

My Singing Angel
by Jane E. Babin

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When I entered Massachusetts General Hospital last April to have a feeding tube placed in my stomach, I was very apprehensive. Don't get me wrong. I had every confidence in the surgeons and staff at this prominent facility. Also, this procedure is done routinely.

My cause for concern was my ALS, aka, Lou Gehrig's disease. At the time, I had not yet had my tracheotomy. Because ALS is a neuromuscular disease that had begun to affect my diaphragm, I was afraid of any sedation that could compromise my already weakened ability to breathe. Try as they might, the medical staff, with their confusing medical jargon, could not allay my fears. I became more and more anxious as the night approached.

It was then that a singing angel entered my life. As I lay on my bed I heard this wonderful sound fill my ears. A nursing assistant had come to make sure I was settled in for the night. A beautiful Haitian woman with large, dark eyes was singing to me. "Is that gospel I hear?" I said, smiling up at her. "Uh-huh. Do you like?" I nodded my head.

She proceeded to tell me that she sang in a church choir in Boston. I responded that her voice was beautiful and that it must be some choir! She smiled and seemed to study my face. "Are you afraid of what's going to happen to you tomorrow?" All my fears came flooding back in that moment and a few tears trickled down my face. "Don't worry, honey," she said, "everything will be okay. Would you like me to sing another hymn?" I nodded, and she went soulfully into another song.

I'm not sure of the name of the hymn or its melody. But its refrain, Till the storm passes by, will remain with me forever. Over and over, with increasing passion, she repeated this refrain.*

My tears subsided and when she finished she said, "There, now, there is nothing to fear. Go to sleep." She then asked if I would like her to sing to me before my procedure the next day. I smiled and said that, yes, I would love it. She patted my hand and walked away. I soon fell fast asleep.

The next morning, true to her word, she appeared at my bedside and sang the same hymn as the night before. At once, I felt all my anxiety melt away. A few minutes later, I was wheeled into surgery a changed woman.

Sometimes medicine is indeed the best medicine. Sometimes it is the song of an angel.

* A friend later told me the words are from “Till the Storm Passes By,” a Methodist hymn, music by Mosie Lister. The moving words of the refrain are:

*Till the storm passes over,
Till the thunder sounds no more,
Till the clouds roll forever from the sky;
Hold me fast, let me stand
In the hollow of Thy hand,
Keep me safe till the storm passes by.*

Jane Babin died in March 1015 after greater a decade of living with ALS. She spent her career at Plymouth State University as a professor in business. She received the 2001 Northeast Regional Teaching Excellence Award and was presented an honorary doctor of humane letters and the Silas H. Pearl Medallion for Distinguished Lifetime Service by PSU. In 2007, Babin published her book, Pearls in the Pond, a collection of poems and writings. We at Cell 2 Soul were privileged to know her.