



Bob and Connie L.

Chapter 5

Tales From The Blindside

by Connie L.

“Between stimulus and response there is space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.”

Viktor Frankl, *“Man’s Search for Meaning”*

During the summer of 2011 the difficulty I experienced swallowing was increasing. I did my best to conceal this condition but my family (daughter Amanda was living with us at the time) was getting suspicious. In a weird coincidence, my dentist was to work on a crown the day before my scheduled colonoscopy/endoscopy but could not get the Novocain to numb me sufficiently, so the procedure was postponed. Had he been able to give me the temporary crown, my endoscopy would have been cancelled.

One Sunday, around the same time, our substitute minister gave a short homily on the freedom to choose fear or faith. I paid close attention to this message, applying the theory to my putting stroke. In the coming months I learned to appreciate the larger aspects of the ability to choose.

These and other little signals and coincidences have played a major part in my recovery.

Excerpts from emails and journal entries

August 10, 2011

Because of some history of swallowing difficulty, I elected to have an endoscopy while undergoing a routine colonoscopy at Moore Regional Hospital. The doctor was startled to report that the endoscopy revealed my esophagus was so damaged it appeared to be shredded, “as though drinking lye”. A small tumor was detected and dilation was performed.

Esophageal Cancer: Real-Life Stories from Patients and Families

August 28, 2011

A follow-up endoscopy showed that the constriction recurred; another biopsy was performed to investigate further.

October 1, 2011

I was ordered to have a test called a barium swallow. Anything with the word “swallow” involved was cause for high anxiety. I recalled that my granddaughter, Hadley, at age ten days took the stuff down from a bottle without a flinch. She gave me courage. The test was not painful.

October 14, 2011

All the data from various tests revealed possible cancer of my esophagus with surgery recommended. Causes were unclear but the damage was obvious and the remedy would be pretty radical. Scarlett invited me to ride with her to Chapel Hill for her annual check after kidney cancer. That day she showed me the ins and outs of parking, registration and logistics. We laughed and cried together and provided moral support at both ends of the cancer spectrum.

Bob has spent three days cleaning the garage, the yard, the pool, and the car - literally everything with a hard surface. Tracy has threatened to bring her car over for detailing. This is the way we deal with fear and stress around here. We get busy.

October 17, 2011

My first appointment with my new internist. Between the time I scheduled this ‘routine’ appointment and the time I presented, the game had changed dramatically. To prepare for the challenges ahead he ordered an x-ray, respiratory, and blood tests. We laid the groundwork for the doctors ahead. All test reports showed excellent results. No problem!

October 21, 2011

My first meeting with the team at UNC. I had an ultrasound and Endoscopic mucosal resection in an attempt to remove the tumor located against my vocal chords. The tumor could not be removed because it was not stable. The diagnosis was still not clear so lots of

scraping and photos occurred. Many of the UNC specialists were called in to have a look. A very unusual case.

October 26, 2011

Kathleen, PA., reported the results of the ultrasound as not cancer but virus. This diagnosis was later rejected and cancer was confirmed. The recommendation is immediate esophagectomy. PET and CT scans scheduled.

October 28, 2011

I am admitted to Women's Hospital at UNC for PET scan, CT scan and consultation. The process is very calm, quiet and professional. The staff is careful to be sure I am warm and comfortable. The kindness of all the caregivers makes this almost a religious experience. Very quiet. I meditate, 100, 99, 98,...

Dr. V. confirms that this is indeed cancer, no question. Remedy is again - no question - esophagectomy. The pathology showed the tumor is stage 1 cancer, no radiation or chemo recommended at this time. We are encouraged to get a second opinion and Dr. Mark Orringer, chief of Thoracic Surgery, University of Michigan Hospital is the natural selection. Dr. Orringer had been introduced to us by Mike and also was known to us as the surgeon for our friend Terry in 1990.

With so much to accept and contemplate, we drive quietly home until we had a blowout on Hwy 1. Perfect.

October 27, 2011

Attend the UNC football game and tailgate with Debbie and Spike. A wonderful day.

October 28, 2011

Spent a great afternoon with the gun club trying to blow up the clay pigeons.

Date: October 29, 2011

Email from: Connie

Hi, All. Here is the scoop...wow, this is tough to write.

