

Broken Bodies, Healing Hearts

Reflections of a Hospital Chaplain



Gretchen W. TenBrook

Gretchen W. TenBrook

**Broken Bodies,
Healing Hearts**
*Reflections
of a Hospital Chaplain*



*Pre-publication
REVIEWS,
COMMENTARIES,
EVALUATIONS . . .*

“**B**roken bodies . . . bodies torn apart by disease; bodies torn apart by aging; bodies torn apart by trauma; bodies torn apart by life in the workplace; bodies torn apart by death.

These have always been the stories in health care, but now the stories are muffled by managed care, pressures of time, calculations of budget, and not enough time in the day. Time vs. stories. Another brokenness.

This very special book reminds all of us of the stories, and especially of the important work that chaplains are still called to do . . . to identify, hear, and affirm stories and people. It is the pathway to the *healing heart*.”

Rev. Dr. Richard B. Gilbert
*Executive Director,
The World Pastoral Care Center,
Valparaiso, IN*



More pre-publication

REVIEWS, COMMENTARIES, EVALUATIONS . . .

“**W**hat is it like in a modern urban medical center? We usually imagine Medivac helicopters, high-tech equipment, and the intercom paging busy doctors in long white lab coats. But what is it like for a patient who is waiting for a kidney or a heart, or a man who has lost part of his face to surgery, or a mother whose child is dying of leukemia? Gretchen TenBrook’s brief reminiscences will tell you. As a chaplain she has been at their bedside, in the darkness of their rooms and hearts.

And what is it like for the chaplain to stand in the midst of pain, to sit with the suffering, to pray with those grieving the often senseless and irretrievable loss of a loved one? Gretchen shares her deep emotional journey and her personal spiritual struggles in a world where strength and weakness, courage and fear, life and death meet head on.

But these are not vignettes of hopelessness and despair. Over and over we are reminded of the light that shines in the darkness, the strength that comes unannounced and unpredictable, and the love that surrounds the patients, their families, and the chaplain herself. As you read

these brief stories of pastoral caring you will feel profoundly inspired by how hearts can heal when bodies are broken.”

Rev. P. Barrett Rudd, DMin

*Supervisor,
Association for Clinical
Pastoral Education,
Lutherville, MD*



“**A**ll those visiting ‘broken bodies’ will find Gretchen TenBrook’s writing a source of learning and inspiration. Her self-disclosing and well-expressed style is not only about seeking, but about being found ‘Even though I witness daily God’s transforming power in the lives of others, somehow I am still always surprised when it befalls me.’ In her goal ‘to create an open space for God to live within me’ . . . she reveals the human side of courage, the spiritual side of grace.”

Ronald P. Dieter, DMin

*Licensed Pastoral Psychotherapist,
American Baptist Clergy,
Concord, NH*

***NOTES FOR PROFESSIONAL LIBRARIANS
AND LIBRARY USERS***

This is an original book title published by The Haworth Pastoral Press, an imprint of The Haworth Press, Inc. Unless otherwise noted in specific chapters with attribution, materials in this book have not been previously published elsewhere in any format or language.

CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION NOTES

All books published by The Haworth Press, Inc. and its imprints are printed on certified pH neutral, acid free book grade paper. This paper meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences-Permanence of Paper for Printed Material, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

This page intentionally left blank

**Broken Bodies,
Healing Hearts**
*Reflections
of a Hospital Chaplain*

THE HAWORTH PASTORAL PRESS

Religion and Mental Health

Harold G. Koenig, MD

Senior Editor

New, Recent, and Forthcoming Titles:

A Gospel for the Mature Years: Finding Fulfillment by Knowing and Using Your Gifts by Harold Koenig, Tracy Lamar, and Betty Lamar

Is Religion Good for Your Health? The Effects of Religion on Physical and Mental Health by Harold Koenig

Adventures in Senior Living: Learning How to Make Retirement Meaningful and Enjoyable by J. Lawrence Driskill

