

December 17, 2009
“Follow the Star”
Contest Winner
Merry Christmas, Nurse and Care-giver Mel!

“The Christmas of 2006 was a rather dark one for our family. While our neighbors’ homes donned their holiday best, the world seemed a little too icy for Christmas cheer at our house.

This was the Christmas they sent my brother home to decide his fate. Was he too sick with lymphoma to live? Or would he muster enough strength from the depths of his chemo-ravaged body to survive? We were all too scared to know the answer, but we carried him home, Tiny Tim-like, to fulfill his request to spend Christmas at home.

The most amazing thing about that Christmas is that the Azzarelli family experienced not one, but two Christmas miracles after a year of trials that had certainly tested the mettle of our faith. The first miracle is that, yes, Frank did in fact summons enough strength to endure a bone marrow transplant and survive. The second miracle is this...

Before Frank was released from Roswell, he confided in his nurse, Mel, that he was worried that there would be no Christmas for his family that year. As he suffered the gut-wrenching pain of aggressive chemotherapy and radiation, Frank was worried that he could not buy Christmas presents for his family. Mel had pulled Frank through a few close calls, and once again, she was there to guide him through the darkness. With a loving squeeze of his hand, she simply told Frank to trust her, that everything would be OK.

When we arrived to carry Frank home, he looked me straight in the eyes and said, “Lisa, don’t worry about Christmas. Everything is going to be OK.” (What Frank didn’t realize was that bringing my little brother home to share another Christmas WAS already present enough.) Frank’s fight with cancer had strengthened his faith, and I could see a look of definite trust in his eyes. I wasn’t sure exactly what he meant by this, but I believed him. It was as if he was speaking from a place of other-worldliness. Who was I to doubt him?

On Christmas Eve, as we gathered for dinner, the doorbell rang. My dad opened the door to a red-cheeked stranger who announced cheerily, “Merry Christmas! I have some gifts for you.” She proceeded to pile a mound of wrapped gifts at our threshold, much to our astonishment. I heard my brother

whisper to his father, "See, Dad, I told you." My brother's face was beaming with joy.

We spent a great deal of that Christmas trying to guess the identity of our kind benefactors, but in my heart, I already knew the answer. We had been touched by Mel's warmth many times throughout my brother's hospitalization. She was more angel than nurse already. Mel provided tissues when we were teary-eyed, hugs when we were weary, and laughter to lighten my brother's mood.

I believe that these gifts came from Mel's golden heart, and this was her final effort to encourage Frank to believe in himself and in God enough to survive. That day, Mel became our family's Christmas Star. She had given of herself endlessly at Frank's bedside, and now she was tending to us as a family at home. I will never be able to thank her enough for her generosity, for helping us find light during our darkest hours, and for allowing my brother to participate fully in the miracle of Christmas. I am eternally grateful to Mel for tending to the sick and weary with a grace that knows no boundaries."