

# **IN THE HANDS OF GOD**

**By Phil and Linda Benedict**

P.O. Box 496  
Ridge MD 20680

# **In the Hands of God**

## **...surviving two serious bouts of viral encephalitis**

**...by Phil and Linda Benedict**  
**...written in 1995**

One trial that my wife, Linda, and I personally experienced was my having two life threatening bouts of viral encephalitis. We decided to include this story as our own personal testimony of the love and care of God in times of deep trials. We have omitted names and places to protect people and places involved. Both my wife, Linda, and I wrote about this part of our lives and then I put the two stories together, so there is some overlap.

Every Christian experiences God's hand on his life. Yet, no two of us experience the exact same things in our walk with Him. God, in His wisdom, twice saw fit to bring me close to death with encephalitis. I do not understand all the reasons why. But I can say that I have a deep sense that my life is in God's hands and that He has a purpose for me. Actually, this is no more true of me than it is of any other follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all in the hands of God.

I was also close to death at least two other times, following open heart surgery in 2019. That is not part of this story, but I can again say that I experienced the presence and faithfulness of our Lord in my life.

I would like to say that the Lord spared my life and gave me a lifetime of ministry, not because of my great faith, but rather because He is a faithful God and He has a purpose for my life. This is no more true of me than it is for any other disciple of Christ. Actually, my faith has often been weak, but God worked in spite of my weak faith. We can all be happy that God works in and through us, even when our faith wavers. I would like to say that the Lord gets the credit, not me. I do not deserve what God has done for me. Thank you, Lord.

I have had two serious bouts of viral encephalitis, once in 1986 and then again in 1994. I do not understand all about the sovereignty of God, but I do believe that I am alive today because many of God's people cared enough to pray. Each time I was sick, many prayed and God answered. No one prayed more than Linda, my wife, who deeply loves me and had faith to believe that God was in complete control, no matter how bad the circumstances were.

Encephalitis is an infection of the brain. In some cases, it can be relatively minor and an individual may not even know that he had it. In other cases, it can be deadly. Some kinds are reported to have up to a seventy percent mortality rate. Some who do live are severely brain damaged or paralyzed or both. Some remain an invalid for life. For some others, it takes years before they are able to return to a productive life. Those who do have a more complete recovery often will still experience long term symptoms such as short and long-term memory problems, chronic fatigue, headaches, slowed responses, decreased concentration, and a host of other kinds of physical problems. I still experience some of these symptoms, such as memory problems, fatigue, slowed responses, and decreased concentration. Fortunately, I do not have a major headache problem that many encephalitis survivors

experience. Overall, however, my recovery is remarkable considering how severe both of my bouts with viral encephalitis were. One doctor, who was not a Christian, recently (2009) stated that it is nothing short of a miracle that I came through two bouts of encephalitis with my brain functioning at its present level. I can only thank God for the health He has given me, and I have committed myself to serving Him as long as He gives me the physical and mental ability to do so.

## **OUR STORY**

### **Phil**

A few years ago, when I was in my early thirties, life looked good. I had graduated from both Bible college and a state university, and I was close to finishing a master's degree in secondary school administration. I had worked my way through college by working as an electrician. I had worked long enough and taken the classes necessary to become a licensed journeyman electrician. I had a good job as an electrician, had an exceptional wife, four tremendous kids, owned a tri-level house, and was the pastor of a small church.

In 1979 and 1980, both of my parents and Linda's mother all passed away within nine months of each other. After the death of our parents, we decided to begin looking into the possibility of entering full time Christian service. A couple of years later found us in the Amazon jungles of Ecuador, South America, where I was supervising the electrical installations in a mission hospital being built out in the jungle. We spent two years in Ecuador. All of us, my wife and I and our four kids, look back on those two years as two of the most enjoyable years of our lives. Our kids thoroughly enjoyed it and had many experiences that only a few kids ever get to have.

I had been accepted as a member of Missionary TECH Team, the organization that had designed and was building the mission hospital. After finishing our work in Ecuador, we returned to our home in Idaho to get ready to move to Texas, the headquarters of Missionary TECH Team.

Little did I know that before we could move to Texas, my whole life would be turned upside down by a disease that I had never heard of -- viral encephalitis.