Dying, Grieving, Faith, and Family: A Pastoral Care Approach
by George W. Bowman

The Pastoral Care of Depression: A Guidebook by Binford W. Gilbert

Understanding Clergy Misconduct in Religious Systems: Scapegoating, Family Secrets, and the Abuse of Power by Candace R. Benyei

What the Dying Teach Us: Lessons on Living by Samuel Lee Oliver

The Pastor's Family: The Challenges of Family Life and Pastoral Responsibilities by Daniel L. Langford

Somebody's Knocking at Your Door: AIDS and the African-American Church by Ronald Jeffrey Weatherford and Carole Boston Weatherford

Grief Education for Caregivers of the Elderly by Junietta Baker McCall

The Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Pastoral Care for the Road to Change by Robert M. Collie

The Pastoral Care of Children by David H. Grosseohme

Ways of the Desert: Becoming Holy Through Difficult Times
by William F. Kraft

Caring for a Loved One with Alzheimer's Disease: A Christian Perspective by Elizabeth T. Hall

"Martha, Martha": How Christians Worry by Elaine Leong Eng

Spiritual Care for Children Living in Specialized Settings: Breathing Underwater by Michael F. Friesen

Broken Bodies, Healing Hearts: Reflections of a Hospital Chaplain by Gretchen W. TenBrook

Shared Grace: Therapists and Clergy Working Together by Marion Bilich, Susan Bonfiglio, and Steven Carlson

The Pastor's Guide to Psychiatric Disorders and Mental Health Resources by W. Brad Johnson and William L. Johnson

**Broken Bodies,
Healing Hearts**
*Reflections
of a Hospital Chaplain*

Gretchen W. TenBrook

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2000 by The Haworth Pastoral Press

Published 2013 by Routledge

711 Third Avenue, New York, NY, 10017, USA

2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2000 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, microfilm, and recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

DISCLAIMER

The vignettes presented in this book are based on actual clinical cases; however, identities and minor life details have been altered to protect confidentiality.

Cover design by Jennifer M. Gaska.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

TenBrook, Gretchen W.

Broken bodies, healing hearts : reflections of a hospital chaplain / Gretchen W. TenBrook.

p. cm.

1. Spiritual life—Christianity. 2. Christian life. I. Title.

BV4501.2 .T39 2000

248.8'92—dc21

99-055440

ISBN 13: 978-0-789-00851-0 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-789-00852-7 (pbk)

CONTENTS

Foreword	<i>David F. Allen</i>	vii
Preface		ix
Acknowledgments		xiii
1. And a Child Shall Lead Them		1
2. Beyond Pity		5
3. Redeemed by Grace		11
4. Divine Identity		15
5. Learning to Be		19
6. Homecoming		23
7. Letting Go to Keep from Falling Apart		29
8. Fertile Ground		33
9. Blessed Are the Poor in Spirit		39
10. Not Religious, but Real		43
11. The Man Without a Nose		47
12. Called to Wait		53
13. Recollection		57
14. Faces of Grief		61
15. Mutual Healing		69

16. Free to Die	71
17. Light Shines in the Darkness	77
18. Good-bye, Grandmère	83
19. Addicted to Pain	89
20. A Time for Everything	93
21. God's Poster Child	101
22. A Longing for Companionship	107
23. Living in Love	113
24. Looking Back Through New Lenses	119
25. Always in Process	123
26. At a Distance	129
27. Another Side of Me	135
28. To Be in Relationship Again	141
29. Necessary Friction	145
30. Empty Before God	149
31. Comfort in Death and in Life	153
32. Home for the Holiday	157
33. Everybody's Savior	161
34. And God Was in It All	167
35. Pink Pajamas in Heaven	169

Foreword

Gretchen TenBrook is a sensitive, caring, and, above all, very spiritual person who with her unique artistry paints for us the inner world of the hospital chaplain-patient relationship. It is a world of sadness and tragedy, but paradoxically punctuated with beauty, joy, and hope. Tenderly tiptoeing into the patients' lives, with their permission, Chaplain TenBrook allows them to explore their pathos, unbelief, and anger. The stories are powerful and pierce the soul. Gracing each and every patient with dignity, Gretchen presents those to whom she ministers as professors or experts of their own experiences. As a result, they teach us about tolerance, forbearance, what it means to wait . . . about life in general.

