

MY  
CHILD  
MY  
HERO



*AN ABSOLUTELY TRUE STORY...*

## My Child, My Hero

*I was sure by now, God, You would have reached down  
And wiped our tears away, stepped in and saved the day  
But once again, I say "Amen", and it's still raining...*

*As the thunder rolls, I barely hear You whisper through the rain,  
"I'm with You"... And as Your mercy falls, I raise my hands and  
**Praise the God who gives and takes away.***

\* Lyrics from the song 'Praise You in This Storm' by Casting Crowns

From the moment we are born, a vital part of our evolutionary process and ultimate success is the ability to meet, greet, and beat various challenges along the way. And, as many parents can attest, an entirely new set and level of challenges is born the very same day a child enters our personal picture. Yes, life can (and will) be tough at times, *really* tough...

Yet, I'm continually amazed by the omnipotent and transformative power of a child's unconditional love, expressed through tender hugs, sweet kisses, and my personal favorite "I love you Daddy" to effectively render seemingly mountainous struggles of the day into measly molehills!

Most parents I know enthusiastically brag about their children. I'm no different. As a matter of fact, I am extremely biased when it comes to *my* son. Becoming a first-time father to an amazing boy has been a life experience with little rival. From birth, he's been an incredible source of pride, joy, love, and personal growth to many people – *especially* to me.

Meet my son, Brennan Alexander Johnston. Brennan means "Strong One," and from day one, he has undoubtedly lived his name! I read that Alexander means "Defender of Mankind," a role for which I truly believe he has been uniquely gifted to fulfill during his lifetime.

As a parent, I've been entrusted to raise, teach, guide, love, and protect this one-of-a-kind gift from above. And as Brennan's father, nothing bad happens and no harm befalls my son but through me!

### **... Or does it?**

I've heard it said "*control is an illusion.*" In January 2007, that became a painful reality by way of an excruciating 15 day life-altering experience. While playing with a soccer ball, Brennan lost his balance, fell, and freakishly fractured his left femur.

In short, what happened during the course of his medical care was a series of events that – still to this day – eludes human understanding and defies logical explanation. What began as a broken leg quickly evolved into a 15 day hospital stay, 7 emotionally draining days in the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), 5 grueling surgeries, 3 critical blood transfusions, multiple rounds of needles, drugs, and various treatments, accompanied by a flood of tears from everyone involved.

Ultimately, we came face to face with the grim reality of amputation...

Throughout the course of events, I frantically asked, "God, *WHAT in the world are You doing? My son doesn't deserve this!*" Compounding the problem (and my growing frustration) was the fact I had absolutely no control over anyone or anything in this situation. We were literally at the mercy of those attending to Brennan, desperately praying each new step or procedure would bring a successful end to his pain and suffering.



Strangely, in the middle of the growing chaos, there appeared a seemingly ill-timed, odd sense or "whisper" over my right shoulder that God was somehow crafting a "*Greater reason-lesson-blessing*" on the backside of this horrible, heart-wrenching, gut-twisting ordeal... As I stood over my son's wounded leg, still thoroughly confused and frustrated by what I saw, God gently whispered "*How do you think I felt when it was **MY Son?***"... (Touché!)

### **"Thank You God" ???**

Brennan's room was located at the furthest end of the PICU ward, which necessitated having to trek the entire loop during each visit.

It was on my second "tour" through the ward when it hit me... With each room I passed, I became painfully aware of all the *other* kids who were admitted for whatever reason or time frame. I was immediately heartbroken and humbled by these little ones, many of them in visibly worse conditions or situations than Brennan! Even more saddening and sobering to me was the absence of a visitor, a teddy bear, or a toy – basically, *any* sign of evidence to suggest someone cared about or loved these other beautiful "broken" ones.

As I continued toward Brennan's room reflecting on these other kids and *their* situations, I immediately and gratefully uttered, "**THANK YOU GOD** for where **WE** are – *right now!* **Thank You** for my son! **Thank You** for this experience! *OK, I get the message – things **could** be worse, I get it! Now, will you please send some of your best angels to watch over these other little ones?"*

Meanwhile, I think Brennan was setting some sort of PICU record! Within a couple of days, his room overflowed from the continuous delivery of baskets, bears, cookies, and various gifts from family, friends, co-workers, churches, businesses, and even people we didn't know who simply "*heard it through the grapevine.*" At one point we began donating additional gifts that arrived, asking the nurses to please distribute them to some of the other kids in the ward.

