5

## *Hurts – Doughnut! Again, and Again...*

As we began our married life together, we experienced some of the "bumps" that most newlyweds experience. We decided it would be best to move away from friends and family for a while, and really get to know each other, away from influences that we felt may not necessarily be in our best interests. We moved to another small community about an hour away and life seemed to improve for us. We got closer together and worked at becoming "us."

Then one day I noticed a lump in my breast. When I went to see the doctor, he informed me that it needed to be taken out. The surgery was supposed to be a quick "in-and-out" thing, but for whatever reason, I had a violent reaction to the anesthesia and ended up staying in the hospital for eight days. Luckily, the lump wasn't cancerous, but the doctors found it very puzzling that I'd had such an adverse reaction not only to the anesthesia, but to **all** the different medications that they used on me.

Now you have to remember that at this time, I was still just five foot six, eighty-three pounds, and I'd never been in the hospital for any kind of surgical procedure. I had no way of knowing that this supposedly routine surgery was going to be such a trial for us. I say us, because not only did I have to stay in the hospital for eight days, but Lee and I had no medical insurance to pay for the operation or for the complications and the extended stay that resulted from them. It was really a financial disaster for us.

Not long after that, Lee was diagnosed with cataracts, and we were told that he needed two operations to remove them. In those days, laser surgery didn't exist nor did many of the great surgical procedures and medical advances we enjoy today. Lee had to have one eye operated on at a time, and for each eye he had to stay in the hospital for five days. The doctors kept his head fastened to a brace that was made up of foam pads and straps that kept his head completely still while his eyes healed. After each operation, the doctors told him that he couldn't lift anything and he couldn't even go back to work for at least four months! That meant

that he was out of work for **eight months**, with these horrific medical bills from the hospital piling up and no insurance to help defray any of the costs.

To make matters even more complicated, I was now pregnant with our first son Jeremy. Because Lee had to miss work for eight months, and since we had no insurance, we decided that I would keep working right up to the day that Jeremy was born.

My personal doctor was a wonderful man who'd helped me greatly during my pregnancy. His name was Dr. Fitzgerald. Because of my physical problems, and my extremely thin build, he was very concerned about me and my upcoming delivery. He kept a close watch on me during my pregnancy.

My due date was rapidly approaching. When I went in for my last scheduled checkup, I learned that Doctor Fitzgerald's wife had been diagnosed with cancer and wasn't expected to live for more than a few months. He decided to put his practice on hold for a while so he could spend as much time as he could with his wife before she passed away. I understood that he needed to do that, and my heart went out to both he and his wife, but I couldn't help but wish that he could be with me for my first baby. His nurse assured me that someone would be on call who would take good care of me when the time came, and everything would be fine.

My due date arrived. I went to the hospital and told the doctor on duty, "I know I'm in labor, and it's time for my baby to be born." However, the doctor didn't think that I was ready to deliver, because I wasn't reacting **physically** the way other women normally react at the onset of labor, so he sent me home.

I returned several times, insisting each time that it was time to have my baby, but he kept sending me home, assuring me that he knew what he was doing, and everything would be all right.

This went on for a period of more than two and a half weeks. Each time I went in, I would be sent home again.

I knew something was happening and that this baby needed to be born. My stomach would get hard, then soft, then hard again, but because I had such weak muscles in my abdominal area, the normal processes of lightning, contractions, and dilation experienced by most women simply weren't happening to me. After weeks of feeling these tightening feelings, I had only dilated to about two and a half centimeters.

I finally went in to the hospital, a full three weeks past my due date and said to the people working there, "Listen, I know it's time for this baby to be born, and I'm not leaving this hospital until you help me get this baby out!"

They admitted me.

After twenty-two hours, the doctor decided to administer "pit drops" to help stimulate the birthing process. This course of action was continued for some time with no success. Finally, another doctor was sent for, who was thought to have a little more expertise in this area.

When the new doctor arrived, he agreed that this baby needed to get here as quickly as possible. I was brought into the operating room, but because my physical body couldn't push the baby down the canal, about four or five nurses came in to push down on my stomach. The pain was horrific! They pushed for five hours, while the doctor pulled on my baby's little head with tongs. After more than five hours, and a lot of help from a lot of people, Jeremy was finally born! He weighed ten pounds, eight ounces, and was twenty-two and a half inches long. When he finally arrived, he came out just screaming! I was just happy to finally have my baby here, and from all appearances he was very healthy.

In those days, private rooms weren't available unless you had real problems or were wealthy enough to pay for one. I shared a room with four other women who had also recently given birth.