### **Linda**

It was a cold February day in 1986 in Idaho. The Benedict family was warm and happy in their older home in the country. Phil was an electrician and I (Linda) was a stay-at-home mom. Our four children were about 10, 13, 14 and 16 years old. It had been an average winter with the usual colds and viruses. The first week or so in February Phil missed three or four days of work because of the flu. He went back to work for two or three days, but woke up on February 13 not feeling well again.

I phoned his boss and told him Phil would not be in for work that day. As the day progressed, Phil began to get more quiet, and seemed to be getting more unresponsive to what I was saying. I asked him if I should call the doctor and as a typical man, he said "no". By evening I realized something was drastically wrong and I called the ambulance to come and take him to the hospital. We spent all night in the emergency room and by the next morning, Valentine's Day, they had admitted him to the

hospital, and the doctor came to me with the diagnosis of viral encephalitis. By this time Phil had slipped into a deep coma. A day later, the doctor said there was a one-third chance that Phil would die, a one-third chance that he would live but be permanently brain damaged or paralyzed or both, or a one-third chance that he would live with some degree of recovery. This was a shock, but I believed that God would take care of him. About 9:00 AM our pastor came in and prayed with me. After that, God gave me such a perfect peace that He was in control of the situation and that everything would be all right. It was a supernatural peace that I cannot explain and that I had never experienced before.

### **Phil**

In early February, 1986, the flu was making the rounds, and even though I don't normally catch it, this time I did. The bout with the flu wasn't particularly significant except that about one week later I woke up with a headache. I almost went to work, but my wife persuaded me to stay home. That is the last thing I remember for the next two weeks or so. As the day progressed I evidently became less and less responsive. My wife knew something was wrong, but I refused to go to the doctor or hospital. Late that afternoon my wife called an ambulance and off to the hospital I went. By that night I was in a coma. The next day they told my wife I was suffering from viral encephalitis. For the next few days my condition deteriorated. They never gave Linda much hope for my recovery. They also indicated that if I did recover, it could take months, perhaps years.

In parts of this story, I talk about my faith in God. When I was young, I made the choice to put my trust in Jesus Christ and commit my life to serving Him. It would be difficult to tell my story without reporting how my faith in Him and the faith of my extraordinary wife, Linda, was part of our experience with two severe cases of encephalitis. My wife deeply loved her husband (me) and after hearing what the doctor said, she was devastated. Within a few minutes after the doctors had talked to my wife, our pastor came into the hospital room to visit Linda. They prayed for my recovery and he prayed that Linda would have the strength to go through the trials ahead. There were also quite a number of other friends and family who were praying for us. My wife vividly remembers that after our pastor prayed, she experienced a deep sense of peace. She did not know what the outcome of my sickness would be, but she knew that God was in control and everything was going to be all right. That peace sustained her throughout my recovery.

### **Linda**

It was a Catholic hospital and I can remember the "sisters" hovering around and coming in every few minutes to check on me and make sure that I was all right. I guess they expected me to "fall apart" or get hysterical or something. They were amazed at the peace that I had. Psalm 46:1,2 says that God is our strength and our help, and we will not fear, no matter what happens. God gave me the peace and strength to do what needed to be done while Phil was sick.

The first thing that I did was to call friends and family all over the world and ask them to pray for Phil. People were praying for Phil in Ecuador, Africa, Mexico, Florida, New York, Washington, California, Texas, and many states in between. I believe that God answers prayer.

Every afternoon I would pick our kids up after school at 3:30 and take them home, fix supper for them, and then go back up to the hospital until 9:30 or 10:00. I would go home and spend the night with our kids, take them to school in the morning, and then go back up to the hospital until it was time to pick them up again. I wanted to stay with Phil every minute, but I felt that it was also important that I be

with our children and reassure them and keep the routine in their lives. As I sat by Phil's bedside day after day, I kept praying that God would heal him, and would let us continue with our plans to be in Texas by fall to work with Missionary TECH Team.

As I sat there, I also read the Bible. God gave me two verses that really meant a lot to me during those difficult times. The first was I John 4:18. *"There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear..."* The second one was Psalm 4:8. *"I will lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety."* These verses further removed my fears and gave me peace that God loved us and would take care of us.