At no other time in my life have I ever felt as deep a heartache or more helpless as I watched and listened to my son endure seemingly endless suffering. For with each agonizing procedure, hearing Brennan beg, plead, and scream "**They're HURTING ME Daddy, PLEASE MAKE IT STOP!**" unmercifully challenged my mental and emotional fortitude – and faith!

And yet, with Infinite wisdom, mercy, and grace, God delivered the "gift" of perspective right smack in the middle of an excruciating and humbling experience that "*Things **could** be worse*", and, "*No matter how bad it may get, **you are never alone** in your struggles!*"

Shortly before the amputation was when this story really began to take spiritual shape...

Exhausted from another day of continued poking and prodding, Brennan asked his Mom to sing him to sleep. Trying to deliver an appropriate, soothing tune, she began to hum and sing a song she knew partially called 'Praise You in This Storm' by Casting Crowns, a popular Christian contemporary band.

Thinking he had drifted off to sleep, she stopped singing. Opening an eye, Brennan asked, "Why did you stop?" Requesting an encore of "that Storm song", she pulled out the lyrics and began reading through them as a type of bedtime story, followed by playing the actual song a couple of times.

As the music began, a noticeable peace seemed to settle over Brennan for the first time since the ordeal began. It was such a beautiful sight to see him lying there calmly, intently focused on the words. When the song ended, he paused for a moment and then said softly, "I **really** like that song – it made me feel special." Immediately the song became a personal favorite to many, serving as an anthem of healing and hope to everyone who heard it.

It's amazing to think that even at such a young age (4), Brennan fully grasped – and internalized – a very powerful lyrical and melodic message! I personally believe he received his own "whisper" through the gift of that song, learning how God would help him/us successfully weather this particular storm.

## **The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour**

Tuesday, January 23: Over the course of several days, Brennan's condition continued to decline despite various procedures and treatments to save his leg. Every failed attempt was one agonizing step after another – leading us down a road I would have never imagined traveling! Ultimately, we were faced with the inevitability of amputation to avoid the possibility of additional harm and potential health risks.

The following morning we were called into a "debriefing session," a brutally candid discussion between medical personnel and family members regarding the operation as well "standard procedure" for breaking such news to patients. Within a few moments of the conversation, I felt an intense uneasiness begin to swell deep in my soul...

Was it due to my frustration of even being there (*in **this** experience*) in the first place? Or, perhaps the gravity of the situation suddenly came crashing down on me in that moment? Whatever the reason, I was adamant these strangers sitting in front of me – with the luxury of emotional detachment – would NOT be allowed to deliver the news regarding a procedure I considered anything but "standard" to a child I considered anything but ordinary!

While I recognize the fact that various procedures, such as amputations, may become part of the "natural" experience or routine for those in a medical environment, and thus necessitate a detached approach... However, I simply could/would NOT entrust the delivery of such intensely sensitive, life-altering, and potentially spirit-crushing news to MY child by someone else, *especially* if not handled with the appropriate level of compassion a situation like this deserves!

I nervously, but forcefully, stated "**I** am going to be the one to tell Brennan about this... I don't know **what** I'm going to say, or **how** I'm going to get through it, but this **has** to come from **ME** – not from a stranger!"

I walked away from that meeting confident in taking ownership of “the conversation” task. However, I was also anxious, considering the probability there would eventually come a day Brennan would ask questions, or want to know in greater detail the events that ultimately led to making such an important, life-altering decision *for* him.

More than anything, I wanted to reflect back on this experience with absolutely no personal regrets. For me, I wanted total peace and confidence in my soul knowing I did absolutely EVERYTHING I possibly could to “save” my son’s leg. For Brennan, I wanted him to discover and understand the valiant and exhaustive efforts made by everyone for his sake. I also wanted him to know that, while the depth and width of his earthly Dad’s love is tangibly awesome, it pales in comparison to that of his Heavenly Father’s love for him.