The next morning, the nurses brought all the new babies in to see their mothers. One lady had a five pound two-ounce baby girl, another had a five pound nine-ounce baby girl, and the third had a six-pound three-ounce baby girl... little tiny baby girls, all of them. Then they brought in my baby. He looked like a moose compared to the other babies! Ten pounds, eight ounces, and twenty-two and a half inches long... he was huge!

When the nurse handed him to me, I was shocked by what I saw. He was black and blue around his eyes, with cuts around his ears, and scratches and bruises all over his little head. It looked like he'd been in a fight! I felt so sorry for him. When Lee came to visit, he laid our baby across my stomach, and we tried to imagine how in the world he could have ever fit in there. It seemed impossible!

During my pregnancy the doctor tried to help me gain weight, hoping that after Jeremy was born, I'd be able to keep some of it on. I'd put on fifty pounds during my pregnancy. Two days after he was born, I weighed ninety pounds. I had retained only seven pounds.

In spite of the fact that this birth had been so difficult, I remember lying there and thinking how blessed I was to have this beautiful perfect baby boy laying there by my side, even if he had been beaten up pretty good.

When the doctor who delivered Jeremy came to visit me to see how I was doing, I told him that I thought something was wrong with me in the vicinity of my tail bone. "Oh, that's normal to have some pain down in that area," he said. After all, you've just had a baby." I could tell he hadn't understood me. "No... not there," I said. "It feels more like it is my tailbone."

After some checking, the doctor realized that my tailbone had been broken as a result of all the people pushing down on me during delivery. He felt bad about it, so he called in a nurse and said, "Mrs. Llewellyn is in some pain here. Would you please go get her a 'doughnut'?" Well, the nurse left, and about ten minutes later, came back with a nice chocolate doughnut, covered with little colored sprinkles. Lee, who had been in the room this whole time, just smiled and said... "Oh, that's perfect. When you're done sit-ting on that, can I eat it? Just try not to squish the frosting and the little sprinkle things."

The doctor started to laugh. "Not a doughnut you eat," he said "I meant a rubber doughnut. The kind you blow up and sit on."

We all had a good laugh over it, at the expense of the nurse. For the next few days that doughnut story got a lot of mileage around the hospital.

As I was waiting to be discharged from the hospital, I sat there in the wheelchair and just stared at little Jeremy there in my arms. I thought back to the time the doctor told me I probably wouldn't live long, shouldn't get married, and would never be able to have children. Yet here I was, feeling pretty good, happily married, and now I had my own beautiful little baby boy.

We came home from the hospital and Lee went back to work. I looked forward to just being a mom. I couldn't wait to do all the fun things I'd dreamed of doing with my little baby and showing him off to friends and family. But as the days passed I didn't feel like my personal health was improving as quickly as I thought it should. I was constantly tired, and didn't seem to have the energy I once had. I never really had all that much energy to begin with.

One day while Lee was at work, I decided to take a nap and try to get back some of my strength. I put the baby down and went to bed. When I woke up a short while later, I couldn't move my feet. I couldn't move my legs to get up. I couldn't

move anything below my waist. I telephoned my mom and she came right over. She took my baby to my Aunt Freddie's house, and then she and my father took me to the doctors.

When we arrived at the hospital, I was immediately admitted. They began doing a series of tests to determine what had gone wrong.

Lee came to visit me that night after work. I can still remember the nervous and frightened look he had on his face. The doctors started administering antibiotics and tried doing some physical therapy on me, but they couldn't figure out what was causing the problem.

After I'd been in the hospital for about a week, I began feeling very lonely and depressed. I didn't know what was happening, and it scared me a lot! The thing that added even more to my pain and frustration was the fact that Lee rarely came to visit me. I'm sure it was because he felt totally out of control with the situation we now found ourselves in. That was the hardest thing of all for me to take.

Lee was frightened about everything now. He worried how he was going to pay back all the bills that were adding up daily. He was terrified at the thought of losing everything to bankruptcy and the embarrassment that would cause. Most of all, he was worried how he would take care of Jeremy if he lost me.

Even though I understood his concerns, it was still very difficult to lie in the hospital *alone* day after day. Another difficult part of my stay in the hospital was the fact that I couldn't see my baby. Here he was, just a few weeks old, and I had to leave him in the care of someone else. *I missed both of them terribly.*

I ended up staying in the hospital for two weeks. The doctors tried to figure out what had happened to me, but they never did. They speculated that the shock of labor and the delivery I'd had to endure was just too much for my body to handle. With time and rest I was finally released to go home. I was still very weak, but I was so ready and very happy to be going home to my husband and baby.