During Phil's illness many of our friends came to the hospital to visit and to pray with me. I continue to marvel at how the Lord works out the perfect timing for all situations. We have a friend that we grew up with. After high school he went away to college and when he married, he and his wife moved to the Southwest where he pastored a church. They only got back to Idaho once in a while to visit. Phil and I had spent two years in the Midwest going to school and then later we spent two years in Ecuador, so we had only seen him a few times in the twenty or so years since high school. God, in His love and compassion, arranged it so that he was in Boise when Phil was in the hospital with encephalitis. His wife had had a major stroke several years earlier and he knew something of what I was going through. As well as encouragement, he gave me much helpful information about organizing all of the bills and taking care of financial matters.

### **Phil**

During this time, I was in a deep coma. I can only tell this story from what my wife and others told me. For the next couple of days there was little change in my condition. I was literally being kept alive by machines, wires, and tubes. I had several IV's, was on a breathing machine, feeding machine, heart monitor, a "foley", and who knows what else.

On the sixth day of being in a coma, I began to wake up. As I was waking up, I can remember looking around and realizing that I was in a hospital. I wondered why I was there and why I was connected to all those machines. A nurse came in and was surprised when she saw me awake, looking around, and moving. Soon Linda came in and in a very calm way explained what had taken place and why I was in the hospital. I will never be able to convey how my wife encouraged me at that critical point in my life. She explained what encephalitis was, and then went on to say that everything was going to be okay. Her calmness was deeply reassuring and I accepted what she said. At that point I did not worry about my recovery.

### **Linda**

On the fourth day of his hospitalization, Phil opened one eye briefly. On the next day, he opened both eyes and then closed them again. There didn't seem to be any recognition of anyone or anything, but the coma was less deep. On the sixth day when I got to the hospital about 9:00 AM, he was awake and talking. I thought my heart would burst with joy. He was awake, but after being in a coma for 6 days, it takes a bit to get back to normal. I didn't know what to expect, but soon found out.

One of the first things that Phil asked me was where he was and why he was there. I told him he was in the hospital and had viral encephalitis, which is an infection of the brain. The next question was how long had he been there. I told him six days. His next statement was that it must have cost \$2,000 so far. I just smiled and said, "at least that". I knew that it was well over \$10,000 at that point. That was a lot of money for a young family in those days, but I didn't want him to worry about it.

During those first days after Phil regained consciousness, several things happened that made me realize that it could be a long haul before Phil was back to normal. While I was sitting by his bed, he asked me several times to close the window to keep the rain out. The window wasn't open, and it wasn't raining. He asked me if one of the medical machines was a radio. It was almost like a child seeing something for the first time, and wondering what it was. When he tried to pick up a glass of water to drink it, his coordination was off and he couldn't make his hand go to the glass to pick it up. His balance was so far off that he couldn't stand up straight or walk. Several days after Phil woke up, on a Sunday morning, I was sitting by his bed listening to the music that they play in the hallways of the hospital. Phil heard it too, recognized the song, and began singing the words along with the music. I knew from that moment on that he was going to be all right. The song he sang was, "No One Ever Cared For Me Like Jesus".

### **Phil**

I don't remember much of anything from the week after I woke up. My mind was still not functioning very well. I do remember one time I tried to walk. My coordination and balance were very poor and I couldn't walk without help. I also remember being strapped in a chair, and needing to go to the bathroom. I was supposed to call for help, but I decided that I didn't need a nurse to help me go to the bathroom. I somehow managed to get out of the restraints, hang on to my IV pole and shuffle and stumble my way into the bathroom where I successfully carried out my mission. I thought it was great progress, but shortly afterward I was chewed out rather soundly by both the nurse and my wife. One other thing I do remember. It really was raining in my room!!! I still clearly remember it.

### **Linda**

After another week in the hospital, it was time for me to go to the hospital finance office and make arrangements for payment before they would discharge Phil from their care. Since we were on deputation raising finances so Phil could become a full-time staff member at Missionary TECH Team, and since Phil expected to work at his job only a short time, we did not have any medical insurance. Everyone was quite healthy so we did not worry about it. The hospital gave me a whole stack of forms to fill out for financial aid from various organizations and through various programs. I took these home and looked at them and it just seemed like God wanted me to just trust Him to get the bills paid. So, the next day I went back to the office and told them that I would like to have a month to see how God would work it out for me to pay the bills. Surprisingly, they said they would give me three months. This was a very large hospital and they just don't do things like that; but that time they did.

