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10-2015

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Recommended Citation

Roschman, Melodie, "The Peace that Passes" (2015). *Lake Union Herald*. 99.
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The Peace that Passes

BY MELODIE ROSCHMAN

“In the midst of it, I said, ‘if nothing changes, it really doesn’t matter, because God’s still in charge.’” Kenley Hall leans back in his chair and nods. “To me, that was the greatest miracle that God gave me.” As he sits easily in his office chair talking to me, it’s hard to believe that Kenley, assistant professor of Christian ministry and director of theological field education at Andrews University, was in a wheelchair only a few months earlier. Today, he’s walking, but that’s a future he didn’t foresee.

In July 2013, Kenley was speaking at the Manitoba-Saskatchewan Conference Camp Meeting at Camp Whitesand in Saskatchewan, Canada. That week, he explains, the entire camp meeting was hit with a vicious strain of stomach flu. “We could feel the devil working,” he says.

Even after he finished presenting and went home at the end of the week, his symptoms lingered for the better part of a month. When Kenley finally recovered, it came at a terrible cost: His autoimmune disease was back. Over the next few months, Kenley slowly and painfully lost all feeling and function in his feet and legs.

This wasn’t the first time Kenley had experienced partial paralysis. He suffered two previous bouts with Guillain-Barré syndrome, the most recent of which had seen him in a wheelchair nine years earlier. Guillain-Barré is an autoimmune disease in which the myelin sheaths coating nerve cells wear away, leaving the nerves unable to transmit information. “The myelin is what conducts the impulse down the nerve, as opposed to a wire, where the pulse is on the inside,” explains Greg Almeter, associate professor of physical therapy and Kenley’s physiotherapist. “It starts in an area farther away from the brain and works its way up. It starts in the legs and in the hands, and can get to the point where you have to be on a respirator.”

By January 2014, Kenley was in a wheelchair without any use of his legs or feet.



It's hard to believe that Kenley Hall, assistant professor of Christian ministry and director of theological field education at Andrews University, was in a wheelchair only a few months earlier. Today, he's walking.

Photo: Peter Damsberg

“I spent probably the first three weeks of January in the rehabilitation unit at the hospital,” he recalls, “being re-taught how to do everything in a wheelchair.” When he left the hospital, Kenley started working with Greg in an arduous 15-month process, attempting to regain limited function in his legs. “I still joke with Greg that he reminds me of someone who could have been a good torturer

back in the medieval days,” Kenley laughs. However, after 15 months of work, they were able to regain a small amount of function in his upper legs, but that was it.

“We rate function on a 0–5 scale,” explains Greg, “five meaning you have full strength, and zero meaning you have nothing.”

By March 2015, Kenley was hovering around a 2 for his feet, and his upper legs had reached 3 — just enough for him to walk for short periods of time with a walker and leg braces that mechanically moved his feet using the movement of his knees.

“Everybody figured that this was as good as it was going to get,” says Kenley, “and that was okay.”

He pauses and looks at me intently, his tone becoming deadly serious. “This is the most crucial part of my story,” Kenley says. “There are people who have prayed more deeply than I’ve probably ever prayed in my life, who have a deeper faith than I have, who are still sitting in wheelchairs. And I don’t have any answer for that question. The only answer I



This photo was taken moments after the prayer was offered asking God to heal Kenley Hall. Shortly after the prayer, his toes began to tingle; and in just a few short hours, Kenley was up and walking.

have to anything is this: The greatest miracle that God performed for me was not my actual physical healing, but what he did in my soul.”

“You see, that’s the ironic thing. Nine years ago, I left the Mayo Clinic being told, ‘You’re never going to walk again,’ and then I did through instantaneous, miraculous healing. I traveled all across the world sharing this testimony, and saying, ‘Were I still in this wheelchair today, I’d still be testifying of Jesus Christ and the great miracles he’s performed. I’d still be saying the same thing.’ Now, eight years later, I’m back in this wheelchair. I’ve had a really good chance to test that — did I really mean what I said?”

