

Joena's Story

There are many ways to walk into Joena Buchholz's story. But we will start with how Joena went to bed with a fever in December 2011 and woke up in February 2012 missing her hands and feet. Joena and Herm had traveled to Germany to visit their daughter, Jill, and her family over that Christmas holiday. Three days after arriving Joena felt ill and feverish and went to bed. Six weeks later she was brought out of an induced coma.

The first thing Joena heard was her daughter's voice. Joena thought she had been asleep for a day. Her infection was so severe that her hands and feet had been amputated in order to save her life. She remembers dreaming that she was traveling and was desperate to get home. She says 'I remember in my dream that I was alone and thirsty and my hands were freezing.'

On the first day of February she asked for ice cream. She had not eaten for six weeks. She wept a lot. She could still feel her toes and her fingers. She moved from intensive care to regular care and then to a rehabilitation center in Switzerland. She dreamed of prosthetic arms that would end not in hands but in knife, fork, spoon, and knitting needle. At the end of February she washed her hair for the first time in three months. In July she was wheeled into her daughter's house for her granddaughter's sixth birthday party and she said she felt like she had been given one day of her old life back by God after eight months of being dead. A few days later she and Herm flew home to Portland.

But everything was different at home. Their townhouse didn't fit. Their car was useless now. The bills were terrifying. Joena couldn't work with the elderly as she had before; Herman was retired from his job in a bank. 'I was so lucky,' says Joena. 'Many people, friends, relatives, and strangers, have stepped up to help us.'

Joena is sitting in her wheelchair, in the new apartment in which she and Herm now live. The place where her right hand used to be is infinitesimally soft. Her prosthetic arms are nearby. Her husband is sitting next to her. Her new right arm is on the table. 'It's the *depth* of people,' says Herm. 'That's the closest I can come for finding the right word. The *depth* of people makes me cry.'

'My word for it is grace,' says Joena, and she is smiling like a summer morning. You would not think a woman who lost her hands and feet and almost died and has to crawl around the couch on her knees for her daily walk would be beaming, but you would be wrong about that. 'There *is* such a thing as grace,' says Joena. 'It's *not* trite. It's *not* imaginary. It's real. It *is* amazing.'

When asked if she had dark days, black days? 'Oh, no, no,' she says smiling. 'No because every day something exhilarating happens. Every day I am startled by the grace of others. *Every day*. Who could have dark days when that happens? Not me. Not *me*.'

Excerpted from a story by Brian Doyle, "Startled by Grace," first published in Portland Magazine.

Some of the people who initially helped Herm & Joena in those first turbulent days went on to form the Buchholz Special Needs Trust. This Trust exists to ensure on-going financial support for their very difficult situation and provides for goods and services, such as assistive devices and medical expenses not covered by public or private insurance, as well as respite for Herm who works cheerfully, tirelessly, and endlessly in the care of Joena.

If you would like to help, donations can be made at any US Bank:

US BANK account # 153666149452

Please note Buchholz Special Needs Trust in your memo.



Joena, Herm, their daughter and grandchildren, July 2012