I told our pastor our situation, and he suggested that he write a letter to all of our friends and supporters and tell them of our need, which he did. Our church set up an account for us to handle any money that came in for our medical expenses. God answered our prayers for help and the money began coming in. We were amazed and overwhelmed at the generosity of everyone. Several weeks later the hospital finance office called me and asked me how our finances were coming. I told them

we had about \$3,000 so far and I would bring it in and make a payment soon. To my amazement, they told me not to worry about it. They said they had extra funds in one of their accounts to aid people in need, and they were going to pay our entire hospital bill which was about \$11,000. Praise the Lord! They said to keep whatever money we had and use it to help pay all of the doctors and for the tests, etc., which all amounted to more than the hospital bill!

Before Phil could go home, he was transferred to another hospital for physical rehabilitation. He spent a week there as an in-patient and another week as an out-patient. By then he seemed to be functioning fairly normally. Everyone said he was making a remarkable recovery. He went back to work as an electrician the next week, but had to quit because he experienced "brain fatigue" rather quickly. This condition slowly improved as time went on.

### **Phil**

The next week I was transferred to a physical rehabilitation hospital to learn to walk again. I was irritated at not being allowed to go home, and I did my best to show them that I didn't need to be there. Even before my rehabilitation started, I got out of the wheel chair and walked down the hall with only a cane. The next day I walked to the dining room by myself without help. Nobody ever told me what I could or couldn't do. I just tried to stay ahead of them. I was also evaluated by a psychiatrist who tried to undermine my faith in God, and he was promptly tuned out by this hard-nosed patient. In another week I was allowed to go home, but had to keep coming back to the hospital as an out-patient.

The doctor did not say anything about when I should go back to work, so after a couple of weeks at home I figured it was time to get on with life and start preparing for a move to Texas to join Missionary TECH Team. I went back to work as an electrician. I worked less than a week and it started becoming painfully obvious that my mind was simply not what it had been. I would work for two or three hours, and my mind would simply stop functioning. I simply couldn't think. I had to come home by noon. This pattern repeated itself for three days in a row, and the work I was doing would have to be re-done by someone else. By the end of the first week, I was fired (laid-off).

By this time, it was beginning to sink in just how serious my sickness had been. The bills were piling up and I didn't have the ability to work at my job. I wondered how I was going to support my wife and our four kids. At that time our kids were about 10, 13, 14 and 16 years old. The following days were the darkest of my life. I went from depression to deep despair. I was brain damaged. I could no longer work, support my wife and children, or be any good for anything, and the future that I was looking forward to was apparently gone. I cannot describe the mental anguish I went through in those dark days. I tried to put up a good front but inside I was in anguish, and I couldn't talk to anyone, not to my wife, or anyone else. Even my faith in God was in shambles and at times I wondered why, if He were really there, He had allowed me to become such a useless brain damaged person.

I cannot explain how, but somehow in the middle of my despair, God reached down and began to calm my troubled heart and soul. Eventually while still in a pit of depression, I decided that God was still leading us to work at Missionary TECH Team and that I would continue to go that direction. In the meantime, there were bills still coming in and we also had the normal living expenses. I got another job as an electrician, worked another week and was fired again. Then another job and for the third time was fired again. My brain was simply not functioning right. I really don't remember much from those months, but somehow, I was able to work enough to get by and get ready to move to Texas. Seven months after I came down with encephalitis, we were on our way to Texas to join the staff of

Missionary TECH Team. Also because of the generosity of friends and family, by the time we moved to Texas all our medical bills were paid in full.

### **Linda**

The next month or two were a time of depression for Phil, wondering if he would ever be able to work again and how he would support his family and could we still work as missionaries. I didn't know the answer to these questions, but I knew that God would take care of us and direct us. I did everything that I could to encourage Phil and take his mind off of the problems. Before Phil and I got married, we enjoyed bowling. Now it seemed like this would be something fun to do and would also help him regain his strength. While our kids were at school, we did quite a bit of bowling for several months, and it seemed to help us both.

