

Six Months to Live

Three Guys on the Ultimate
Quest for a Miracle

by

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with

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The Boyle Family.

Back Row:

Allan and Jennifer (Boyle) Pichay, Brendan, Artie Jr., Nicholas, Brian, Timothy, Christopher, Andrew.

Third Row: Gabrielle, Brianna, Judy, Artie, Kathryn, Julianne, Michelle (Boyle) Larnard and Eric Larnard.

Second Row: Gabriel, Brayden, Maria, Trevor, Michael, Gavin, Annabelle.

First Row: Shamus, Christopher, Sofia, Jacob, Christian.

Seated: Connor (Larnard), Daniel (Pichay).

Prologue

I see my children at my funeral. Twelve beautiful faces side-by-side in the front pew of Resurrection Church. These are my living children. My eighth child, Joseph Anthony, entered heaven as an infant and if I get to heaven myself, he'll be waiting for me there. How I've

missed holding that soft little hand in mine and cradling him close to my heart, although, like my other twelve, he's never left my heart in all these years. Beside the children sits my lovely wife of twenty-six years, Judy, my first and only love. We've been together since I was thirteen and she was twelve. Despite my death, I know she is still a woman of great faith. But I can't bear the thought of her raising our young family alone. Who will teach them to throw a ball? Who will wipe their tears when they fall, or when life disappoints them? Who but my wife will remember them taking their first breath? Their first step?

Our shared history is now gone; the family we so lovingly created and nurtured is changed forever. I can see the two stained glass windows on either side of the altar, one of St. Michael the Archangel and the other of St. Gabriel the Archangel. Ironic. My earliest memories of the Bible came from a picture of the two sides of angels fighting—the faithful ones staying in heaven and the others falling to hell. Had I known I was going to die at forty-five, I would have spent more time here with the angels in our church. By now the pallbearers have reached the midpoint of the center aisle. The priest approaches the casket where my body lies, anoints it, and prepares me for my burial Mass. My corpse patiently waits.

Prologue

I see it all so clearly as I begin the long overnight flight. While I try to block these images, my doctors have offered little encouragement, and I know my friends worry that I might not survive the trip. This is my second bout with cancer in less than a year. As an athlete with a discipline for training and faith in my body's ability to heal, I really believed we could beat it the first time. And we did. But, now I feel like I've been handed a death sentence. I've lost a lot of weight, I'm tired, and I'm depressed. My skin is the color of a metal fork.

I remind myself that this trip is no vacation. It is supposed to be a pilgrimage. So as my traveling companions sleep from sheer exhaustion, I snap on the overhead light and start my reading. I have a King James bible, a gift from Lloyd, our airport limo driver. A self-described "non-practicing Jew," Lloyd had received it as a tip from a passenger and despite his boss's repeated requests to remove it from the car, he still had it. Our enthusiasm for the trip must have been obvious because when we arrived at Logan, he handed it to me saying, "This was meant for you." Between the bible and the books I've brought that tell the history of our destination, I will be awake all night.

It is Labor Day weekend 2000, and we are traveling to a place called Medjugorje, a tiny village nestled in the hills of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the former Yugoslavia. Until last week, I'd never heard of it. Well,

I didn't think I had. My wife says she's been telling me about it for years, but I was probably watching sports and not paying attention. My brother-in-law, Kevin Gill, and my neighbor, Rob Griffin, had learned of the miraculous apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary that were reported at Medjugorje—and, more importantly for me—of inexplicable healings that blessed sick pilgrims.

So here we were, Kevin, Rob, and I, hoping for a miracle of our own. Our trip came about as a result of chance conversations in hockey rinks, locker rooms and golf courses where my own dire situation broke down barriers, and led us to talk about the kind of things men generally hold deep within.

None of us would describe ourselves as deeply “spiritual.” We were “guys.” Our parents were devout Catholics and had done everything possible to plant the same faith in us. But other things like family, work, and the business of “life,” smothered those mustard seeds. Our faith just wasn't the priority it had been for our parents. In fact, we'd never really considered why we were Catholic; just accepted it as what we were. We attended church with our wives and children on Sundays, and believed this made us “good” Catholic men, but we gave God little thought or time.

People who knew “The Boyles” from church would probably describe us as “active” parishioners, but I generally volunteered my time out of a sense of obligation rather than zeal—as something I should

Prologue

do because of the kids. I suspect it's the same with many men. Simply put, Rob, Kevin and I were neither heathens nor choir boys, just three guys desperate enough to take a leap of faith.

A few weeks ago, I had been diagnosed with a recurrence of renal cell carcinoma, which had now spread to my lung. Following my first diagnosis last year, I had what they call a radical nephrectomy: I was virtually cut in half, right across the middle, to have my kidney removed because of a large malignant mass. At the time, the doctors said that the growth was "contained," that they had gotten it all and I would be fine. But eight months later, they told me it was back, and that it had metastasized. As one doctor said: "The cancer could be anywhere."

My family was devastated, and while I tried to keep a brave face for them, I had never been so terrified in my life. I was exhausted from just pretending. The doctors told me starkly that there was no effective treatment. The only option was surgical extraction. And it's very risky.

On September 14, I am scheduled to have my lung removed by a thoracic surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital. He will saw through my ribs, deflate and remove the lung, hold it in his hands, remove the tumors, and feel around to make sure he's extracted all the cancer. I may lose a piece of my lung. I may lose the whole thing. And even if this nasty little procedure "succeeds," it's just a matter of time before

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the malignant cells appear somewhere else. The doctors tell me the odds of survival are less than five percent. As in blackjack in Vegas, you may win a few hands, but the decks are stacked against you. The disease, like the house, always wins.

I am going to Medjugorje to be healed and to be with the Blessed Mother. I'm hoping for a miracle. And, although I might not actually see her, I feel strongly that she will touch me in some way. It's the only hope I have.