Esophageal Cancer: Real-Life Stories from Patients and Families

Yesterday the doctors at UNC confirmed that I have esophageal cancer. This diagnosis is the result of two endoscopies, an endoscopic ultrasound, PET scan, and CT scan. I had been experiencing some difficulty swallowing certain food for about six months.

The good news that comes with this is that the cancer is confined to my esophagus and may be rather new. I feel fine and the doctors expect a full recovery without chemo/radiation. They think I am tough enough to make them look good.

So here is the plan. Bob and I are preparing for surgery at UNC to remove my esophagus. We have met with the surgeon and will be traveling to the University of Michigan to visit with the specialist there for a second opinion. Apparently, this type of cancer is extremely rare, so all the doctors are buddies and discuss techniques and procedures with each other. If, as we expect, all the opinions are confirmed, I will have this done the first week in December.

Between now and then, I am going to train like I am in a marathon to prepare my body, get my Christmas shopping done, and play as much golf as I can. I am also supposed to keep my weight up so anytime you want to go out for lunch or dinner... I know you have all been keeping a vigil with us and we have come to rely on your prayers and support. Please don't stop now.

It seems unbelievably strange to report this to you because I feel so well. I will see all of you at the golf course, the poker table, or the dinner table, so keep in touch.

XOX

Connie

November 7, 2011

Bob and I meet with Dr. Orringer at 8:00am at the University of Michigan Hospital. He spends an hour with us explaining esophageal cancer and his recommended surgery for esophagectomy. He is modest, calm and very confident. He carefully explains the special technique required due to the location of the tumor. He describes

how he will tweak this and tease that so that when I awake from surgery I can say “this sucks” and he will be able to hear me.

We are anxious to have this surgery immediately and move on with our lives. Another intervention occurs. Dr. Orringer is unable to perform my surgery until 1/10 due to his travel and teaching schedule. I ask what I could do to prepare. I get a spirometer to use every day and instructions to walk three miles every day. My training begins. I believe this ultimately saved my life.

November 16, 2011

Dr. V. and I discuss by phone the various recommendations before us regarding esophagectomy. The decision is remarkably easy. Dr. V. advises us to go to Michigan for surgery with Dr. Orringer. Dr. V. is not feeling confident in his ability for this delicate situation. Dr. V. has performed about 250 such surgeries and Dr. Orringer had 3,000 under his scalpel the week we visited him.

November 17, 2011 – January 6, 2012

Bob and I concentrate on making the most of each day and each situation. We say yes to each invitation to play golf, bridge or have dinner. We receive with gratitude all of the offers of prayer and support and gain a sense of wellbeing for its own sake. To be sure, we experience the fear and apprehension of an unknown future but we try not to inflict each other and others with the tension this creates. We make our travel plans, follow the doctors’ orders, and pay our bills. We have a bunch of family and pals for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We walk the dogs, enjoy our cocktail hour and listen with care to the sound advice of our friends. Late one cold afternoon, my girlfriends arrived for a “surgery shower”. They gift me with the slippers, heating pads, books and blankets required for a long recovery. That day, nurse Bob administered Cosmos. Standing in Susie and Gus’s kitchen one evening feeling the pressure, Adair reminds me that I should not let my imagination get ahead of my reality. Excellent advice. I am practicing this theory.

During this time, Sam, the “minister of putting”, came into our circle of friends. Knowing, but not knowing that we needed spiritual support, we made a date for Sam to visit for tea. Drinking tea in the

afternoon has never been a part of our life and sharing our personal fears even less so. Sam makes it easy for us. We get acquainted and know that when needed, he will be ready to step in. This we can do. Sam talks about the women's basketball coach from Tennessee State. With regard to her recent cancer diagnosis she said, "It is what it is. What it becomes is up to me."

January 6, 2012

Bob and I take the long drive through the snow to Michigan. We are the only people on the road heading North at this time of the year. In spite of the miserable trip and the trepidation we experience, we know for sure we have made the right choices all along. This helps. Through the kindness of Susie and Mike, Bob and I are invited to stay in the house of their friends, Dede and Jim, while we are in Ann Arbor. The house is great and Mike and Susie are down the road. We unpack and quietly wait for January 10.

January 9, 2012

Dr. Orringer's nurse, Lori Flint, calls to advise that Dr. Orringer has had a personal emergency and cannot take me on January 10th. The good news is she called just before I drank the "cleanser". The bad news is she is not sure when I can get in. This is probably the worst news we have yet received. Later, we are told that we will be delayed only one day. This helps us keep our mental momentum flowing.