“Even in the midst of this, while I was still in the wheelchair, when I had no function from the waist down, God sowed this peace in the depths of my soul — the peace that Paul describes as this peace that passes understanding (see Philippians 4:17). This peace helped me say, ‘Even if I live the rest of my life in a wheelchair, with this kind of nerve pain, with no function in part of my body, it’s okay. God still loves me, he still has a plan for my life: I’m still teaching over at One Place, I’m still teaching in the Seminary. So I’m wheelchair bound — that’s okay!’”

While Kenley was spiritually and mentally at peace, day-to-day life still wasn’t easy. On an historic campus like Andrews University, many older buildings aren’t fully equipped for wheelchair accessibility. He also didn’t have the funds to

equip his house or car with full disability accommodations. Kenley’s son, Josh, a sophomore at Andrews, had to carry his father into the house piggyback style — no simple task when Josh was 65 lbs. lighter than his father. Josh also came along on a Seminary-sponsored history trip, and carefully carried his father in and out of the tour bus along with his wheelchair.

“It was incredible,” Kenley recalls. “I felt so guilty about it — my 20-year-old having to carry around his father on his back. I was so touched and grateful for his willingness to do that.”

Kenley’s Seminary colleagues went out of their way to help him as well. After taking medical leave in fall 2013, he returned to teaching part-time in spring 2014, and full-time the semester after that.

“The wheelchair-accessibility button on the Seminary door often malfunctioned,” explains Kenley. “My administrative assistant took it as a personal assignment to make sure I had access to the building.”

Kenley’s colleagues also worked together to raise money to buy him a handicap-accessible van, which they were planning to purchase in March 2015. Overall, he says, people simultaneously treated him with compassion and all of the dignity and normalcy they had [shown] when he could walk.

“I was still the teacher, father, husband that I always was,” Kenley says. “Some probably doted over me more than they

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Maintaining our Legacy

BY MELODIE ROSCHMAN

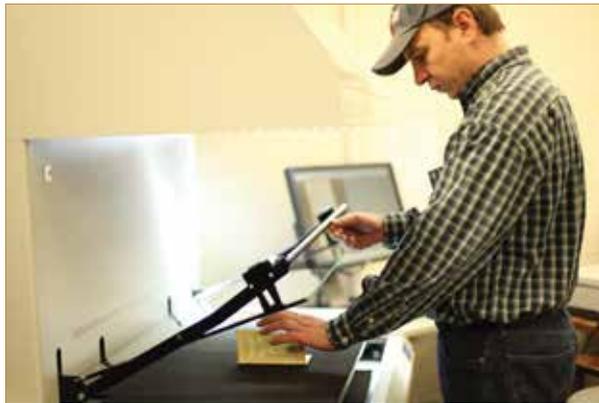
The collection of rooms in the basement of the James White Library on the campus of Andrews University may seem unassuming to most, but for Juliette Johnson, digitization manager at the Center for Adventist Research, they're a treasure trove.

"There are some really interesting things here that no one knows we have," she says, "and there are so many things that we don't even know we have. We find things every day that were given to us in the '50s, '40s, '30s, and were never processed, so we're discovering new stuff all the time."

The Center, which receives support from Andrews University, the White Estate and the General Conference, is a concentrated effort to collect any and all materials pertaining to the history and legacy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These can range from the expected — such as editions of Ellen White's books and early issues of *Signs of the Times* — to the strange or extraordinary.

"We have the cane that Uriah Smith used," Juliette says with a laugh, "and we have his prosthetic. It's funny, in the collection it says that we have Uriah Smith's leg in our vault!"

The thousands of items in the archives range from a complete catalog of *Student Movement* (Andrews University's student newspaper) to letters home to General Conference president William Spicer from his daughter, who was a missionary in China; from William Miller's pen and



The digitizer in the Center for Adventist Research will allow anyone access to electronic versions of everything in the Center, including 3-dimensional images of objects and artifacts.