Phil made the decision that unless God definitely closed the door, we would still aim to move to Texas that summer and begin working with Missionary TECH Team. God, in His mercy and love, gave Phil almost a complete recovery and at the end of August, we moved to Texas and began working with MTT. All of our medical bills were paid and enough money had come in to keep us going while Phil was out of work. Praise the Lord!

### **Phil**

It is my feeling that, with time, I made about a ninety-five percent recovery. I forced myself to think and to use my mind, and I was able to do most of the work at Missionary TECH Team. I would get tired easily, but I was able to adjust by varying my schedule and not trying to do too much when I was having a "bad" day.

Considering everything, the work at Missionary TECH Team went fairly well. I was doing a number of different things. I did electrical work for several different missions, did some electrical design, and represented TECH at several different colleges. I was traveling and enjoying it. However, I was also sensing that God was leading on to a more direct ministry. After being with Missionary TECH Team for a total of five years (including the time in Ecuador), when asked to become the director of a ministry in Oklahoma, I accepted.

In Oklahoma I became friends with a Choctaw Indian man, who had at one time been a multi-millionaire and the founder and president of a Fortune 500 company. When I met him, he was going through bankruptcy, having lost everything because of his alcohol addiction. I do not believe that I have ever worked with a man as spiritually hungry as he was. We spent many hours studying the Word of God and praying together. As our friendship grew, he encouraged me to seriously start thinking about a ministry working with alcoholics and other drug addicts. At first, I resisted, but we did visit several recovery centers and then began to put together plans for a recovery center. To my surprise we were given the use of a beautiful 95-acre camp site on the Illinois River. There, for the next six years, we worked together in a program designed to help addicts get victory over their addictions. I was the director and Bible teacher, and my friend taught about alcoholism. It was stressful and not easy, but God was at work. There were good results and it was a very rewarding work.

In November 1994, I had agreed to help the state mental health department distribute some literature on drug addictions near an area where they were giving flu shots. I had never gotten a flu shot before



and I wondered if I should get one. I talked to the individual in charge and told him that I had had viral encephalitis. I was assured that was no problem and of all people I should get a flu shot. I had also been assured by the doctors in the hospital that I would never get encephalitis again. I decided to go ahead and get the shot. Again, my life was about to be turned upside down by a disease that the doctors had assured me that I would never get again.

About a week after getting the shot we had some friends over for the evening and I began developing a splitting headache. I excused myself, took four Tylenol and went to bed. Again, that is the last thing I remember for about the next week or so. The next day I was again unresponsive, and my wife recognized the same symptoms that I had had about eight and a half years before. She called a close friend who was an EMT and he came over to look at me. He called an ambulance and took me to the small hospital here in town. I again was diagnosed with viral encephalitis. That night in the emergency room I became quite combative. I am told that I tried to hit a 5' 3"-woman doctor and also one of the nurses. They kept a security guard with me all night long. They gave me large doses of sedatives, but evidently none of it worked and I continued to be combative. I have no recollection of any of this. By morning I quieted down but then stopped breathing. A "code blue" was called and they were able to resuscitate me. After this I was flown by helicopter to a larger hospital. The doctor who cared for me in the smaller hospital later stated that she never expected to see me alive again.

### **Linda**

The doctors were never able to find out exactly what caused Phil's original bout of encephalitis. There are a number of things that can cause it, but none of them seemed to fit Phil's case. One possible explanation that I am now convinced was right, was that it was a complication of the influenza that he had had the week before. They told me that he would never get it again.

Well, guess what?! He did. On Veteran's Day in 1994, Phil woke up with a headache. By noon he was becoming unresponsive to me. I knew immediately what it was. I went out in the backyard and sat at our picnic table and cried my heart out to the Lord that I didn't want it to be encephalitis and I didn't want to go through it again. But for some reason, God let it happen again, and He once again gave me the peace and strength to carry on and get through it.

Once again Phil said not to call the doctor, but by mid-afternoon I called our pastor who was also an EMT. He was at work, and right away he and the ambulance team came out to see Phil. They immediately took him to the hospital where they began doing tests. I told them what I thought it was and after many tests, they reached the same conclusion--viral encephalitis. This time Phil did not go into as deep a coma and he was very restless and combative, but totally unresponsive to what was going on around him.

