

I'm Here

By Marcus Engel

I keep hearing sounds: a siren, the clamor of EMS workers, the click of a stretcher as the wheels fall into place. Breaking glass, a woman screaming, the CB radio squawking in the ambulance. I can't put these sounds in order.

I can't listen to them.

I can't pay attention to them.

They just happen.

And they keep happening.

A woman shouts my name and orders me to lay still.

The 'whoosh' of automatic doors.

The taste of blood.

A warm blanket.

Pebbles of concrete under my hand.

And pain. God help me, the pain.

I was blind – immediately, totally, permanently; though no one would say for sure until the doctors had time to do some exploratory surgery. But, I knew. Deep down, I knew.

Now, here in the emergency room, white hot pain and utter confusion were my guides on the road to hell. Hands ravaged me. Hands everywhere. Cutting off my clothes, re-positioning my body, grabbing my arms and shoving needles into my flesh.

Gallons of morphine are pushed into an IV, it doesn't stop the pain, but it DOES get me so messed up on narcotics that I don't pay as much attention. The ability to think is completely shot. Memories don't hang around for more than a few seconds – then they're gone.

Exhaustion finally takes over and I fall into uncomfortable sleep. Even when I'm asleep, I hurt. God, the pain!

I awake with a mental crash landing. As soon as I grasp "this." This horror. This blackness. This rape of every square inch of my body. I'm bludgeoned into seeing white flashes of light. Not truly visual images, but the mental flashbulbs that explode with sudden pain. And

they never stop. Paparazzi flashbulb explosions of pain. One after another. Pain is all I know. I surrender to it.

"Marcus? Can you hear me?" asks a female voice.

I dip my chin. A searing jolt slices my head back into place. I gasp. As I do, the sucking sound of inhalation comes from my throat. My throat? Not my mouth?

The owner of the voice slips her fingers into my right hand. With her other hand, she lightly traces two fingers up my forearm.

"Marcus, you're in Barnes Hospital. You were in a car accident," comes the soft voice again, "Just rest now."

I obey. Back into sleep, back to the haunted terrors of hallucination.

Maybe minutes, maybe hours later, I slam back into consciousness. I find the familiar hand from before.

Everything below the neck aches with a dull pain, and everything above burns like dipping my head into a blast furnace. Fear and hurt take over. My breathing kick starts to the rate of a sprinter.

Again, those same questions come from the girl.

"Marcus? Can you hear me?"

I will NOT nod again and topple that boulder of pain. Instead, I squeeze the hand. She seems to understand. "Marcus, my name is Jennifer. You're in Barnes Hospital. You were in a car accident," Without thinking, I squeeze the hand again, just to show her I'm getting it.

She pauses. She gives my hand a soft squeeze. Then, the most comforting words of all, "I'm here."

I'm here. I don't even know where "here" is, other than some anonymous name like "Barnes Hospital." But I know I'm not alone. I'm hurt, I'm helpless and I'm scared. I cannot be alone. I cannot be alone. And she's here. This Jennifer girl with her soft hand and quiet voice. She's here.

Jennifer doesn't say her title, doesn't give her background nor her credentials, just bare bones information. Nothing else is necessary; and she knows it. All I need to know is that in this world of black – this ocean of pain, I am not alone.

"I'm here." Those two little words are a verbal embrace, a warm, safe place of protection for your patient. Patients relinquish all independence, all pride and all needs to you. Those words, "I'm here," give an anchor of security and reassurance. No one wants to be alone, especially in an unfamiliar place and with strange things happening. No one wants to be in a hospital, out of their usual element of safety and familiarity. Throw in the pain and fear of whatever their ailment entails and sometimes reassurance is what your patient needs most.

"I'm here" also secures your role as the caregiver. Let's just face it; the patient/caregiver relationship is similar to a child and parent. While the caregiver is on duty, they become the parent. The patient longs for the comfort that all children desire; knowledge that their parent is nearby and watching over them.

Those two simple little words can offer more hope and security than anything else you can say or do. As you leave one patient to attend another, use those two little words to reassure your patient that he/she is safe, secure and that all is well. Try it. You'll see your patient's comfort level raise and raise.

About the Author

Marcus Engel lived these horrific moments... but that is only the beginning of the story. On a cold autumn night during his freshman year of college, Marcus' life took a dramatic turn. Following a Saturday night hockey game, Marcus and some friends were headed to a local diner for a midnight snack. They never made it.

As the carload of teenagers pulled into a busy intersection, a drunk driver traveling at twice the speed limit slammed broadside into the small Toyota; only a thin piece of metal separated Marcus from the full impact of the oncoming vehicle.

When he awoke to a world he would never again see, Marcus faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles: survive hundreds of hours of reconstructive facial surgery, adapt to blindness and find happiness in a world changed forever.

While still restricted to a hospital bed, a feeding tube and respirator, Marcus set his goal: return to college as quickly as possible. This goal would sustain him through two years of medical recovery, a six-month stint at rehab school and one month training with a new Seeing Eye dog.

Not only did Marcus accept and embrace the challenge, but the life lessons he learned are now the guiding forces that inspire hundreds of thousands every day.

Marcus' story has empowered, enlightened and entertained audiences around the nation to overcome personal adversity and make intelligent decisions. His autobiography, *After This... An Inspirational Journey for All the Wrong Reasons* has helped tens of thousands realize their potential and reach for new goals. His latest book *The Other End of the Stethoscope* is an inspirational tribute to health care professionals, offering insight and strategies for excellent patient care.

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