As I approached Brennan’s room, my heart literally pounded the breath out of me! Armed with a stuffed anatomic doll and an industry magazine for prosthetics, I strained to hold back my emotions regarding what I *knew* was going to happen to him later that afternoon, and how our lives would be forever changed...

Kneeling beside the bed, I carefully held Brennan’s injured leg. Gently kissing his foot a couple of times, I struggled through a silent, painful prayer of goodbye, knowing I was about to deliver the hardest speech of my entire life! Already emotionally exhausted, I desperately prayed “*God, PLEASE grant me supernatural strength and wisdom to deliver this message with utmost compassion and kindness.*”

Try as I might, I could not hold back the tears as I began to talk with Brennan about his leg, how it was injured (broken) in the first place, how the different procedures had not worked, and how that part of his leg was just not healing the way in which we had all hoped...

Struggling to find the right words, I reached for the anatomic doll, complete with detachable limbs at every juncture. In an attempt to show Brennan which part of his leg they were going to “fix”, the instant I detached the Velcro limb from the associated area, he screamed, **“NO DADDY, PLEASE NO! DON’T LET THEM TAKE MY LEG AWAY – PLEASE, NO!”**

Clenching Brennan’s hand, I immediately turned away, buried my head and began crying – *hard!* An intense, deep stabbing pain plunged through me. Feeling absolutely helpless I begged, **“God, PLEASE take over from here! I NEED YOUR HELP RIGHT NOW – He’s YOUR child too!”**

Pausing for a moment, I took a deep breath and regained my composure. Frantically flipping through the magazine, I discovered a picture of a prosthetic limb sporting a red design on the socket. I immediately associated the red prosthetic limb with the red ‘Power Ranger’ action figure that faithfully served as Brennan’s ‘security blanket’ while he in the hospital. Turning back toward Brennan, my eyes instantly locked on his and I remember delivering this enthusiastic and “Supernaturally-charged” rant:

*“Hey Brennan, do you know what I JUST now realized? WOW, I can’t believe I missed this earlier! Did you know God CHOSE YOU for this! Do you know that most kids won’t EVER get to experience something COOL like this? They’ll never get the chance to have a ‘SUPER-POWER LEG’ like the one you’re going to get!?! God must REALLY think you’re a special boy! I guess He saw how bad your leg (and your heart) have been hurting, and He decided YOU should be “The One” to get a BRAND NEW, ‘SUPER-POWER LEG’ – one that will never ‘run out of time’ and never have any boo-boos. Did you know you can run SUPER FAST and jump SUPER HIGH with one of these SUPER-POWER LEGS? Heck, you can even step on things, like spiders, and crabs when you go to the beach in the summer! And guess what? You won’t feel it! AND, I’ll bet you’ll be running faster and jumping higher than ME in no time! I CANNOT believe I didn’t realize this sooner! I am SO blessed to have such a brave and wonderful son like you Brennan – YOU ARE MY HERO! And I can’t wait to see all the great things God has planned for YOU!”*

As we continued talking about the benefits of a new "Super-Power Leg", Brennan began to calm down. We spent the next several hours listening to music, playing a few games, doing our best to pass the time on a positive note before the procedure later that afternoon...

When I mentally replay the various moments of that experience, I'm continually amazed by the depth and force of each memory, often producing "goose bumps" along with tears of sorrow *and* joy.

No matter the circumstance, to personally experience a child (YOUR child) wail and wince in pain, cry out for help, and relentlessly beg for mercy would undoubtedly shake the strongest of souls! But, when I witnessed Brennan, even in his greatest times of pain, extend kindness to needle-bearing nurses, the various doctors, to me and others, I *knew* God was in our midst.

And when I listen to 'Praise You in This Storm', the line "I will praise the God who gives **and** takes away" resonates as a meaningful reminder of what we're called to do through faith, even if (and/or when) God's answer differs greatly from our prayerful wants and expectations.

### **Life Transformed...**

Upon returning home from the hospital, we immediately discovered life – as we once knew it – had been forever changed! Now, every possible task previously performed simply and routinely was suddenly transformed into a multi-step, multi-person, multi-feeling event

However, God consistently delivered additional valuable life lessons through experiences only He could orchestrate. For it was through Brennan's complete dependence on me for everything, I soon found my own physical, mental, and emotional resources exhausted – with only One place to turn for answers and help.

