

My story? Simple. Tragedy, sorrow, laughter. Who's life isn't? I brought my uplifting, hysterically funny personality to my troubles. Who doesn't? Apparently not many. After years of childhood doctors telling my mother, she's just lazy, I believed them too. I married the wrong man in my late teens and suffered through a weird marriage and nasty divorce - but two of the most wonderful daughters later, I still survived my "Laziness". All the while the hospital stays were determined to be "In my head" ...lazy? Hmmm. Must be. The doctors are still saying Lazy. It was not until I was 28 years old that one doctor told me I wasn't lazy...I had a very hard to diagnose disease that effects mostly women of child bearing age. Systemic Lupus Erythemetosis . Yikes, a woman's disease. I wish I were only lazy. This incurable, terminal illness is in your face - deadly. So when the doctors told me I had about 3 months to get my affairs in order, I decided that I would not die and let my rat of an ex-husband get the girls AND the house. See, your mind can make you sick or it can make you well. I had to be well. For my girls. So, there is the beginning of my story. In the 80's - Ductal Carcinoma and double Mastectomies. Funny? Sometimes. In the 90's, hysterectomy (suspicious Uterine cells) - funny? Yup. Especially the Hot flashes. Boy I laughed all the way to the soy bean counter, next to the "Personal automatic fan" department. All the while dealing with the real killer, Lupus.

More people have Lupus than Cystic Fibrosis, Multiple Sclerosis, and Aids combined, yet it is still considered by most doctors to be "in your head". In 2003 Readers Digest printed an article of the top 10 hardest diseases to diagnose. Yes, you guessed it, Lupus was up there at the top. So, it's not in my head, I'm not lazy and in 1993, My doctor suggested I hang up my professional career and apply for permanent disability. My body was showing signs of too much wear and tear. Social Security Administration denied my claim. I appealed but was denied. So, with bad health continuing to mount, I needed to feed myself and pay the rent. So I got a series of stressful jobs which helped the Lupus spiral out of control. And.... this is only back ground. My sad sad story hasn't even started yet. Well, it's actually a great story, depending on how you look at it. In 1999, I was back on top as an executive at a very large, powerful corporation. Fell in love with my brother's best friend and married the man of my prayers June 6, 2001. I was again applying for permanent disability at the request of my doctor as my Lupus was attacking my heart and I had a severe Mitral Valve Regurgitation. Yet that man 'O' mine didn't care. He loved me just like I was, Broken heart and all. Five months after we got married, Ted got sick. The VA Hospital didn't know it was cancer until 1 ½ years later. Ted's got cancer, we have custody of his daughters and I'm not working. So, no money, lots of illness and We find ourselves at the mercy of a system of the social programs offered by the government. We qualified for food stamps and medical care but kept slipping through the system and denied any benefits. My savings is gone, the VA hospital is a nightmare if you are sick and dying, and I've got to hold it together for the sake of the children. Did I mention that stress will kill anyone with Lupus? I'm trying to find my happy, funny place in my head but I could not get through. I kept going to agencies, my congressman, David Dryer, and anyone who could help my dying husband and his children. I appealed the denial for permanent disability AGAIN. My specialists are appalled that the State doctors and administrative law judge are denying my claim. And Ted is dying. We were hungry and the house is in foreclosure. I need medication, The girls need therapy, Ted only has a few months to live. Oh, in the mean time, my Mother dies of Cancer, and all four of my beloved dogs die, and Ted's time is near. Darkness closing in? How much more can my heart take?

The dark hole I was in was getting deeper and deeper, I'm getting dangerously ill as I have no

medical insurance and need to see my specialists NOW. I just couldn't do it anymore. It felt like I was in the middle of the Ocean, No one else around. I was treading water, In one hand, I was holding on to Ted who could not move, in the other hand the children who were scared and very frail. I prayed and ask God to help. The next morning, I received a phone call. Hello, My name is Barbara Case from Compassion in Action. I understand you could use some help? (God? Is that you?) A little tiny hand reaches into the dark abyss and pulls me closer to the top. The light is still far away. She got us food, and temporary medical care. She started working through the system and was a light unto our family. With Barbara's help, I started to see the good and funny again. You see, when Ted died, I finally saw with clarity that he was not MY gift that I had prayed for, but I was his. You see, before we got married, he did not know salvation nor the beauty of Christ. We attended services at my church as a family. So when I walked him up the steps of Heaven and handed him over to God, I was honored that I had been chosen as his best 2 ½ years before his flight took him home. How blessed am I? Very. 2 ½ years married to Ted was still better than most people get in their lifetime. And I left out the really bad parts of my story, who wants to read the grueling truth of what life hands you. I want to sing praises to God and thank him for my wonderful life. To the outside looking in, it is a really horrible life I have had, but that is not the case. I find the beauty in living. I would not be alive today if not for the intervention of that brave woman who is on a Divine mission. She reached her tiny little hand into my dark, desperate world and brought me back. I will always love her.

Sincerely,
Barbara