



August 25, 2013

Dear Friends,

Notes like this don't come easy for me. This isn't an all inspired Jerry Maguire moment by any means. I don't like attention, and in cases like this still have much to learn about public relations. In fact until recently, I had come to the conclusion I was the only male under the age of 40 who didn't blog, didn't have a facebook account, had not taken an instagram, and consider twitter an irreparable source of widespread societal decay. So without the use of social media, please take a moment to learn about some important upcoming events for the Chatraw Family.

“Just the Facts, Ma’am.”

For those of you who are engineers, Dragnet fans, or survived your college literature classes, thanks to the notes of your friend Cliff, here's the short version of the story.

- God is the Sovereign Creator of the Universe who loves me, loves my family, and is working for good in our lives today amidst and through difficult circumstances. I know this because He promises this and illustrated it by sending Jesus, His divine Son, to die for me.
- Six years ago I was diagnosed with a rare autoimmune disorder impacting the ducts in my liver called PSC.
- The disease is chronic, with no known cases of reversal or regression and with no effective medications available for treatment. The only treatment protocol for PSC is a liver transplant which most often permanently resolves the condition if transplant outcome is good.
- Approximately three years ago, I began to experience mild and occasionally escalating symptoms. Although a nuisance, these symptoms were nearly undetectable by others and did not prohibit or even deter any type of activity.
- My symptoms and condition have drastically worsened in the last six months, most recently resulting in three hospital visits, a lot of hoopla, and a serious blood infection, which we believe has been resolved. As a result, my doctors have recommended I pursue a transplant as quickly as possible, else risk ongoing and more serious complications.
- Living liver transplants are not a good solution to my condition. Cadaver livers are awarded based on a quantitative scoring system, called a MELD score, which does not always reflect the underlying condition of a patient with PSC. Texas is one of the most difficult regions in the country to obtain a liver, while Florida is a location with more prevalent availability.
- At the recommendation and through the help of my physicians, Stephanie, Ivie and I are headed to the Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville, Florida on Thursday so that I can be evaluated and hopefully placed into their transplant program. Kelsy, Raelin, and Camden will stay here in Dallas under the care of family members that have traveled here from out of state
- The evaluation period will most likely take between 2 and 4 weeks. If accepted in the program, it is possible I will be required to stay in Florida for an unknown period of months to await the transplant. Alternatively, it is also conceivable, and perhaps more likely, that I will be sent “home” and called to return when my MELD scores suggest I'm pretty close to being awarded an organ. At this stage, we're praying for sooner, rather than later.



- We have been well cared for by family and friends. The degree of help we will need from others is largely dependent on exactly how long I will be in Florida, which will likely remain ambiguous and subject to change on a whim.
 - If you have not received prior email updates from Stephanie during my hospital admissions and would like to receive short periodic updates of material events or changes, please email Stephanie (stephanieking22@hotmail.com).
 - A friend set up the following link for anyone wishing to deliver meals to our kids and mom while we are away. <http://www.carecalendar.org/logon/158212> CALENDAR ID : 158212; SECURITY CODE : 7126
 - If you would like to be notified of any other periodic needs our family has while we are away, please email our dear friend Andrea (leenorwood2000@yahoo.com) who has so generously offered to coordinate our family's care. If needs do arise, she'll send out an email to those that have emailed here, as appropriate, seeking assistance.
- God's presence, provision, and blessing, both directly and through others, have been more apparent to us than ever these last few months. All things considered, we're doing very well.

“Now, you know the rest of the story.”

Well, not exactly yet, but now you've got enough data to deposit this note into the Cloud in good conscience. If you're the Paul Harvey type, here are some more details on this adventure. Read on at your own risk.

“Yeah, well, was ya ever punched in the face 500 times a night? It stings after a while, ya know.”

There may not be a more authentic and real American hero than Rocky Balboa, and one of the two things I loved most about Rocky were his ability to endure a beating and the fact he always called it like he saw it without a bunch of filler.

And, as I look back on the last year, I see a lot of scenes from Rocky I and Rocky II playing in the reel of life. For those of you who don't live your life between the lines of a sports movie analogy, Rocky I is the movie where Sylvester Stallone spends about 90 minutes getting the crap beaten out of him in the boxing ring by Apollo Creed. He gets knocked to the mat over and over again, but always gets back up, to the disbelief of just about everyone. At the end of the movie, he loses the fight, but is ordained a hero because he was not knocked out. Only in America, can you get pulverized in a fight, but come out as a cultural icon simply because you survived!

Rocky I ends with Rocky all bloodied-up in the ring, having won the respect of his opponent, who mutters, “Ain't gonna be no rematch.” to which Rocky replies, “Don't want one.” Well of course there was a rematch, and thank goodness, because without Rocky II, we would have never made it to Rocky III seen Rocky beat up Mr. T, and there would have not been a Rocky IV in which Rocky beats up the Soviet commie, and odds are Reagan would have never gotten us out of the Cold War.

“Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice....”