During the first couple weeks of being home after the accident, there was one recurring event that stands out in particular. Several times, in the middle of the night, Brennan would wake up sobbing for reasons he couldn't explain or comprehend initially...

Then one night, after crying for some time around 3 a.m., a very pointed question arose from the sobs, "Did **you** know my leg was going to run out of time, because I wasn't ready for my leg to run out of time yet?" And, through another burst of tears he cried, "And **I WANT MY LEG BACK!**"

There is no possible way to adequately prepare mentally or emotionally for situations like these. It is the ultimate test of one's ability to really be present and listen, offering only your purest expression of love and compassion – as God does for each of us.

As empathetically as possible we explained to Brennan, "No, we *absolutely did NOT* know this was going to happen. Only God knows how, when, and *WHY* these things happen. It's okay to be sad and mad about ALL of this, because I am extremely sad (and MAD) about it too! You need to know above anything else that *NONE* of this was your fault – You did *absolutely NOTHING* wrong! And, we're going to get through this experience with flying colors – *TOGETHER!* I am *SO* proud of you Brennan, because I could never go through what you've just been through and be so *BRAVE!* Again, **YOU ARE MY HERO!** And, **I LOVE YOU!**"

## God Gets a Big Red Star

Attempting to live out the *"Praise the God who gives and takes away"* concept, Brennan and I briefly recounted "the conversation" experience in the hospital regarding his amputation.

I desperately wanted him to know that *"I fully realized he (we) had absolutely no control or choice over having his leg taken away from him in the hospital."* Yearning for some closure and a sense of peace on the subject, we devised a plan for a special party.

Similar to the way a family might perform some type of commemorative service for a cherished pet, we came up with the idea of having a "Send-Off" party for Brennan's leg. Done in a celebratory spirit, we hoped it would provide the perfect opportunity for Brennan to release his leg on HIS terms, in HIS time, when HE decides he's ready.

Sharing the idea with him, I remember the wonder in his eyes and the excitement in his voice as he asked, *"You mean, I'm going to send my leg to heaven for God to look after, until the rest of me gets there one day?"* Instantly, a tangible, confirming peace washed over us, and a welcome shift in perspective began to surface...

We decided a local park, along with a handful of family and friends, would create the optimal environment in which a painful past could be released and a new outlook born – for everyone!

There were 4 helium-filled balloons – one for each year he had his leg. Three plain white balloons would accompany a big red star-shaped balloon, on which I attached a picture of his affected limb.

We began by playing the song *'Praise You in This Storm'* to commemorate our triumph over the torrential experience which took place just one month earlier. When the song finished, we huddled around Brennan to pray for his continued physical and emotional healing, for peace and joy that surpasses our current understanding, and for supernatural courage and strength to successfully meet, greet, and beat all future challenges.

Eager to release his special Heaven-bound "Badge of Honor", Brennan paused for a moment and then counted down *"3-2-1, Blast-Off"* and finally "let go."

Everyone watched intently as the balloons quickly rose above the trees, floating upward until their shapes and colors eventually blended into the clouds above. Soon after, there was a very palpable, soothing wave of relief that gently washed over the group.



We concluded the event reminiscing with family and friends over 'Sponge-Bob' cupcakes, followed by some long-overdue "monkey time" on the nearby playground. Watching Brennan climb up, slide down, run around, swing, jump, play, and (most importantly) laugh again that afternoon was absolutely magical!

The event proved to be more valuable than anyone could have imagined. Empowered by the chance and choice to release the hurtful experience on HIS terms via the "Send-Off" party, we immediately noticed a significant emotional shift in Brennan from that day forward.

## Life Lessons from a Child

I'm confident most parents would agree it is important to see a loving sparkle in your child's eyes, hear excitement and joy in their voice, and genuinely feel in your heart they are happy and safe. For me, it was especially meaningful to see these simple things return to Brennan after his accident.

Instead of dwelling upon that which had been "*taken away*" from him in the hospital, Brennan was now laser-focused, energized and excited about his forthcoming possibilities, consistently asking "**WHEN** do I get my new Super Power Leg?"

