

I miss the SOUND OF THE WIND

As a child, our large garden had many trees, and I remember lying in bed listening to the wind, and feeling secure. My parents were Christians, but as a teenager I had no belief in God – religion made no sense to my scientific way of thinking. Fortunately, I now know God believed in me.

I was one of the last to undertake 1st MB and entered St Thomas' in 1969. Studying was hard, and looking back some years later I realised I had a dyslexic 'trait' which meant I stumbled from one exam to another. Gradually I began to attend the Christian Union and a local church, where I was later confirmed. As my faith in God became a reality so I became a much happier and more confident person, and reading and studying immediately became easier.

After qualifying I trained as a GP but later changed to palliative medicine. Somewhere in all this I found time to train as an Anglican Reader. My faith and my spirituality have been moulded by working in palliative care, by the difficult questions, and by the pain of loss. For my own support I attended conferences organised by St Columba's Fellowship, where palliative care and spirituality could be explored together. Eventually I became a trustee of that organisation, which is now known as 'hospice23'.

My final few years of work were as Medical Director at Farleigh Hospice in Chelmsford. I was drawn there by exciting plans for the development of a brand new hospice, but sadly had to leave just one year before it opened.

Hearing loss

I had developed a high frequency hearing loss which gradually progressed. Eventually I could no longer hear conversation in noisy surroundings, and meetings were becoming increasingly difficult. Finally even one-to-one conversations could be a struggle. Over the years I found my own solutions: gadgets for the phone, a personal loop system, a fancy stethoscope, and ways of asking questions until I was sure of the content of discussions.

From time to time I went back to the hearing aid consultant to have the settings adjusted. Then one day I went hoping for another tweak, but one look at the audiogram told me I had lost some speech frequencies completely. This time there was no room for denial, and I was hit by the implications for work, knowing I was already missing more and more.

I remember that day. I also thank God now for his timing. Being given such devastating news coincided with a conference at Lee Abbey. Safe amongst friends I had grown to trust, but away from home and work, I had time to think things through.

So began a six month process. No one ever did decide if I was safe with a stethoscope, but from then on I always got someone to check. That however led to a feeling of inadequacy, and loss of

confidence. Occupational Health and my managers were brilliant, and after a risk assessment allowed me time to work through the implications as I made decisions for my future.

Medical retirement

I needed time to grieve, and could only cope with a few knowing I had applied to retire. Waiting for the official verdict was terrible, and a strain on those who did know, as they couldn't plan. Then, while at a similar conference six months later, the news came through that retirement had been granted. What timing! The right people again there for me, in the right surroundings, with time away from work. So I left the place I loved just one year before the new hospice was up and running.

I thank God now for his timing

'What are you going to do?' 'I am going to learn to be, not do', I replied. I still believe the difference is so important. Life didn't stop and new opportunities appeared. Farleigh moved, and I was able to be a tour guide! Church has moved on and we are looking at 'fresh expressions'. I still lead a home group, although struggle. They are very patient with me.

But as I look back, I can also see how God began years ago to provide the openings for the future. I now co-ordinate *hospice23*, mostly by email, and value supporting an organisation aiming to sustain a Christian presence at the heart of palliative care.

The sound of the wind

I am scared of the future. Hearing has vanished from my left ear, which used to be my good one. Surroundings are not silent but sound is distorted, and a room of people can be too noisy. It can be very lonely in company. I miss conversation, especially in groups, and prefer one-to-one. I can understand very little speech unless I can see the speaker, and depend on lip reading and subtitles. I miss the sound of the wind.

I am on the waiting list for a hearing dog, for company in a crowd as well as alerting me to alarms and bells. Perhaps this dog will signal my moving on another stage in my own journey, from denial to acceptance. And when I finally reach heaven, and healing will have taken place, I look forward to hearing the sound of the wind in the trees.

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