

**RELECTIONS**  
**12 YEARS AFTER ANESTHESIA AWARENESS**  
**January 24, 2010**

Every year on the anniversary of my anesthesia awareness, I do free writing reflecting on the last year and the continuing sequelae of anesthesia awareness in my own life. I have chosen to share these raw reflections not for sympathy, but to show the world what anesthesia awareness wreaks even after many years.

After feeling somewhat lost, disoriented, depressed, and unmotivated for the last couple of months, I came to a startling realization while sitting in church one week before the anniversary: I don't have a life plan because somehow I never thought I would still be alive today! I should not be surprised, because my intellect knows that victims of awareness have a foreshortened vision of the future (which is not to say a foreshortened lifespan). This does not mean I consciously considered suicide (though I do remember consciously thinking I would not avoid death - like not getting out of the way of an oncoming car). It doesn't mean I consciously thought I would die for any specific reason (though I could easily have died during my hysterectomy bleed-out and three-day coma). I just knew the stats and the histories of so many victims who don't care whether they live or die, that I never planned to be here this long. Unnerving, but profoundly enlightening.

I continue to believe that awareness victims don't fear much because they can't imagine anything worse than awareness. I indeed feel I was in hell twelve years ago, and by God's grace, I came back.

Now, as many of you know, I believe this whole Campaign is the result of God's mission for my life. If I truly believe that (and I do), then I must assume my work is not done yet.

I am neither happy nor sad to be alive today - I just am. I've been searching in books about motivation, procrastination, ADD, depression, OCD, and other self-help tomes. Nothing has hit yet. I read daily meditations, hymns, and the Bible. I pray regularly especially for the victims.

As I look back over the last 12 years, there is no doubt that much has been accomplished - and I believe everything is the result of God's guidance. Many victims have somehow found The Campaign, and with that they find someone who understands them and what happened to them. The publicity garnered by the Campaign is documented in Google, and even that list is not totally inclusive. This Campaign has taken me to places I would never have dreamt and for reasons I could not have fathomed (i.e., the U.S. Supreme Court, the red carpet at a movie premiere, twice to Europe, to name just a few). The web hits speak for themselves. The invitations to speak have been humbling; the media attention surprising. What was once a bitter rivalry with the ASA has been turned to one of mutual respect and collaboration. I can now call many, many anesthesiologists friends. An awareness database that really listens to victims has been established.

Certainly huge obstacles have been overcome with anesthesia professional organizations. I am saddened that the aftermath of my speech to the ASA in New Orleans last October has met mixed reviews with regard to perceived bias. At the time, it was a highlight of my work. The moderator of the panel told the audience that this was the first time a layperson had lectured at an ASA annual meeting. The Campaign has been a co-signatory on a new brochure about Anesthesia Awareness. These are positive steps!

Yet, after twelve years I still sleep in a recliner with the lights on and TV playing softly, still can't bear to lie on my back, still wake up too many times a night - though my sleep is finally yielding some dreaming

in the true sense of the word, though most of those dreams still place me in uncontrollable situations. I'm still on many psychiatric meds, and I'm not an easy friend. I most surely changed twelve years ago. I am not the person I was. I can be difficult to get along with; I have memory lapses and have trouble finding words; I am surely much more reclusive than I ever was before 1998; my family relationships have suffered; I'm not self-sufficient at all. I am intolerant of noises in general and some specific noises (like automatic blood pressure cuffs and children), crowds, exaggerated startle responses, and generally responding to triggers of awareness. I have been damaged by trauma. I have one heck of a case of PTSD. I don't always like myself. My faith has increased greatly and has become that rock and resting place where I return time after time after time.

What's even more tragic is that, as I tell every victim I speak with, "[I] am neither alone nor crazy! There are thousands of people just like me because of anesthesia awareness.

I'm depressed and frustrated by my lack of ability to get around on my own because I can't drive. My vision deteriorates notably. I can't see faces; I don't see television. I have trouble simply appreciating the gracious help people give me; I grumble about the things that being dependent demand instead of being eternally grateful to kind souls.

I speak up way too much. I truly believe what I say is true and necessary to discuss; but it doesn't meet society's demands for patience and political appropriateness.

I'm great at lofty goals and lousy on accomplishing them. My mind wanders, and I spend far too much time wasting time. I don't have a lot of close friends because I am not a good close friend.

It appears from this writing that I am depressed, to say the least. Tears are flowing, which is not unusual at the end of January.

I desperately want to write a book about the Campaign and the sequelae of awareness - but I don't write and organize and accomplish. My to-do lists are exhaustive and exhausting to even think about - yet my checkmarks are few.

As I read this reflection, I realize just how depressed I am, and know I am depressing to others. I must somehow turn this around, and with God's help, I will. Maybe anniversary 13 will be a better one!

Anesthesia Awareness remains a tragedy, a serious traumatic event, a scourge, and a life-changing event. Indeed, one case is one too many. Fixing something as fixable as awareness should not take more than 12 years! We must find a way to prevent and treat it now!

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Reston, Virginia  
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