I am continually amazed and enlightened by the magnitude of impact such an event has, not only on those directly affected by it, but on everyone with whom I've shared this experience. On a personal note, my immediate family grew much closer during that time, personal epiphanies ablaze as to what's **truly** important in life. And, the close relationship I now enjoy with my Dad is directly attributed to our time spent together in the hospital 'weathering the storm' as Brennan's father and grandfather.

I know for a fact Brennan, myself, and many others have grown wiser and more blessed in ways which may never have occurred, had it not been for this very experience. And, I am still completely baffled and awestruck when I witnessed Brennan's immense strength of character, wonderful sense of humor, and genuine faith in others and God remain intact, and even *grow* – during and after the event – while he endured undeserved and prolonged pain! (*Reminds me of another Son I know!*)

Humanly speaking, I readily admit it was incomprehensible at times how (or WHY) God could possibly allow something "bad" like this happen, *especially* to a child! It also became increasingly difficult to believe in the possibility "*a forest beyond the trees*" even existed when each day grew more surreal than the last, yielding nothing more than a continual string of dismal prognoses and disappointments.

However, I can vividly recall the specific moments He came through when I needed it the most. Whether in a whisper over my shoulder, a comforting Scripture, the soothing melody of a song or a surprise visit from a friend – all were Divine gifts of vital comfort and peace, perfectly timed and delivered!

Mentally reviewing the experience from start to finish is a regular exercise in humility. Not only has sharing this story with others helped me better cope and more effectively process the myriad of emotions such as anger, rage, frustration and sadness, it has also led to the discovery and development of the "*Greater reason-lesson-blessing*" previously mentioned.

And, response from others has consistently exhibited the same individualized beauty and uniqueness of snowflakes. No matter whether someone reads the story, watches the video, attends a seminar, or we talk personally, I am continually told the impact it has on the heart and the imprint it leaves on the soul is indelible.

Personally speaking, I am immensely grateful for the "gifts of perspective" along the way, coupled with numerous serendipitous events that have occurred which provide a remarkable 20/20 hindsight discussion worthy of historical notation. (*Hence, this story*) ☺

Since the accident, we've witnessed several examples of the "*Greater reason-lesson-blessing*" resulting from this experience. A determined spirit with an unstoppable attitude, Brennan decided to tackle a Kid's Obstacle Course/Fitness Event, a mere 30 days after

receiving a "practice" leg. (*Oh yeah, he decided to "warm up" his new leg – as if the 94 degree day wasn't enough – with a half-mile walk around the track before conquering the obstacle course!*)

Additionally, he's played multiple rounds of T-Ball, has successfully climbed Stone Mountain (*I know adults who quit half-way!*), and raised money for others by participating in a Walk-A-Thon, extending his personal walking "mission" from 20 to 33 laps, equivalent to 3.3 miles!

As far back as I can remember, people have always commented on how incredibly "*kind, sweet, loving, perceptive, creative, and funny*" Brennan is, so it's no surprise he's also met with and spoken to other amputees, offering a level of compassion, insight, and wisdom that rivals the greatest of sages!

Watching this "Strong One" strap on his "Super Power Leg" and get back to being a kid again (*running, jumping, kicking, sliding, swimming, climbing, stomping, and my personal favorite – laughing hysterically*), has been a wonderful healing salve for the heart and soul.

Additionally, it's been incredibly soothing to experience a greater level of comfort and peace when 'stormy' situations arise, **knowing** and **trusting** that God **is** truly in control – especially when *my* plan or expectation is drastically different from *His* ultimate plan!

## **Let Go & Let God...**

I believe it is part of our basic human nature to want and expect the inexplicable wrongs of the world made "right" somehow. I subscribe to that ideal. However, the number of personal challenges or struggles I have encountered, amplified, and/or lost over the course of my life thus far is in direct proportion to the number of times I have failed to defer to the Ultimate Judge.

Simply stated, my inability to surrender tough situations – "*Let go and let God*" – has rarely (if ever) resulted in a favorable outcome long-term.

Does the very thought of surrendering (*anything, to anyone, at any time*) cause you to mentally recoil in defense? If so, I highly recommend abandoning such a myopic, self-limiting, and incredibly frustrating view of the term and concept.