Gretchen shows us that hospitals and churches are similar. She states, "We come to both institutions with open wounds, some visible and some not, desperately seeking the remedies buried somewhere in the shambles of our lives." Central to Gretchen's philosophy of care is the sacrament of the Eucharist, for in the broken and bleeding body of Christ, she touches the wounds of the patients as well as her own. The book ends with a triumph of joy as a very ill lady wearing pink silk pajamas transcends her pain and challenges Chaplain Gretchen to change the drabness of her dress, of her very approach to life. In the true essence of ministry, Gretchen receives this woman's advice graciously and the next day arrives on the ward dressed in brilliant colors, only to find an empty hospital room awaiting her. Despite this woman's tragic death, Gretchen finds through a time of bittersweet reflection how her vibrant spirit lives on.

The book is compassionate, joyous, and hopeful. But most of all, it is a beautiful treasury of the soul's journey to God. Read it and be challenged to face the journey of your own soul.

David F. Allen, MD, MPH
Arlington, Virginia
Author of *In Search of the Heart* (1993)
and *Shattering the Gods Within* (1994)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gretchen W. TenBrook is a former Adjunct Chaplain in the Department of Pastoral Care at The Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. She is an affiliate of the Association of Professional Chaplains and has served in pastoral care ministry at several hospitals. A graduate of Dartmouth College, she, her husband, and their son currently reside in New England, where Gretchen continues to pursue her interests in pastoral care and writing.

Preface

I did not write this book. Rather, through the Spirit's leading, it wrote itself. In this way, it has not been as much an achievement or act of the will as it has been a work of obedience and surrender.

Writing has always been a trustworthy place of fruitful exploration for me. In it, I find a refuge for reflection, and through it, I find a path to the voice of God inside of me. I do not come up with answers as much as I do the genuine questions that lie behind them. And any clarity that befalls me is subject to further refinement, inviting me to continue to seek the ever-new shades of God's eternal light. On the surface, such a pursuit may seem pointless. However, I have found just the opposite to be true, for to participate in divine activity is to willingly go and not to incessantly arrive.

Each essay in this book found its birthplace in the unique story of a person that stirred up a passion within me to wrestle with it in words. To preserve confidentiality, these persons' names and some minor details of their lives have been changed. As a chaplain in a large academic inner-city hospital, I come into contact with a multitude of people facing a multitude of events amid a multitude of thoughts and emotions. Together, they paint an awesome collage of what it means to be human, *and* what it means to be of divine descent. Needless to say, I find myself constantly walking on fertile ground for spiritual growth, not only for the patients to whom I minister, but also for me.

In my book, I seek to express my heart's true desires, desires that have been made real to me through my visits with patients. In offering a safe place for others simply to be, I have found that God opens my eyes to new horizons of learning about myself, others, and the world in which we live. It is my hope that my book will encourage you to do the same—to look for God's immanent presence in both the momentous and the everyday experiences of life.

I recently wrote the poem "My Heart's Desire." It is a collection of longings that, through the process of writing this book, I have

sensed welling up in the very hidden place where only God can touch me. Each desire that has risen to the surface I consider a gift from God, revealed to me through all those who have been courageous enough to let His light shine from their broken hearts: patients and colleagues, friends, family, and strangers alike. May this book invite you, also, to receive the desires of your hearts, desires that find their fulfillment in the very hands of the One who has made them.

MY HEART'S DESIRE

- To create an open space for God to live within me.
- To empty myself of myself so that He can fill me up.
- To wait for my Provider in hopeful expectation.
- To be willing to be silent that I may truly hear His still small voice inside me.
- To be open to the change of the One who never changes.

