



**BLOOD IS LIFE;
LIFE IS PARAMOUNT
("Thou Shall Not Kill")**

In 2001 sixteen-year-old Bethany Hughes of Calgary (one of Jehovah's Witnesses) refused to undergo blood transfusions. Bethany died in September 2002. She was told by the Watchtower (WT) organization that she was making the right choice. Her father, Lawrence, is striving to raise awareness about Bethany's senseless death and has made numerous media appearances and legal strides since.

In 2003, 20-year-old Candice Unland tried to challenge legislation which says a patient 18 years or older should have the right to refuse a transfusion, arguing that a 16-year-old, such as Hughes, should have the right to refuse blood. The case was rejected. Justice Mary Boyd said the rights of a "mature minor" to make her own medical choices do not supercede the authority of the courts in B.C. to protect her life.

In 2007, I watched my friend struggle with the blood/Watchtower issues when her elderly mother needed surgery and her brother, a Jehovah Witness Elder (leader), charged into the emergency room at 1 a.m. to ensure that his mom signed a Watchtower document refusing blood. The mom was weak and in pain. Did she have a choice? Of course: Take blood and die at Armageddon (according to Watchtower beliefs) and then even if she lives, be shunned by her whole community of Jehovah's Witnesses friends and family...or *not* take blood and possibly die now. Wow! What a predicament!

Was this the only thing the Elder, her son, was concerned about? It seems that way, because as soon as his mom signed the paper, he left the hospital and didn't return until the next day. His mother could have died and yet he was nowhere to be found; meanwhile, my friend, who was never a baptized Jehovah's Witness, waited patiently in the waiting room for hours with her developmentally delayed daughter by her side for word from the doctor about her mother's fate. Fortunately, my friend's mom survived without a blood transfusion. But now, because of my friend's obvious concern about her mom's well-being, both her Jehovah Witness mother and brother (the Elder) are shunning her...and her disabled child! Her mother told her "I don't give a damn about you and the state can take care of "M" (her granddaughter)."

I'm dedicating this article to *the families* of all the men, women and children who were coerced into giving their life needlessly in order to comply with Watchtower rules, which seem to change with the whims of its fallible human leaders, rules that make no logical or Biblical sense, rules that in 10 years may be obsolete and yet no apologies will likely be made to the families who lost loved ones. Unfortunately, the dead have become 'poster children' for Watchtower martyrdom. What's worse? Those who recognize this deception feel trapped through coercive persuasion and pray to God that they are never faced with this life or death decision.

The ignorance bred into Jehovah's Witnesses by the Watchtower is staggering. On my visit to Pennsylvania in June 2007 my dad remarked, "I would never take blood. You know you can get the personality of someone when you take blood." Sheesh, dad! I wonder where he heard that? I recall attending an assembly years ago where a giant heart spoke to a giant brain. The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society taught that one's personality resided in the heart (*Watchtower*, 3/1/71, p. 133-139) and so people who had heart transplants had *personality* transplants. But according to my dad, the personality resides in the blood too—I guess it just moves around.

This kind of mindset really isn't that surprising when you consider that Charles Taze Russell, *Reconciliation*, p. 14, wrote that Jehovah God lived on Pleiades and touted the belief that germs didn't cause disease, or that small pox never saved a human life. Or as a Jehovah's Witness told me recently (and this is a direct quote): "You ask doctors and they will tell you that they would **never** accept a blood transfusion because they know how dangerous it is. No doctors accept them." Ignorance is bliss.

Out of the Cocoon

I recently had a first-hand experience with blood transfusions so now I “get” the gravity of refusing blood. True, it wasn’t a human being that I lost, but it was still, ultimately, a very precious life. I’m sharing my very personal account as well so that hopefully some Jehovah’s Witness reading this will look beyond the dogma and into the eyes of the life they are willing to gamble away.

On July 30, 2007, I *almost* lost my precious dog Rags, a 7-year old Shih Tzu, when she began bleeding internally. We didn’t know what caused the bleeding, but the veterinarian quickly spelled out her options: a blood transfusion to make her strong enough to survive exploratory surgery (her blood count was exceedingly low), or she would certainly die that night. It was a no brainer. I signed the documents while wiping away a flood of tears.

