

MY JOURNEY: Disappointments Are Not Destinations

By Brad Mattrisch



A young couple in their 20s fell in love and decided to get married, thinking that together they could make northeast Wisconsin a better place. That first year, eager to start a family, they welcomed their first child, a little girl, into their home. Soon after that, a baby boy was born. Life on the farm was sweet, so the couple planned to have one more child.

Unfortunately, they experienced perhaps the biggest disappointment in their lives on the morning that their second son was born. He experienced a delay in breathing for 26 minutes, and all of their hopes and dreams were shattered.

The doctors at St. Vincent's in Green Bay told my parents that I would probably die or live as a "vegetable" for the rest of my life. My family believed that God changes things when His people pray. I live each day as a testimony of His grace.

Since my family lived in Pound, a rural community, our school district didn't offer services for children with disabilities and decided to transport me to Green Bay. There I received services such as occupational, physical and speech therapies. The school had a time set aside every week for swimming, a great form of exercise for people with cerebral palsy.

My time in Green Bay was vital in building a framework for my family to deal with my disability and allow me to pursue my potential. More importantly, as I grew, I developed a love for God's Word and began attending a Special Touch camp in Waupaca for people with disabilities.

I now have the privilege of working as an Assemblies of God minister with Special Touch Ministry, a national organization that provides lots of opportunities for people with disabilities to experience God, to be included in the

church, and to build meaningful relationships with believers. That is exactly what takes place each summer all over America through our Summer Get Away Program.

But even as God guided my path into this fulfilling ministry, He used challenges and heartache along the way. I journeyed through a series of setbacks that seemed to build on each other in an attempt to break me.

In 2004, my mom, who was in her mid-60s, became very ill as a result of diabetes. She needed heart surgery. We would "chat" online every day, and she did many things for me like make my phone calls.

Following the surgery, my mom spent 11 weeks in the hospital in serious condition. I believed God was going to heal her, but after several weeks of steady improvement, she had a massive stroke and went to be with Jesus.

While I was deeply disappointed that God didn't do what I expected, my focus quickly turned to my girlfriend who was placed in a nursing home three weeks later.

She was having issues with her spasticity (tightening of certain muscles as a result of cerebral palsy), so she had a pump implanted in her abdomen to try to control it with regular medication. This also involved a long hospital stay and a lengthy rehab.

A year later, I was told that I needed the same pump to help me with arthritis, pain and spasticity. After much prayer, I sensed God leading me to trust Him and get the pump. The day after my ministerial ordination interview, I had surgery to implant the pump. I was very sick following surgery and had to spend a month recovering at my dad's home.

Six months after my surgery, my dad had a stroke and would never be the same. He then had a number of heart attacks.

God called him home during Thanksgiving 2006. I treasure the month that my dad took care of me and brought me back to health.

I experienced another big disappointment in 2007. Upon completion of a multiyear project to design and implement business systems at Kikkoman plants around the world, the contract with my company for IT services was not renewed. I was out of a job.

Yet, God used that final loss to propel me into the ministry I now enjoy. I have the privilege of connecting with so many people who face challenges similar to my own. That sounds to me like what the apostle Paul was talking about when he wrote to the Corinthian believers: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Corinthians 1:3,4, NIV).

From that earliest season of disappointment my parents experienced when they first heard the words cerebral palsy applied to me, through every heartache or setback or challenge our family experienced, God remained faithful. He is always "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort." And at Special Touch, I can introduce so many hurting people to Him.

I hope you know Him, too. **e**

BRAD MATTRISCH is the national coordinator of Support Ministries for Special Touch Ministry, Inc., in Waupaca, Wis.

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