January 11, 2012

Bob and I arrive at U-M at 5:30am. From this point the story gets sketchy. Surgery takes six and one-half hours. The procedure is relatively routine, the exception being the tumor location causing Dr. Orringer to cut through the sphincter and leaving only a tiny bit to attach my stomach to the remaining tissue. Hand sewing rather than staples cause a more fragile anastomosis. But the job is complete and I am sent to my room with nine tubes connecting me to an IV pole.

Nursing care is around the clock for the first 24 hours. Dr. Orringer's physician assistant is stationed across the hall and watchful. The first three days I am encouraged to walk the halls pushing the IV with all the apparatus as much as possible. I have ice and water and began clear liquids on the fourth day. I am able to

take care of myself getting up and down and am quite mobile. I attribute this to all the physical training.

The pain is in the form of a headache, likely the result of the epidural. I had experienced this once before when Amanda was born - same drug. My body mends very well but the headache continues.

Day 5 post-op, I get rid of some of the tubes. The chest tubes are the most painful both in and upon removal. They are big tubes and I am relatively small so I feel the compression. I have had the good fortune to be cared for by wonderful nurses. Melissa has taken me under her wing and supervises the others (should I say 'bossed?'), in the delicate aspects of my care. All the nurses will leave this work behind to return home to full-on family obligations. I do not know how they have so much to give.

I am released from U-M on the 8th day.

Date: January 11, 2012

Email from: Bob

GREAT NEWS!!! Our girl came through today and knocked it out of the park. She went into the operating room at 7:30. As she was wheeled out, the pre-op nurse looked at me and said, "You lose." Her blood pressure was 102 over 72 – almost comatose. Connie had told the nurse that she and I always have this contest over who has the lowest blood pressure. Can you believe she went into this operation with that B/P? Mine would have been 190/120. The operation was supposed to last seven hours, and she was out in six. The Dr., who is not very effusive, came out and said he couldn't be happier with the results, nor could I !! One of the main worries was the proximity of the tumor to the voice box.

When I walked into the recovery room, Sweet Con looked up and said in a great voice, "How are you?" I said, "You have a voice." She said, "Sure." We have a few more things to get through, but this is a great first step. I will see her the first thing next morning. Hopefully, she will have a peaceful night's sleep.

Thank you very much for all your prayers. I am sure that God does listen.

Bob

Date: January 12, 2012

Email from: Bob

Everyone, the first night was not exactly as we wanted. Connie was allergic to the epidural sedative, and her blood pressure went down to 40/20 – not good. They changed the meds to a high-powered Motrin, and she is doing great. Let me just say to see her makes me want to cringe; she has nine tubes in her right now. What a tough lady. They will all stay until Saturday when, hopefully, six will be removed. She got up and walked the halls four times today, tubes and all. Not far, but four times. Tomorrow is her 67th birthday. Friday the 13th – can you believe that? I am absolutely sure my report will be much more upbeat tomorrow.

We love you all.

Bob

January 18, 2012

Bob and I are staying in the home of Loretta and Jim for recovery. Jill provides professional nurses for the night and Nurse Bob is on the day shift. I am instructed to eat a mushy diet but food tasted really, really awful. Nothing tastes as I expect or remember. Chef Bob is very frustrated and tries hard to entice me. I force what is possible and rely on the feeding tube. My headache is persistent but otherwise I am improving. Bob administers all the meds with real expertise. We have drugs and supplies everywhere. It is incredibly nice to be in this beautiful home with a fire and friends.

Date: January 21, 2012

Email from: Connie

Hi, All. Today is what is known in the medical field as ‘Patient Day 10’. This is a red-letter day. There are several along the way. Day 3 means some of the various tubes are removed, easing the burden on the IV pole. Day 5 I can’t remember because I felt so shitty. However, this is Day 10! That means that danger is

behind, the medications are beginning to do their advance work and I am definitely coming out of the woods.

You will see from the photo taken from the front door that Michigan is beautiful today. I walked this morning and Bob and I are due for another round in about an hour. It has been great to see our old pals and they are kicking in with love, soup, and support. Mary P. came yesterday to whip my hair into shape. The kindness of all of you continues to overwhelm us with gratitude. Believe me, when you catch a cold, I will be the first one on your doorstep.