- To let my false answers become true questions.
- To know God's peace in my uncertainty.
- To surrender my will for His.
- To abandon the shelter of my own making to find myself already inside the mighty house of God.

- To offer others a safe place where they are free to come, free to go, and free to be who God made them to be.
- To allow others to be true guests in the home of my heart rather than possessions or projects.
- To be truly present with others, not subscribing to the illusion that I can fulfill them or they me.
- To keep those around me in God's care rather than subject them to my own manipulations.
- To move forward with my fellow sojourners rather than to remain in a closed huddle with them.

- To find my deepest desires met in God's promises.
- To look beyond my idols to the true Source of all my needs.
- To find that the Love I so desperately seek is already waiting to be received in my heart.

To know God's presence deeply, even in light of His absence.
To know that the God I can't touch is already touching me.
To know that He who has already come will come again.

To live my humanness to the fullest, just as Jesus did.
To find rest in places of fear, loneliness, and anger, knowing
that God's healing lies beneath the surface of their roots.
To live the cross that I may live the resurrection.
To see my own illusions shattered by the truth of God's perfect
provision.
To experience God's kingdom as superior to my own worldly
longings.

Oh, Lord, You who placed these desires in my heart,
Give me Your courage and Your strength;
For my heart's desire is also my greatest fear.
May I find that there is no fear in Your perfect love.

Gretchen W. TenBrook

This page intentionally left blank

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who have blessed me with the gift of themselves: patients, colleagues, mentors, family, friends, and strangers alike. Some of these people know who they are: may you take joy in the fact that God has touched me in a mighty way through you. Others are not aware of the glimpses of divine love that they have participated in shining my way: may they continue to be beautiful and know their own beauty in doing so. Still others I am not yet aware of myself: may God enable me to see His wonderful ways in all people upon whom I set my eyes.

Specifically, I would like to thank my dear and loving husband, John, for always answering “yes” to the question I’ve asked hundreds of times: “Will you read this?” I am grateful for his Spirit-led insight, and for his patience amid my sometimes willful and stubborn attitude. I am also thankful for his helping me with my “was’s” and “were’s” and “lays” and “lies.” Sorry, Love, but I fear I will never get those straight!

I would also like to express my thanks to all of my Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) supervisors and fellow students. Your generous participation in my learning and willingness to tackle tough questions with me has been invaluable! The CPE process has been essential to my growth as a chaplain, and as a person in general.

This page intentionally left blank

And a Child Shall Lead Them

The Meyer family had traveled all the way from Texas, only to be told that nothing could be done for their three-year-old son, Jimmy. Nothing, nothing at all. The child had an inoperable brain tumor that had not responded to multiple trials of chemotherapy and radiation. I imagined the growth inside of his head, spreading its toxic tentacles like an octopus seizing a long-awaited meal.

I came upon Jimmy and his mother in the pediatric playroom. As I was making my rounds on the ward, I heard the sound of clattering toys. I peered into the playroom and was immediately taken with a sight that left me temporarily mesmerized. Jimmy was running in circles around the room, dragging a blue plastic wagon filled with blankets and an oversized stuffed bear. The sturdy cart was normally his mode of transportation, faithfully pulled by his mother on the frequent days when he didn't feel so well. It was evident that Jimmy took great pride in doing himself what his mother usually did for him.

Mrs. Meyer sat perched on the windowsill, her tear-stained eyes staring off into the distance. I wondered what she was thinking about: what the doctors had said, what it would be like without her son, how much time the family had left together? In any case, she seemed to be avoiding participating in Jimmy's play, as if it would be too painful to enjoy what would soon be taken from her.

While Mrs. Meyer's thoughts appeared to be traveling into the inevitable future that she dreaded, Jimmy's mind remained focused on the only thing he knew—the moment at hand. "Whew!" he sang gleefully, followed by a giggle, watching the wagon temporarily escape the command of his little hand. Jimmy's ignorance of his terminal illness appeared to be a blessing, his innocent mind not yet subject to the distortions of a world of worries. Unlike his mother,