Our daughter was attending a university about forty miles away at the time and took off from school and came home as soon as she knew Phil was sick. She came up to the hospital for a while, and then I asked her to go home and call friends and family again to ask them to pray.

About 6:00 the next morning, Phil had a seizure and stopped breathing. After they revived him, they immediately made arrangements to fly him by helicopter to a larger hospital about 75 miles away. Because of threatening weather, it was questionable whether they would be able to fly, but they did. Because of rules and regulations and lack of space in the helicopter, I was not able to fly with Phil. As I stood there with our pastor and his wife on that cold dreary November day and watched the chopper

take off with Phil, I was very close to tears. But God gave me peace and the strength to go on. I hurried home and got my toothbrush, etc., and enough clothes to last for a week or so, and headed to the hospital along with our daughter and Phil's brother who also lived near us. We all drove our own cars because I was planning to stay with Phil as long as he was in the hospital, and they had to get back to school and work. All of our children were on their own by this time, and there was nothing that would keep me from staying constantly with Phil.

The nurses were all very nice and allowed me to sleep in a chair by Phil's bed at night, even though they said I wasn't supposed to. Because Phil was so restless, the doctor gave him some kind of new drug to put him in a deeper coma to allow him to rest easier. After a couple of days, they started easing up on the drug twice a day to see if he was "back" yet. On the fourth day, he opened his eyes briefly and then closed them again. That night when they let up on the drug, Phil was conscious again. Praise God for answering my prayers again!

In another day or so, they moved Phil out of ICU and down to the medical floor. The nurses there also let me sleep in a recliner by Phil's bed. Then one day I was told that the nurse that was going to be on duty that night was a real stickler for the rules and I probably wouldn't be able to stay with Phil that night. I was pretty unhappy at the thought, but I was determined to stay if I possibly could. That night the nurse came in and surveyed the situation and I guess she saw that Phil and I were really attached to each other. She asked how long we had been married and I told her twenty-eight years. She said, "That's good enough for me.", and let me sleep in the chair by Phil that night, too.

### **Phil**

The second bout with encephalitis, I was in a lighter coma than the first time, but I was kept heavily sedated for about a week. When they would ease off the sedation, I would become restless and difficult to handle. I do have one very faint memory during this time. I dimly remember my daughter calling my name. I somehow recognized that I was in the hospital and I thought my daughter was a nurse. In my sedated and tortured mind, I figured that I must have been in a coma in the hospital for about four years, since it would take that long for my daughter to become a nurse.

About a week after being in the hospital, when they eased off the sedatives, I was able to respond and look around me. Again, I saw all the machines, the wires and the tubes. Unable to talk because of the tubes in my mouth, I looked at my wife who was by my side, and she again calmly explained that I had viral encephalitis.

Shortly after I woke up, I gave my wife and nurses a real scare. I was on a breathing machine with the tube down my throat. When I turned my head, the tube would clog and I could not breathe. The nurse later said that couldn't happen, but I very clearly remember it happening. Once when I turned my head, the tube plugged and I could not get it unplugged to breathe. Even though my arms were tied down, I was able to barely get my finger around the breathing tube and pull it out. My wife immediately yelled for the nurses and a number of them came running. I, however, was breathing just fine. I can remember the rush of relief that I felt at being able to breathe again. Since I was doing fine without it, they did not put it back in again. I also remember the pleasure of talking again, even though it was very difficult, even with the tube out. I was scolded, but I didn't care. I could breathe again.

I have no memory of the time in the local hospital, the helicopter flight, or of the first several days in

the larger hospital. It is hard to describe the first day that I began to regain consciousness. I was semi-conscious, dizzy, hallucinating, and fighting for breath. Both arms were tied down, and I was unable to talk because of the tubes in my mouth and nose. I wondered whether my mind would heal, and how we would pay the mounting costs. I wish I could say that I experienced God's peace throughout the whole experience, but part of the time I was again deeply discouraged. At one point I felt that I had had all I could take, and I began to pray that God would take me home to be with Him. However, Linda and many others were praying that God would restore me to health again. God answered their prayers, and again I made a near full recovery.