We will hang here a few more days. On Thursday we will visit the magician that performed this surgery for the release to leave the state. We are expecting to return next weekend. Amazing, I think. One little note about Bobby L. Has he not been incredible? He takes care of all the details, makes the medicine go down and buys everything he walks by to cheer me up.

This has been a weird and beautiful blessing.

XO
C

January 25, 2012

We visit with Dr. Orringer to be released for home. I have a slight temp and headache. Dr. Orringer dilates my throat, or tries to anyway. This might be the corollary to waterboarding. It is awful. Given my history of swallowing issues the sight of the bougie device freaks me out. Once done, Dr. Orringer signs the papers and we are free to travel. Then, the shit hits the fan.

January 27, 2012

Bob leaves at 5:00am for the twelve-hour drive to NC. John and Julia are due to fly up here in the afternoon, spend the night with me and fly me home Saturday morning. Adriane and Del are coming with dinner for all of us. How unbelievably generous are our friends.

As the morning progresses my temperature rises and the headache continues. Erica comes at 1:00 to give me a massage. She comes

regularly to help circulation and keep the medications moving through my system and out. I am starting to realize I am really sick. I contact John and Julia while they were still at the NC airport to delay their departure while I figure out what to do.

By 3:00 I am certain I cannot leave Michigan. I wait until about 3:30 to call Bob and tell him the bad news. He might turn the car around and come back to Michigan. That is too much and too dangerous in the snow and stress. Adriane and Del come with dinner and Adriane brings along her nightclothes to stay with me. How does she know when I don't that this will be so prophetic?

Date: January 27, 2012

Email from: Bob

Shit happens!! I left B'ham this morning at 5:00, expecting C to follow with friends tomorrow. That's not happening. Con woke up with a temp and Dr. O. didn't want her to leave. She didn't call me and tell me this until she knew I was in NC and couldn't turn around. Very sneaky. We don't think this is very much, but you never know. Mandy is with me tonight and that is great. I am not sure what is going to happen the next few days, but I will keep you informed. Bo just came up and put his head on my lap. What could be better?

Bob

January 28, 2012 3:00am

I call Dr. Orringer's physician assistant on duty and report my temp at 103. I have to go back to the hospital. Adriane and I find our way through a snowstorm to the hospital where the emergency people are waiting for me. Thank you, Ron. I am admitted smoothly. I can't let Adriane call Bob until about 7:30. He is exhausted from the drive home and must rest. There is surely more to come. I am safe and in very good hands. I am not afraid.

January 28, 2012

By midafternoon, Bob is back in my room. I am so grateful. I have symptoms of pneumonia, my headache is raging. Other than that, I feel pretty okay. I am admitted and under observation by the physician assistants. Dr. Orringer is in Florida attending a

conference. I have a barium swallow and the radiologist thinks it is okay. Amy, physician assistant, smells a rat. All day she has been hovering, fretting, wondering what is going on with me. Finally, she reviews the barium test with Bob. By now, Bob is up to speed on all procedures and confident to give an opinion. On the screen there is a faint detection of a “swoosh” on the swallow test. There is a leak in the anastomosis and bacteria are being released into my system. Amy and Bob know this. They are sure of this.

Date: January 29, 2012

Email from: Bob

To all - I just found the cord to the computer to charge it. I am a spastic. Well, two nights ago Connie got worse. Thank God Adriane D. was staying with her. Con woke up at 3:00 feeling like crap. At 3:30, in a blizzard, they left for the hospital. When they got to Ann Arbor, they started a myriad of tests – great place. Adriane said at one point they took C to have a chest x-ray and said, “We’ll be back in five minutes”. In five minutes C was back. Adriane called me with this development around 7:30. I had to find a place for the dogs, Gus and Susie L. As Gus said, “Why not have six?” Thank you, Gus and Susie!

I got a plane at 12:40 out of Raleigh and was in Connie’s room at 4:30. The one thing that was for sure was that the white blood count was high, meaning it was trying to fight an infection somewhere. Their best guess right now is that it is a bladder infection. If there had to be an infection, bladder is the best – easiest to control. However, the damn headache is still there and throbbing. Seventeen days. We hope this is just a little ding in our door and will be coming home soon. Will keep you all informed.