After returning home, I slowly began to get my health back. I didn't recover as quickly as I would have liked to, but at least I could function. Jeremy was growing and seemed to be a happy, normal baby. I was mostly worried about Lee now. He was becoming far too serious about life, constantly weighed down with the burdens imposed by the tremendous debt we'd incurred. I noticed that the sparkle in his eyes was gone. His jokes were few and far between, and he was becoming reclusive and depressed. Time seemed to pass very slowly for us now. Lee got a job working in construction with my dad, and we plodded along the best we could.

The months passed by, and I found I was expecting our second child. We were happy at the prospects of another baby, but our excitement was tempered by the knowledge we had that this baby was certainly going to cost us a lot of money. The anticipation of more expenses looming off in the distance, coupled with the fear that he might lose me this time, caused Lee to become even more worried and depressed.

One morning I woke up and rolled over to talk to him. He didn't respond. I looked into his eyes. They were glossed over, and he looked very pale. Eventually, he did respond slightly but he was very lethargic.

I grabbed the phone to dial 911, but he begged me not to. He didn't want any more bills. I was getting very frightened by now because he seemed really ill to me. I decided to call his mom. She came over, took one look at him, and said, "You're going to the hospital now!" Lee protested, claiming he was beginning to feel better. "I am not going to go to any hospital!" he said. But his mom looked him in the eye and said, "You are going to the hospital if I have to hogtie you and drag you there myself!" Lee knew better than to cross his mom. In his weakened condition, she could have easily taken him anyway.

We drove to the hospital. By the time we arrived, Lee was having difficulty breathing. We walked into the ER and sat down to wait for a doctor. Just then, a little girl came in with a cut finger. Lee told them to take care of her first. So, we sat there for quite a while and just waited.

When the doctor finally got around to Lee, he took one look at him and knew that Lee was in serious trouble. He looked at his hands. There were no veins visible. The white half-moons that he should have had on his fingernails had disappeared. The doctor called for assistance and then he started to yell for the nurses to get such-and-such, STAT, and do such-and-such, STAT and a nurse immediately started an IV in him. Because his veins had all disappeared, the only place they could find a vein to start the IV was in his jugular vein.

After running several tests, the doctor determined that Lee had developed a severe bleeding ulcer. It had drained so much of the blood from his system that he required multiple bags of blood just to stabilize him. He was put on medication and stayed in the hospital for two weeks until he was out of danger. Eventually, he got feeling better and was able to come home. Two weeks after that, I went back to the hospital and delivered our second son. We named him Jason.

This delivery went a little smoother than the first one with Jeremy. Although, when the time came to deliver Jason, the doctor realized that my tailbone had healed in a bad position and was causing complications for Jason's birth. So, my tailbone had to be broken again to get it out of the way so that Jason could be born.

Three months after I came home from the hospital with Jason, my body again "collapsed." Lee brought me back to the hospital. I was partially paralyzed. I spent the next two weeks being medicated, tested, and undergoing physical therapy. The end result of all this, of course, was more bills, more stress on Lee, and serious questions and concerns about what the future held for us.

I finally came home, and eventually the entire family began to function more like a normal family. The boys really began to grow, and I even started feeling better than I had in years. Happily, even Lee found the strength to keep on going. He worked very hard for us, and I was so grateful to him for that.

We didn't dare say it out loud, but it seemed like we were starting to see just the faintest glimmer of hope in our future. A small, almost imperceptible silver lining was starting to be visible around the edges of the black clouds of depression, doubt, fear, and debt that constantly hung over us.

Two of our very good friends, Rob and Debra, often invited us over for dinner and offered support, love, and help in any way they could. Rob had been Lee's best friend in high school.

One day when we were visiting them, Rob told Lee that they had just purchased a new home. He told him how much the monthly payments were going to be, and Lee noted that we were paying more a month on medical bills, than Rob would be paying for his new home mortgage!

When Lee and I were married, we never thought our lives would take so many crazy turns. We thought we were fairly normal, but we didn't have a job that provided medical insurance at the time we were married. Now, no insurance company would take us on. We couldn't believe all the many thousands of dollars of debt we'd racked up in such a short time.

Whenever I talk to newlyweds, my advice to them is this: Make sure that you have medical insurance when you get married. We never thought this could happen to us, but we've learned that it can happen to anyone.