Within a couple hours, she was transfused with the blood from a pit bull and on the operating table. During surgery they removed her spleen, which was engorged with blood. My son and I tried to lighten our somber mood while waiting by telling jokes: “So...what do you get when you cross a Shih Tzu with a bulldog?” Answer: Bullshi*.

Joking aside, Rags was fine for 50 days, sweet as ever (no, Watchtower, she didn’t take on the stereotypical personality of a pitbull). She lived on, as did her personality...to snore like a freight train when she’s asleep, cuddle in my lap, nuzzle her face into my neck, obsessive compulsively lick my toes, wrestle with her sister, and “whimper” endearingly while seeking out a good hiding spot for her treats. Sadly, though, she began bleeding again 7 weeks later, after what appeared to be a full recovery, and I had to make the extremely painful decision to put her to sleep on September 20, 2007. Life is soooooo precious; even for a dog. I LOVE my dog (notice I didn’t use the past tense, because she will live on in my heart.) And she is JUST a dog (although very “human” to me)! I never “let in” what refusing a blood transfusion meant, until now.



Here are some pictures of Rags. On left, notice transfusion line being administered before surgery. On right, both of us in much better days. **I’ll never regret the decision to do a blood transfusion, even though she ultimately died. It bought us a lot of extra precious time and I got to love her, hold her and plant kisses upon her furry head until the moment of her final breath. She was truly spoiled those next 50 days.** If there is a doggie heaven, she is most definitely in it, frolicking happily through green pastures.



After this experience, I can’t imagine *not* allowing someone I loved—a human being—to have a blood transfusion.

What hope do Jehovah Witness parents have to save their children when they are being coerced to avoid blood transfusions? Consider this: According to Paediatric Child Health, Vol. 11, No. 10, Dec. 2006: “Three recent Canadian legal cases have dealt with the proposed blood transfusion of adolescent members of Jehovah’s Witness (JW) families...Before one may legally give or refuse consent to medical treatment, three conditions must be met: competence, adequate information and lack of coercion... **Coercion by actual or threatened shunning and excommunication can occur, and these factors may affect adolescent decision-making...** a court order authorizing medical treatment can, therefore, be seen as enhancing patient freedom...” (emphasis added)

Referring to changes in Watchtower blood policies, they go on to say, “According to neurologist Muramoto, “Official church publications show that the use of serum was prohibited by the church from 1964 to 1973, the use of clotting factors by hemophiliacs was prohibited until 1978 and the use of albumin was forbidden until 1981...the WTS reversed its position on the acceptability of the use of hemoglobin-based blood substitutes in two years (1998 to 2000). Critics claim that the precedent of other policy reversals (in removing the vaccination and transplant bans) and these piecemeal changes in the blood ban will lead eventually to acceptance of all blood in medical emergencies...Muramoto advised physicians to ask the patient:



'In view of the changing blood policy of the Watchtower Society, the component you now refuse may be considered acceptable in a few years. Are you sure you want to refuse it and die now even if you may not have to do so in the near future?'" The article went on to state that a patient may actually benefit from court-ordered transfusions in that JW's do not shun members who are under court order to accept a transfusion. This makes it easier for the patient to receive life-saving treatment without losing their JW family and friends.

Here's another story:

My involvement as one of Jehovah's Witnesses came about through my mother who became a witness when I was very young. My mother is a survivor of childhood sexual abuse herself and this charismatic group came along in the door to door ministry and professed a more hopeful life for her. [My mother was emotionally and sexually abused by a very charismatic elder 24 years ago...to this day she maintains a very close relationship with the abuser's daughter (very hurtful and strange to me)]. What this religion did over the course of more than 40 years was completely divide my family including my parents divorcing 24 years ago; my oldest brother nearly committing suicide before separating himself off from our entire family; another of my brothers has struggled with his homosexuality, has been disfellowshipped and returned and no longer speaks to any of us; my youngest brother became very depressed and close to suicide before finally leaving the organization. My mother has four children...the three of us that finally **walked away** endured years of my mother's shunning. Two of my brothers escaped before considering committing suicide. I **walked away** a year and a half after my husband's death.