Once, in the hospital, I can remember seeing Linda reading her Bible. I asked her to read to me. One verse she read was I Peter 2:9. *'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.'* As I heard this, God spoke to my hurting heart and confirmed to me that I was a chosen individual that He had called to *"declare His praises"*. There is no way that I could express how much that verse meant to me in a time of deep distress.

I believe God confirmed this message by two special events that took place. The day before entering the hospital, I was at a drug and alcohol treatment center where I regularly worked as a volunteer teacher and counselor. While doing a client intake, I realized that I was working with an individual who, although addicted to both alcohol and cocaine, was very well educated, intelligent, and spiritually hungry. I had the joy of leading this young father to put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Savior from the penalty of sin. Just a few days after I returned home from the hospital, a young wife and mother who was a drug addict came to my office desperately seeking help. What a joy to lead her to put her faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I believe that God brought these two spiritually hungry people into my life at that particular time to be a special encouragement and to let me know that He still had a ministry for me.

### **Linda**

After two weeks in the hospital, Phil was released and was able to go directly home. He was weak and got tired real easily for quite a while, but had a lot fewer problems that he did after the first illness. Once again, God gave him an almost complete recovery. Tiredness and "brain fatigue" are continuing problems that there is no cure for, and he has just had to learn to adjust his life style around them. When he gets tired, he takes a fifteen-minute nap and/or does some physical activity outside, and he is able to go again. There are some days when he just feels "rotten" and can't do much, but the next day is usually better.

Our financial situation this time around was no better than the first. Since Phil had already had encephalitis, it was excluded from our current insurance policy. And we had no money saved up for emergencies. Our pastor wrote a letter to our friends and supporters explaining our needs. I explained our situation to the hospital billing office, and they greatly reduced our hospital bill to just \$6,000. In just a couple of months, gifts from family and friends paid that off along with all of the other medical bills that were incurred during Phil's illness. Praise the Lord for His goodness!

### **Phil**

Most of the doctors never said for sure why I had gotten encephalitis the first time let alone why I had gotten it the second time. It may be coincidental that I got it the first time one week after having the

flu, and the second time it was one week after getting a flu shot. Some of the doctors vehemently denied that there was any connection. It was as if such a thought would degrade a sacred cow -- flu shots. They would not consider any connection between a flu shot and encephalitis. Others weren't so sure and said there very well could be a connection. Recently a veteran neurologist flatly stated that the second episode was a result of the flu shot. Since that time, after becoming a member of an internet encephalitis survivors support group, I have found out that there are quite a number of people who have gotten encephalitis after getting a flu shot. I am not trying to suggest to others what they should do, but I will guarantee that this is one old boy that will never get another flu shot.

Medical bills for the second encephalitis episode came to about 60,000 dollars. This was not covered by insurance since our insurance had a rider specifically excluding encephalitis. However, due to the goodness of God and His people, all the bills have been paid. PTL!!!

My long-term recovery from the second bout of encephalitis seemed to go easier than the first time. I definitely have days that I just can't think very well. On some of the worst days it can feel like I am in a mental fog. I have learned that on those days I just don't try to do anything very heavy or any reading, studying or writing. If I get out and do some plain old hard physical work, I have learned that I can sometimes work the fog out of my brain. Most days my mind feels more or less "normal" and I am able to do a fairly normal days' work. I can honestly say that I am satisfied and that, most of the time, I am enjoying life, even after two serious bouts of viral encephalitis. I have committed myself to using the health and the time that I have left to encourage Native Americans and others to know, to walk with, and to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have a renewed appreciation for the exceptional wife that God has given me. She stayed by my bedside, day and night, and was a rock of comfort and encouragement. Other family members showed their love and were also a tremendous blessing. I also have a renewed appreciation for my extended family--the body of Christ. Many prayed and many gave to help pay the huge medical bills. Simply saying "thank you" almost seems trite, but from the bottom of my heart I say "thank you" to all who prayed, who visited, and who gave.

Although I still tend to forget, today I have a deeper awareness of the presence and the power of God. He is sovereign and He holds our lives in His hands.