For some, the term 'surrender' might be synonymous with weakness, failure, and/or sustaining a loss of some sort, all of which *are* valid points – in one context. However, I'm going to share what it can look like in a different context, as it was revealed to me.

Trust me – I speak from immense personal experience! My life was a repetitive mess, filled with foolish pride and selfishness, unwilling to surrender, which caused frustration on many levels, for many people.

*(Perhaps "breaking" me through this very situation was the only way to finally get my attention?)*

After hearing this story, people often inquire about the various stages and effects of our experience, and the significant impact such an event makes physically, financially, emotionally, socially, relationally, and legally on those affected...

However, the more entrenched I became in certain thoughts or discussions demanding "justice" (*at least as I saw it*) the more 'roadblocks' seemed to surface, ultimately hindering our recovery process.

Driving to work one day, I got stuck in a mid-day traffic mess. I began pondering the mounting medical bills, current and future prosthetics, and simply reflecting on how Brennan has continued to progress and shine through this whole ordeal, despite ongoing challenges.

Drifting in and out of various thoughts, one of those "whispers" caught my attention. A slight ringing in my ears became a steady background track for the ensuing discussion that took place between God and me.

Two simple words surfaced: **"Forgive and Forego"...**

Momentarily stunned, I immediately quipped **"WHAT did You say?"** thinking God had obviously made some kind of mistake! Without hesitation He answered:

*"Why don't you forgive and forego? After all, you know the story of the two paths – the wide and the narrow – right? Do you understand the current path you're on is going to require a huge sacrifice of time, energy, resources and emotion? Instead of chasing a 50/50 shot of "success" at the end of a frustrating and lengthy legal rainbow, why not channel your focus, energy, and My resources toward something YOU can control? After all, you can raise money faster than you can sue for it! Isn't that your intention for writing this story and making a video anyway? How much bigger, better, and more inspiring would THAT story be? How many people have already experienced, or will experience these same challenges? How many more people could benefit from a POSITIVE and DIFFERENT story about you and your son – and in the process, learn about Me and My Son?"*

*The "million dollar question" is... Are you willing to forgive and ready to go?"*

Somewhat confused – *and offended* – by what I deemed a completely absurd request, I defensively snapped, **"WHY should I do that? THEY don't deserve it!"**

And, like a bullet ricochet, I was immediately hit with: **"Neither did YOU, but how many times have I already, or should I continue to forgive YOU?"**

Feeling like I had just been zapped with a stun gun, I sat there quietly, reflecting back over my life. It didn't take long to realize I had to abandon my desire to "cast a stone" (*truth be told, my wish-list for exacting justice included heavy artillery!*)... For I realized just how many of my personal mistakes, selfish pursuits, and times of simply 'being human' were swiftly, consistently, and many times undeservedly, erased without further prejudice by His grace and mercy.

Now the option to do likewise was staring me in the face, unwavering in its demand for my response!

Wrestling with my own human desire to avoid "surrender" I took a deep breath, held it for one final second... Forcefully exhaling, I said out loud:

"OK God, I'm **SICK & TIRED** of being angry, and hating, and holding this grudge for so long! I know YOU ultimately control things, and YOU know how this thing ends... I just want the pain to go away for everyone that's been hurt by this situation! **I surrender and I forgive!** I give it over to You – ALL of it! Now, can we PLEASE get to the 'Greater reason-lesson-blessing' you keep mentioning?"

In that moment – where complete surrender and genuine forgiveness intersected – I immediately felt the stranglehold of my deep-rooted bitterness and anger dissolve, and a tangible heaviness suddenly dissipated from my chest.

This was followed by a flood of ideas that literally began to pour over me faster than I could process and write them down! I immediately pulled over to the side of the road and filled an entire page with an amazing array of possible "reasons-lessons-blessings."

### **"If You Build It, They Will Come"**

A conversation during one of Brennan's first appointments to be fitted for a prosthetic went like this:

*"I bet you're going to be unstoppable with this new leg! And, did you know they have a camp every year for kids with special limbs just like you? As a matter of fact, you'll see some kids who don't have any legs – and some kids are missing an arm, or both arms! You're going to love it! Unfortunately, it's for older kids, so you'll have to wait a couple years before you can go..."*

His voice tinged with great anticipation, Brennan anxiously replied, "I want to go to camp too – that sounds like a really cool place! Can I go to camp Dad?"