The way my husband died was directly from a lack of a blood transfusion which was clearly stated in the report sent to me by the coroner after his death. My husband had a work related accident (explosion and fire) he was burned over 75% of his body and 50% of that was beyond 3rd degree (so deep they have to remove all the skin and fat layer beneath down to the muscle). I did not understand how blood or a lack of a blood transfusion related to that until it was explained by the professionals in the burn unit and I did some research myself. When a person has burns that deep over that much body surface it is like having a massive wound and all your white blood cells are rushing to the area trying to protect and create a scab, but of course it cannot. During this process while the person is bandaged head to toe and all the white blood cells are seeping out throughout all the wound sites soaking the bandages the blood count is continually dropping. A normal hematocrit for a man is between 45-52%; my husband's dropped to 5% before his major organs started shutting down. The JW's think it is all a matter of VOLUME, giving VOLUME EXPANDERS, these do not CARRY OXEGEN!! So once the blood count is that low and there are not enough cells carrying oxygen to the organs, organ failure sets in. First his kidneys shut down, dialysis was not an option either because a dialysis machine as the doc's put it eat up a number of blood cells before it really starts doing it's job and (my husband) had none to spare. His liver was beginning to shut down next and his heart would be next. At that point he was only breathing with a ventilator machine and his heart continued to beat due to the drugs being given. When they told me there was no hope (5 weeks into being at the Burn Unit) it was even too late to give him the life saving blood transfusions.....I was asked to make the decision to withdraw the life-support. NO ONE should ever be put in that position, it is the most horrible place to be...especially when it did not have end that way. My husband was only 32 yrs old, strong as an ox, and able to survive with the right treatment. I KNOW this without a doubt. The Burn Unit has had patients worse than my husband survive, I met several of them.....but my husband did not stand a chance without the blood he needed.

Looking back with 20/20 vision of course, knowing all that I know now.....I wish I had the presence of mind to push the elders and others away....and RISK whatever I thought the consequences would be.....ANYTHING..... just to be able to still have him here, with his children and with me.



The loneliness I felt in a kingdom hall full of so called brothers and sisters every time I attended a meeting was unbearable. Feeling the constant scrutiny from elders who didn't have a clue of the burden I carried. One of those burdens was the knowledge that ***I alone*** could have prevented my husband's death (since he was too drugged and incoherent to make decisions) just saying to the doctors to GO AHEAD!!! DO WHATEVER YOU NEED TO DO to save him!!!! Except for the fear of what actions I thought the elders would take against us, and the brainwashing I had in believing my husband was making some kind of sacrifice in Jehovah's name, giving a ***WITNESS*** to all those doctors and nurses. My husband was not even active in the congregation at the time all this happened.

The elders that were dispatched to the hospital to act as liaisons with the doctors were soon notified of his standing in the congregation, and that he was not eligible for that kind of support from the HOSPITAL LIASON COMMITTEE. So they decide they could exert the same kind of control...but do it through me ***I did not REQUEST this***. I was considered spiritually weak at the time...missing meetings, etc. So in hind sight I see that they placed themselves in a position of authority were they had no place to be. This was a personal family matter but by being a liaison between me and the doctors they put themselves in a position of controlling whether a KNOWN MEMBER would receive a blood transfusion.

For the entire five weeks that my husband was in the hospital there was always an elder or so-called mature brother hovering nearby. At one time the doctor asked to speak with me alone in a conference room and the elder present said he ***must*** be in the meeting as well not by my request. This elder did in fact make sure he was there to ***maintain the decision to not allow blood to be given to my dying husband***.

The burden I carry is because I know without a doubt my husband, my children's father would be here today had it not been for the JW religion and their involvement and worst of all my going along with it ultimately allowing his needless death. But also it is because since then I have researched the whole blood issue too, the doctrine they teach has no scriptural backing. They compare it to the scriptures that speak of eating blood and they interpret that to be the same as taking it intravenously. My research has proven that is in fact NOT the same. JW's allow organ transplants and a blood transfusion is the same as a transplant. If you were unable to eat to keep nourished you would be hooked up to IV fluids that would be consumed by your body for nutrition. When you are given blood through an IV your body DOES NOT CONSUME IT!!! A blood transfusion is a REPLACEMENT for the blood already lost just like an organ transplant would be to replace the failed organ. What makes this more disturbing is that they have drastically changed their position on this in recent years thus making my husband's sacrificial death more hurtful.