Saint Peter was one smart dude. I guess when God makes you the first Pope he imparts some wisdom on you. A couple thousand years ago he wrote these words to the early Christian churches that had formed and were spreading throughout the Mediterranean areas of Turkey. He tells them, “Hey, you made this decision to become a follower of Jesus, so why are you suddenly surprised by all the suffering



you are enduring. Did you think it was going to be easy? That's not the way God works. Life is not easy, and just because you become a Christian doesn't mean the circumstances you face are going to be easy. In fact the circumstances and challenges you face are going to actually be tougher because you have chosen to follow Jesus". [Subsequently he proceeded to pass an offering plate and deliver a free copy of "Your Best Life Now" to anyone contributing more than 9.99 Liras.] That's not exactly the message that most people want to hear when they go to church these days.

"That was some of the best flying I've seen....Right up to the point where you got killed".

So, fast forward about twenty centuries back into my life, and I have to admit, that I've experienced not just surprise, but utter shock and awe as bombs have exploded around me the last year. This extends way beyond the realm of health and into pretty much every area of my life with the exception of my family. This hasn't just been some cold streak or batting slump or even a general progression where things didn't go the way I had hoped. Rather, I'm talking about uncanny, here one day gone the next, you-wouldn't-fully-believe-me-even-if-you-had-all-the details scenarios that have shredded areas of my life that were both important, purposeful, and righteous.

I really hate drama and when possible have always been quick to parachute myself out of situations or relationships that are heavy on the dramatic. So I'm certainly not trying to be melodramatic and definitely am not implying that I've endured a Rocky I period of life because of my faith. Making the call whether difficulty and suffering are ordained by God, allowed by God, created by Evil, or are simply the result my our own stupidity are probably circumstance by circumstance calls, and in this case, way above my pay grade. All I'm trying to say is that I was surprised, and I shouldn't have been, and I'm not going to be surprised anymore because we don't live in a world where we grow without suffering--because these are the things that God works through to make our character more like His when we endure and trust Him in the midst of suffering,

"This is a very simple game. You throw the ball, you catch the ball, you hit the ball. Sometimes you win, sometimes you lose, sometimes it rains."

What's around the corner for the Chatraws? We don't know. Really, we don't have a clue. Yes, we've probably had some of the same thoughts that you're thinking right now, and we're asking ourselves some of the same exact questions that may be running through your mind. As we head out to Jacksonville, we could be back in a week, my symptoms may calm and we may be back fully in the swing of life. Or things may escalate, and I may have a very short trip to the Orange Bowl, new organ in hand, to watch the Ramblin Wreck upset whatever overrated foe the NCAA monarchy ordains they face in January.

Thus, we've learned to be good at living amidst ambiguity. Jesus commanded his followers to not worry about tomorrow for two reasons: 1) because worrying about tomorrow adds nothing; Zero; Nilch; Negative value. 2) because tomorrow will have its own worries and they probably won't be the same ones you're anxious about today.

We've learned not to try and plan ten steps down the road, but rather, to go one step at a time, to simplify and play the game pitch by pitch. We've learned to trust God in the moment and specifically I've learned that God's promise of provision is not always in coordination with hard work, but is often in coordination with pure, unmerited grace. Every single need we have had – spiritual, emotional, and physical – has been met, often out of the blue, sometimes before we even ask, and occasionally by others who have had no clue we even had a need. We only have one play in our playbook right now: we're going to trust in the Lord, we'll seek wisdom from him and the sage counsel He has placed in our lives through others, and we're going to obey when He tells us to act.



“I don't throw darts at a board. I bet on sure things.....Blue Horseshoe loves Anacott Steel.”

The amount of ambiguity we have faced has led me to spend a lot of time reflecting on what is not ambiguous; that which I know, have learned, and have experienced to be unyielding truth. As such, I'll close by sharing a few of these truths with you:

- I know that God is Sovereign and that He has either ordained or allowed me to experience everything our family faces today, tomorrow, and the next day.
- I know that God loves me and that He is working for good in all things for me.
- I know that God is on my side and that the Creator of the Universe will fight for me and he will fight for my family.
- I know that God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, and because I believe in Him and confess Him as Lord, my life will not end at death. I know that God promises this to all those who believe in Jesus.
- I know that I have been blessed with a family and friends that love me and are fiercely loyal. They have illustrated love in a real, tangible manner, sacrificing selflessly for my benefit with no expectation of anything in return.
- I know that prayer is heard by God and is effective to the extent it is consistent with His character and will. I know this because I have experienced it through the prayers of hundreds of others throughout the world, most of whom I have been too prideful to solicit on my own accord.

“It's two minutes to closing, Gordon. What do you want to do? Decide.”

If you've made it this far and you're not my Mom, then you've absorbed as much drama as you'll probably ever hear from me. Don't plan on a lot of long-winded messages going forward; best bet to stay connected is via the details earlier in this letter. We'll do our best to keep everyone up to speed, and please know that out of sight is not out of mind.

We're truly blessed, so incredibly thankful for our friends and family. confident in our God, and excited to watch Him work in the midst of all of this craziness.

Blessings,

Ben, Steph, Kebz, Rae, Camden, and Ivie