Bob

January 30, 2012

Dr. Lin is called in. Amy tells Bob to go home to Birmingham and rest. This will take a while. I am calm, not in pain, and full of faith that this will turn out well. In fact, what is taking Dr. Lin so long? Let’s go. Dr. Lin repairs the tear in the anastomoses. He also discovers a blood clot in my jugular vein.

I awake in a magical place. Danielle, the most beautiful blond nurse, is taking care of me. Am I dead? I must be. My headache is gone. Bob is here. I know that all will be well. Danielle bathes me and washes my hair. It is reverent. Bob is sleeping in the next room. I feel levitated, transformed.

Date: January 31, 2012

Email from: Bob

Last night I got a call from the hospital that C was in ICU after the operation. So, off I went, back to Ann Arbor, and talked my way into ICU at around midnight. There I saw this really great nurse taking care of Connie – everything she needed. The operation went better than expected. The incision on the neck was re-opened and they found a rather large hole in the connection to the stomach. The incision was not sealed and will be left open to heal from the inside out.

She does have a pneumonia, which they are aggressively fighting with antibiotics. Now for the good news. The intern came in about 5:30 (when do they sleep?) and said all looks really good. He asked how Con felt and she said, "GREAT". Can you imagine having a five-inch open slice in your neck and saying, "Great"? She is one tough lady. I know she is feeling better; no headaches at all – first time in eighteen days.
Bob

January 30, 2012

Alex arrives. I am still in ICU and Bill is my new nurse. He is full of joy and good will. I feel wonderful but Alex is sure I am going to die. He thinks I look awful. He does not know. This is the beginning of my recovery. I have pneumonia and blood poisoning, but I do not have a headache. I will be well.

February 1, 2012

Dr. Orringer has returned with a vengeance. Late evening he has come to check on me. The anastomosis is healing perfectly now, from the inside out. Now, we are aggressively fighting pneumonia. The antibiotics are fighting blood poisoning; Bob is being trained by Amy in the art of wound care. Bob does not flinch. He cleans, swabs, and disinfects the anastomosis site, places the dressing just so,

and pretends he does not see the tears rolling down my cheeks. He is not hurting me, I just can't believe he can do this. Mandy arrives. In our attempt to maintain perspective, we held our children off a little bit. We have done them a disservice. Their presence gives us comfort we realize we desperately need.

February 2, 2012

My feeding tube is reinstalled. This is a major accomplishment because it had been out for the maximum amount of time and scar tissue was quickly forming. Dr. Orringer had 'tagged' the site, which made this procedure successful. I am wheeled into the most beautiful, brand new surgery. Right out of a movie set for nuclear medicine for the 22nd century.

Date: February 03, 2012

Email from: Bob

Well, sports fans, the hits just keep on coming. Dr. O. saw Connie last night and confirmed that the lung problem is ARDS, acute respiratory deficiency syndrome – not pneumonia. ARDS is a very different problem. It is not affected by any antibiotics. It is only cured by the person's own body. Thank God Connie is so strong. Her white blood count is still elevated, which means there is still an infection somewhere, which they are working diligently to find. HOWEVER, I just talked to Connie and she sounded GREAT!!! Mandy is coming in from Charlotte today as a little surprise for Connie. She will love it. We will talk tonight.
Bob

Date: February 4, 2012

Email from: Bob

To all. It is a wonder what a Mother's children can do. First Alex and today Mandy. Both times she saw her children, you could see the will and love strengthen in Connie's eyes. We also had a long talk with Dr. O. We are not getting out soon, but Con is definitely doing MUCH better. Another milestone, nurse Bob changed the dressing on "patient's" neck. It was a piece of cake – not! And, I will be having a larger vodka this evening. See you tomorrow.

NB

Esophageal Cancer: Real-Life Stories from Patients and Families

February 9, 2012

Back to Ryan's home for the final lap. I have lost about twenty pounds - from 124 - and Nurse Bob is again trying to get me to eat. Food tastes disgusting but I am trying. I now love and respect my little feeding tube. This is a device to embrace. There is nothing to it and it makes you feel good. My wonderful nurses return at night to give us both the peaceful rest we need. Nurse Bob takes care of my wound very professionally. We have a very funny (not funny) encounter with a visiting nurse. Hire a private if you possibly can. It did not take Nurse Bob long to kick her out. That is another story.

Date: February 11, 2012

Email from: Connie

Hi, All. It is lovely to be in Birmingham and out of the hospital. We have a foot of snow and the sun is shining. I am tucked in by a fire and getting ready for a snooze. Not too bad.