Cognizant of the gleam in his eyes and desire in his heart to be able to attend such a "magical" event or place – so that he could see/know there are others "just like me" during such a critical time – I asked what events were available for younger amputees, or what support groups were available locally for families?

A rather glib answer of "None... We tried doing something once before, but it just didn't get enough response" generated a myriad of emotions in me. I sat there silently watching the conclusion of Brennan's fitting as my initial feelings of shock and disbelief quickly morphed into a frustrated determination to change the situation!

Driving home from the appointment that day, I grew more frustrated by the answers I received pertaining to the availability of support – local or otherwise – which I considered a necessity, for Brennan and for me! Admittedly, I too was in need of support and encouragement, often wondering "What do OTHER people do in this situation? Who do they talk to for support and encouragement? How do they handle things emotionally, physically, socially, financially? Where do THEY go for help?"

Suddenly, a simple line from a popular animated movie 'Robots' that Brennan and I watched at least a dozen times popped into my head. In the movie, a little boy's creative aspirations were set ablaze after hearing his mechanical-genius idol proclaim "**See a need, Fill a need!**"

That's it! I thought, *"Heck with this, I'll MAKE an event! It will be an opportunity to give to others everything I wish was available to us at this time! And, unlike other events which may only happen once a year, we will meet four times a year (once per quarter)! And no matter what your age – You're invited! It will be a fun "Day of Discovery" – where kids can get back to being kids through supportive and engaging activities, hopefully inspiring older amputees to do likewise – and parents/caregivers can get vital support and encouragement from trained professionals and other families in similar situations! And, all attendees will "graduate" with an opportunity/expectation to return and mentor others in future sessions!"*

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Moving forward, I realize that only God knows and ultimately dictates how stories begin and end, along with everything that happens in between. I'm just incredibly excited (and humbled) to think that we've been chosen to play supporting roles alongside Him in this new chapter! Now it's simply a matter of following His lead from here, confident that an eternally significant outcome and opportunity for others was crafted for *His* ultimate glory through our "accidental" experience.

Above all, I hope others are gripped and God is ultimately glorified through our story and ongoing testimony. I pray this serves as a reminder that His strength, love, grace, and sovereignty IS the silver lining – *especially* during the darkest of times.

## **A Video is Born...**

During the course of events, I had this deep sense or "urging" to begin documenting everything, through taking notes and pictures of various things at different times. As a result, I ended up with 10 pages of written, real-time, personal history along with 56 pictures that definitely speak volumes!

Approximately twelve weeks after Brennan's accident, he began the fitting process for his new *"Super Power Leg"*. After returning home from one of the appointments I was unable to sleep later that night, haunted by memories of the previous months.

About 12:30 a.m. I went into the living room, turned on my laptop, plugged in my headphones, and opened the file containing all the graphic images. None of the pictures had ever been labeled, but I remembered exactly when each photo was taken, so I simply numbered them from 1 to 56.

After the images were organized, I remembered how we all fell in love with the song *'Praise You in This Storm'* when Brennan was in the hospital. So, I cued up the music and the pictures and pressed 'Play'...

As the song began and the first few images went by, I was immediately gripped by an "eerie" and incredibly serendipitous thought that a "gift" had just been dropped in my lap from above! As the music continued, tears flowed uncontrollably as I watched various images appear in perfect unison with appropriate phrases in the song...

Instantly, I KNEW a video was going to become an integral part of sharing this story with others, in a way far more powerful than words alone ever could. Enjoy the ride! ☺

## To My Son

Dear Brennan:

*I hope one day (when you're a little older) through reading our story, watching the video, and participating/helping others via AMPUCAMP™ you get a clear sense of just how much I love you. I am grateful you entered my life when you did, for I've learned many valuable life lessons along the way, in all of which YOU have played a pivotal role – teaching, humbling, and inspiring me (and others) in many ways, many times.*

*I hope you never grow tired of hearing it, because I never get tired of telling you how incredibly thankful and proud I am that YOU are my son!*

*Remember: "Stay Strong, Be a Leader, Defend Mankind, & Always Dream BIG!"*

*PS: You're My Hero! 😊*

*Love,*

*Dad*

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