### **WHAT I REMEMBER ABOUT DAD IN THE HOSPITAL**

by our daughter – Age19 (in 1995)

The first time Dad had encephalitis; I don't really remember that much. I was only nine years old. I remember being told that Dad was sick, but it wasn't until later that I realized what it meant when the doctors said he had a 1/3 chance to live, and a 1/3 chance to die, and a 1/3 chance to come away with neurological deficits.

The second time, I remember much more clearly. I remember Mom saying Dad had a headache, and gradually as the day progressed, he became more confused. After Mom had called an ambulance, I can still see Dad sitting on the bed with a very frustrated look on his face because he forgot what he was saying and couldn't finish his sentence. Mom was trying to get him to put his pants on, but he was more concerned at his loss of memory than with his pants.

The next thing I remember is going back to his space behind a curtain in the emergency room. Dad was only semi-conscious and he still had a frustrated look on his face. He was sitting up on the Gurney with a hospital gown on and, while Dad is normally a very calm person and seldom gets angry, someone had made him mad. I think because they were trying to draw blood for labs. Dad finally, in a frustrated, confused and helpless anger rebelled by pulling his arm away and hollered “dog gonnet”. I laughed, thinking this was the closest my dad would ever get to cursing.

The next time I saw Dad was in the ICU at the local hospital. Mom says he had seized that night and they called a code blue on him. Then they flew him to a larger hospital.

At the larger hospital, my mom stayed by my dad’s side the entire time, almost two weeks. I still don’t think I realized the severity of Dad’s illness, because bad things happen to other families, not mine. It seemed like the doctors had everything under control, because when they wanted him to wake up, they would just lower his sedative, and he would rouse and stir. Dad was too “combative”, they said, to have him awake.

One of the first experiences I had with nurses was with a nursing student in the ICU taking care of Dad. She was so kind and helpful and explained what they were doing with Dad. I realized then that being like her would be a goal of mine down the road. It wasn’t until Dad recovered later that he told me he woke up and thought I was his nurse, during one of his lucid intervals. That set in stone my goal to become an RN.

When Dad finally recovered, he recounted to us kids about what it was like being in a coma and then being helplessly restrained to a hospital bed. I can’t imagine what it would be like to actually want to die and actually pray to God to take you. This is what is most heart wrenching to me, to realize my dad was hurting that much and in that much pain that he would want to leave me, my brothers and my Mom behind, to relieve his suffering.

God had blessed me and my family by pulling Dad, once again, through another bout with viral encephalitis.

## **UPDATE - FEBRUARY 2021**

**by Linda Benedict**

Phil and I now live on the east coast near our daughter and her family. Phil has had several more medical emergencies in the years since the above story was written. Each of these is a story in itself of how God worked out everything to accomplish His will. But I will only mention three of them.

The first episode occurred about four years after Phil’s second bout with encephalitis. We went to our local emergency room in Oklahoma when Phil had extreme abdominal pain. It was on Thanksgiving and there was a minimum of staff on duty at the hospital. They wanted to just send him home with some pain pills and have him come back after the holidays, but after our insistence they did some tests and discovered that it was his gall bladder. They were able to get a surgeon willing to come in to the hospital the next day and remove it. At that time, they discovered that his gall bladder was full of gangrene and if they had waited until the following week, he could have died from it.

The next brush with death was in 2019 when Phil had open heart surgery to replace the aortic valve in his heart. There were several crisis points during the surgery and also during his ten day stay in the hospital after the surgery. We thank the Lord for the way He intervened and brought Phil safely through it.

Later that year, 2019, Phil had a major bleed in a stomach hernia that nearly took his life. Before I called the ambulance, he was so weak that he couldn't even walk across the room. One doctor said that he had lost nearly half of his blood. Once again, we were able to get the medical help needed and the Lord graciously healed Phil and restored him to health.

Now, February 2021, Phil is doing well and continues to be active and to write and teach Bible studies. We thank and praise the Lord for how He has answered our prayers and taken care of every need that we have had. It is a blessing to look back on these very difficult times and see God's hand at work right down to each little detail in everything that happened! And each time God gave me the peace and strength that I needed to get through it all. PTL!

As for our children - all four of them (three boys and one girl) are happily married and are actively serving the Lord. Our daughter achieved her goal of becoming an RN and is now working part time as a hospice care nurse.

Again, we praise the Lord for His goodness to us!