

When I Get
to Heaven
the only one
shaking will be
Elvis

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Elvis

Jim Jackson

My Battle with
Parkinson's



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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to the most important people in my life:

My mother, Bettye, who gave me life.

My wife, Laura, who gave me love.

My daughters, Mary Elizabeth and Sims, who gave me gray hair.

And to the most important person:

Jesus, who gave me eternity.

Special thanks to the following friends:

Tim Irby, for taking such superb pictures, and for putting so much of your time and talents into this book.

Charles Schuchard, my friend, my brother-in-law, and part-time wordsmith. Thanks for always being there with an encouraging word. Your positive comments gave me credibility with the family when everyone thought

my writing was a “phase.” Your friendship has been a blessing to me.

A special thanks to Oprah, a lady so special that all you need to say is her first name and everyone knows who, you’re talking about. Your show with Michael J. Fox, where you spoke with him about how therapeutic writing a book was, gave me the idea to do this. You have inspired many people. God bless you.

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FOREWORD

I chuckle every time I read the title of this book. I based it on my strong faith, knowing that my Lord will remove the baggage that comes along with this disease when I meet Him at the pearly gates of heaven.

This book is my attempt to document my battle with Parkinson's disease, nicknamed "PD." This battle, while deadly serious, is fought by me and my friends and family with prayer and humor. I believe it is important to laugh at yourself and the surprises that PD brings on a daily basis. I do not mean to minimize anyone's personal experiences with this disease. I realize what a horrible illness it is. I just choose to meet this bump in the road of life with a laugh rather than a cry.

This book is a celebration of all the people who have assisted me in this battle. They have made the journey a blessing.

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I once told Joe White, a mighty Christian man who is the owner of Kanakuk Kamps, that the Lord blessed me with Parkinson's. Joe responded that not many people would thank the Lord for giving them a disease and that I was a role model to others. That is my goal.

I believe the Lord gave me PD, not to see how I would handle it, but to show others how to handle it. This book is my way of doing that.

I hope you enjoy these tales of the happenings in my life. Don't be afraid to laugh. I guarantee you these incidents resulted in much laughter when they occurred.

May God bless.

—Jim Jackson

PD SNEAKS INTO MY LIFE

Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.

—Deuteronomy 1:9 (NIV)

Parkinson's disease ("PD") came quietly into my life in the spring of 1996. I am a special agent with the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service. Now, to set your mind at ease, let me assure you that special agents do not audit income tax returns. We perform investigations into various types of crimes, including money laundering and drug dealing.

My agency sends new agents to Glynco, near Brunswick, Georgia, to be trained by a group of senior special agents. In 1996, I was assigned to teach senior special agents advanced money laundering investigation

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techniques for four weeks. I was excited, partly because it was a reward for my hard work and also because it gave me the opportunity to work on my golf game.

I had been a fairly good golfer, shooting consistently in the high 70s for eighteen holes. But work and family life had shifted my priorities away from golf, and I was eager to see what I could shoot after some daily practicing.

The second stop I made when I got to St. Simon's Island, my home for the next four weeks, was one of its many beautiful golf courses. I immediately signed up for the practice range membership and gladly paid \$200 for the right to hit practice balls all day, seven days a week, for four weeks. I enjoyed my daytime teaching activities, but lived for the late-afternoon and early-evening hours I spent on the range beating golf balls. Whenever I called my wife, Laura, she said I talked like I was in heaven.

Sometime early during the third week, I began to notice that my right arm was often hanging close to my side. It did not swing as naturally as my left arm did, but rather as if it were in a sling. Being a typical man, and since it didn't hurt, I ignored it, hoping it would just go away.

Laura came up with "golf overload" as the likely culprit. I believed her and took a couple of days off from golf.

When my teaching assignment ended, I returned to my Jackson, Tennessee, home with my new best friend, PD, though I did not yet know him by name.

TIDBITS

The four primary symptoms related to Parkinson's are:

- a. *Rigidity*—stiffness. Can be experienced in an arm, leg, toes, or fingers. My initial symptom was my right arm hanging close to the body.
- b. *Tremors*—shaking or trembling. Usually in one hand or leg, but can be in both.
- c. *Dyskinesia*—my nemesis. The slowing down or stopping of the body's movements. This can be caused by some medications.
- d. *Loss of Balance*—Be very careful of falls.

IS THERE A DOCTOR IN THE HOUSE?

Back at home, the worry remained with me. My arm didn't hurt, but without specific effort on my part, it hung by my side as if it were broken. I thought I might have had a stroke, but figured if I lost some weight and exercised, I would be good as new. I began the infamous fen-phen diet and lost weight quickly, but I became terribly nervous.

It was early fall, and my extended family back in Oxford, Mississippi, was beginning their annual task of preparing the land and buildings of the deer camp for the upcoming season. This usually includes a couple of "men only" weekends comprised of bush-hogging the deer fields, fire lanes, food plots, and access areas. Grass seed has to be planted and fertilizer applied. These working weekends are always fun, but terribly tiring. That year was no exception.