The local congregation's response to the local paper regarding an article about my husband's death was declaring the choice of refusing or taking a blood transfusion as a personal choice....it was never ***a personal choice for my husband or my family!!*** We were burdened with a man-made law, and threatened with the consequence of displeasing Jehovah leading to the Elders' actions (with us) being marked or disfellowshipped. ***This coercion kept us from taking the life saving measure of allowing a blood transfusion to save my husband's life.***

Things to Seriously Consider

- According to David A. Reed's book, Blood on the Altar, more than a thousand Jehovah's Witnesses die every year refusing blood transfusions. That's more than the deaths at Jonestown, or to put it another way, every



five years it like the terrorism of 911 (September 11, 2001) happening all over again! So the next time JW's come to your door and proudly state that they don't participate in war, smile and ask them about the thousands of senseless deaths related to this policy.

- Why aren't all Jehovah's Witnesses vegetarians? Even if you drain the blood from an animal, blood remains in the meat and organs. Besides, doesn't the Bible say, "Only its flesh with its blood, **its soul, you must not eat.**" When you eat flesh or the soul, aren't you eating *the animal's carcass*? Isn't the soul forbidden in this scripture? Jehovah's Witnesses seem to read right past this and only see "its blood." Since Jehovah's Witnesses believe the soul is the body and not some invisible force that departs the body when one dies, isn't this scripture also suggesting that you shouldn't eat an animal's *body*?
- If God created Eve from Adam's rib, then that was the first time anyone shared blood because when doing any type of bone or organ transplant, some of the blood is naturally transferred. Additionally, bone marrow contains blood, does it not? No where in the Bible does it say that God broke Adam's rib to drain the blood, does it? In the film KNOCKING, Seth, a Jehovah's Witness, accepts an organ transplant. Do physicians get out all of the original blood before transplanting these organs?
- Why would God prohibit blood transfusions when medicine--at that time--didn't even practice such a thing? Isn't that "adding to the scriptures"?
- If consuming blood was so serious, why were Saul's men not executed when they ate blood along with the meat?
- Some hemophiliac treatments require the collection of blood from up to 2500 blood donors for a single treatment. How can Jehovah's Witnesses say they "abstain from blood" when the fractions of blood that are permissible to them allow them to tap into the world's blood supply? How can JW's ethically take from the world's blood supply but refuse to donate back to it? Couldn't *their* blood be used to save the life of a fellow JW?
- If any other religious group refused to allow their children to have broken bones set, citing religious beliefs forbade them from allowing "interference" from modern medicine, and the child became horribly disfigured and couldn't even walk, use their hands or arms, etc., would not civilized society, even Jehovah's Witnesses, condemn this as neglectful/unnecessary? Isn't death even more serious and impactful to an individual and his/her family than disfigurement? Should "religious belief" ever usurp an individual's right to life? Is not one of the commandments "Thou Shall Not Kill," indicating that LIFE is sacred?
- If you believe that every individual has a right to refuse medical treatment of any sort that might prolong his or her life, at what age do we cut-off a person from this right? Should we allow a five-year-old to refuse surgery because he doesn't want to be separated from his mommy? How about a 10-year-old who doesn't understand the consequences of his or her decision? How about a 16-year-old like Bethany who was promised her picture on the cover of one of the Watchtower's magazines in exchange for her sacrifice—a promise that was never kept. At what age and during what circumstance is a person capable under emotional and physical duress of making such a life-altering decision?

Please, consider giving blood anytime you are able to do so. I do! When a family accepts blood on behalf of a loved one who is about to die, it's more than a gift. It is frequently the difference between picking out a casket and picking up your loved one at the hospital and taking them home. Imagine the relief knowing someone you love has been SAVED...and the peace inside knowing that even if you couldn't save them, at least you tried. Life is precious.