As Bob has reported, the last couple of weeks have been crazy. Fortunately, I do not really remember too much of the details. I just kind of floated along on the prayers and support you all were sending hourly. I am really improving each day now. No aches or pains, just a little thin. I will come back quickly with the smell and beauty of home and the ability to get outside and walk.

It looks like we will be able to break for home next Saturday. We can barely wait.

Last night, a home health nurse was sent by some Medicare provider to check me out, etc. Fortunately, we had a private nurse standing by to watch and help us through an IV hookup, etc. So, this Medicare nurse comes in, all disorganized and really none too clean or inspiring. She starts a pitch about her company, yada yada, and we are looking at her like, "Is she nuts?" Really, do we care? Then she starts to sneeze and blow her nose, grabbing the closest paper towel to wipe up. We are trying to back out of the room. Finally, Bob blows! He kicked her out! Honestly, it was hilarious. Bobby L. does it again.

We will let you know what happens next. Thanks for all the cards and emails. We so love hearing from all of you.

XO, C

February 16, 2012

Back to U-M for the final reports. We are on our way home!

February 17, 2012

Alex, Meredith and our grandchildren, Kate, Hadley and Jack visit us. The little ones cannot detect the importance of their visit. But for Bob and me it is the culmination of the work we have done over the last weeks. Pay day. Our visit is completely ordinary, easy, and nothing special, everything is okay. No apprehension in the grandchildren, no anxiety in the adults. Love you, see you soon!

Dave and Paula offer their plane for our return to NC. We recognize the importance of this and are grateful, once again, for the kindness of our friends. Paying forward the kindness we have accepted will be our intention in the years to come.

By Saturday afternoon when we arrive home, all the support supplies are here as well. I have an IV pole, nutrition, and oxygen by 5:00pm. Bob has a cocktail by 6:00. I am in heaven by 7:00.

February 19, 2012 – March 31, 2012

The gentle work of recuperation is beginning. I feel well but pretty weak. But each day I see a little improvement. I can walk the dogs a short way, play bridge, visit with friends. I am weaning myself from the feeding tube, which initially took 14 hours a day. Naps are shorter. My anastomosis is forming scar tissue at a very rapid rate. I returned to UNC for after-care and regular endoscopies to stretch my throat. It is still quite difficult to swallow. I am now making friends with the staff in the GI unit. I am begging them for their tee shirt. It says UNC – GI Right on Track. Pretty cute.

April 1, 2012 – December 1, 2012

I have gained some weight and like my new body. I play golf and travel. My energy level and strength still are somewhat retarded. I can eat almost anything but still return to UNC for periodic

Esophageal Cancer: Real-Life Stories from Patients and Families

endoscopies to stretch my throat. Dr. Orringer told me that I can do much better and has encouraged me to attempt self-dilation. I have the sense that I've let him down and vow to work on it...sometime.

December 16, 2012

Brian, our physician friend and neighbor has agreed to be my dilation coach. In an email he actually said, "Gulp". Very funny guy. Sunday afternoon he arrives with his bundle of bougies slung over his shoulder and a bottle of Lidocaine. Together, we try to coax that device down my throat. Forty-five minutes later, in full sweat, we decide to try it again the following Sunday. His Zen approach to the procedure helps me breathe and visualize what needs to happen. It is rough and unsuccessful but it is a start and I slowly began to overcome my fear.

January 1, 2013

Brian has allowed me to keep a 24cc bougie and practice on my own. Every morning I take it down and hold it for 30 seconds. I feel my courage increase each time. I am now in control of the device and more important, I am in control of my body.

January 11, 2013

Bob and I are sailing in the British Virgin Islands. Hard to believe. I am wearing a bikini and feel wonderful.

February 1, 2013 - March 1, 2013

Bob and I spend the month in Naples FL. I begin to work out every day. Kick boxing, yoga, weight training, whatever the gym puts in front of me. Every morning I dilate my throat for 30 seconds. I am now up to 34 French and on my way to 42. That is the goal Dr. Orringer has set for me. I can do it. I walk the dogs three miles most days and play lots of golf. I look for ways to repay all the kindness given to me.

"If you need me to
Take your hand and pull you through,
Friends like you there are too few, just one or two
I will remember you"

Bobby Runk, "*I Will Remember You*"