Joseph Bates' pocket watch to the complete DVD series of "Gilmore Girls" which featured an unflattering portrayal of Adventism in the character of Mrs. Kim.

"If it mentions Adventism, it's there," Juliette explains. "We're not just trying to promote our church; it's basically to give someone a view into our history, 'warts' and all."

Juliette has been working on digitizing and scanning

the Center's contents since 2005, but now she has a new project: the Adventist Digital Library, which will launch January 2016. The library seeks to make a vast number of full-text books, articles, letters and images available online for free to anyone interested in Adventist history.

"It's not just the digitized materials," she says, "we're also planning to have articles, and that kind of thing, to get people interested in going deeper into searching." She hopes the digital library will be a special resource for Adventist educators who seek to get their students passionate about the heritage of their church.

With this in mind, Juliette's personal passion and project is to raise \$10,000 for the equipment and labor necessary to use a 3D digital scanner to recreate some of the Center's

more unique holdings — like evangelist William Simpson’s paper-mâché beasts from Revelation — as fully explorable models on the web.

“Being able to see these tangible representations of Adventist history can make it real for many members,” says Juliette. “I’m connected. I know who I am now.”

Ultimately, she hopes the upcoming digital project — and the Center as a whole — can help Adventist children and

adults remember where they come from, and what their purpose is.

“I want to highlight artifacts and say, ‘Look, these are our people who spread the gospel and sacrificed so much, but they were just like you and me. Maybe we can do something like that. Maybe we can change the world, too.’”

Melodie Roschman is a graduate student writer for the Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.

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needed to,” he smiles, “but I understand where that came from.”

In March 2015, Kenley traveled to Columbia, Maryland, to teach a one-week intensive class for a master’s in pastoral ministry. The class met every day from Sunday to Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and at 5 p.m. on Thursday, Kenley prayed a blessing over his 22 students. When he had finished, they gathered around him and explained that they liked to give gifts to their professors as thanks. “The best gift we can give you is the gift of prayer,” they said.

“So they gathered around me,” Kenley remembers, “laid their hands on me, and this woman, a lay pastor, begins to pray. Unbeknownst to me, when she’d seen me on Sunday night, she said, ‘God, I know what you want me to do this week,’ and she literally went on a complete fast through this entire intensive class, fasting and praying for a stranger. That was mind-boggling for me.”

As his students prayed, Kenley began to pray too — a very different prayer.

“I was saying ‘God, I’m at peace. When they’re done praying ... I don’t want it to be devastating to their faith when I don’t jump up, throw off my leg braces and start running around the room.’”

The moment the prayer ended, though, Kenley’s eyes widened. For the first time in months, he felt a prickling sensation in his toes. Within seconds, he was wiggling his toes. “You know, this may not be significant to you,” he exclaimed, “but this is huge for me!” He smiles. “In that moment, we praised God that I could wiggle my toes.”

When Kenley returned to his hotel room that night, he wondered if anything else might happen. He slowly removed his leg braces and stood up. “The next thing I knew, I was walking back and forth across my hotel room,” he says

excitedly. “I had complete nerve regeneration in my upper and lower legs.”

Kenley flew home on Friday, and Monday morning he went in to see his physiotherapist. Greg ran a few tests, but it quickly became clear: Kenley’s legs and feet were restored to almost perfect strength. “You’re done; you’re healed,” his therapist said.

“There was nothing left for me to do,” Greg shakes his head. “I’ve been doing this 18 years, and I’ve never seen anything like it. God still does really amazing things sometimes. There’s just no denying what he did.”

Today, Kenley can move and walk without difficulty. While the future is unsure — he could suffer another relapse, Kenley remains confident and at peace.

“I have no idea what eight years from now is going to look like,” he says, “but I really don’t care because I’m just going to live with God right now in this moment. Whatever happens, it simply doesn’t matter, because God’s got my back.”

Melodie Roschman is a graduate student writer for the Division of Integrated Marketing & Communication at Andrews University.

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