



About the Author

The Rev. Dr. Jim Hargis now lives by the sea, in Half Moon Bay, California. He is currently working on three books (about everything from his coming of age to his political observations) and finds that writing helps him cope with his disease. A 1974 graduate of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, he has served God in a variety of places: St. Stephen's—Orinda, St. Timothy's—Danville, St. Mary the Virgin—San Francisco, San Francisco General Hospital—San Francisco, and True Sunshine—San Francisco, all in California; All Saints—Heidelberg in Germany; St. Stephen's—Longview in the state of Washington; St. Andrew's—Prineville and St. Alban's—Redmond in Oregon; and All Saints—Kapa'a in Hawaii.

About Vintage Voice

Vintage Voice is a monthly publication for retirees of the Episcopal Church who, in sharing their stories, help deepen the sense of community. We hope you enjoy these articles and find them helpful. Stories are published with the authors' permission. If you have a reflection about your life in retirement, consider writing for the *Vintage Voice*! Send your submissions to vintagevoice@cpf.org.

VINTAGE VOICE



Wonders Never Cease

By the Rev. Dr. Jim Hargis

I started out as a child in the Ozark Hills of southwest Missouri. Blessed with some athletic ability, I was privileged to play minor league baseball during college. Due to a devastating eye injury on the field, however, my career was short and sweet. So I had to decide what to do when I grew up.

Law school was my next stop, but I hated every second of it. Somehow, the priesthood called me. Apparently, God uses some pretty peculiar characters! I told Him He had the wrong number. Then, while on a backpacking trip, I rolled 30 feet down a cliff in my sleeping bag. This must have been God's way of shaking me up to get it through my thick Missouri-mule-headed skull that I needed to heed His call to be a priest. I finally gave up and gave in. Little did I know it would take me to the trippy hippie '60s of Berkeley, California (and the equally trippy Church Divinity School of the Pacific). And no, I never inhaled!

My spiritual mystery tour took me through opera singing, comedy, and getting lost in the wilds of nature. I was an avid runner, obsessive weightlifter, and—despite the unfortunate cliffside slide—still a mountaineer, hiker, and backpacker. Having climbed many of the high peaks in the Wild West, I wondered what adventure would be on the horizon. Would I be prepared for it? What would I really do when I grew up?

Then, more than 40 years later, there I was, in retirement. Suddenly, I was a 70-year-old couch potato, with congestive heart failure and something I had never heard of: amyloidosis.

“What the #!%! is that?” I asked the doctor. And thus began my quest to become an instant expert on this rare, life-threatening blood disease.

How did I, as physically fit as I was, end up with a disorder that caused amyloid, an abnormal protein, to build up in my organs? “What do I do, now?” I wanted to know. “What will fill that void of my formerly active lifestyle? What will get me motivated, inspired, and energized to keep on keeping on?”

I began writing. I had to do something besides sitting on my butt feeling sorry for myself. I couldn't let this debilitating disease take over my life. I knew that God wasn't finished with me yet. So I immersed myself in

poetry, humor, politics, teaching, and helping others. While I might be past my prime as a baseball player, opera singer, and priest, I still could contribute something positive toward making this world a little better.

My treatment included chemotherapy with a steroid. Hoping to return to my former bodybuilding glory, I invented the character “Amyloid Floyd,” King of his magical kingdom of Steroid. In my head, I followed the adventures and misadventures of this crazy guy as he rocked and rolled to overcome this rare blood disorder.

Many of us are going through some tough issues in our lives. There are many ways to handle the challenges we face. The main goal is to find out what works best for you. Being an extroverted, gregarious person, I found that my journeys involved humor and asking lots of questions of experts, staff, and patients who were facing similar challenges. I listened to the different ways that others were overcoming the difficulties I was experiencing. I learned that handling struggles like these can also involve being a PITA (Pain in the Ass!) patient. One milestone I’m happy to have reached is that I’m now off steroids.

The following tips have helped me get over every hurdle I’ve faced, and my hope and prayer is that they will help you too, no matter what you’re dealing with:

1. **Be empathic.** Show genuine interest in other people, and they will show genuine interest in you. If you bring out the best in others, they’ll help do the same for you.
2. **Find out what really makes you tick.** Use whatever energy you can muster to do those things that help you find meaning, purpose, and joy in your life. Spend time focusing on something outside of yourself (volunteer work, hobbies, helping less fortunate people, animals in shelters, etc.).
3. **Find things (and people) that help you feel good about yourself.** Negative stuff drags you down. Positivity builds you up. Be receptive to constructive criticism, use it wisely, and implement it to better yourself.
4. **Listen intently and others will invite you more deeply into their lives.** Remember to do the same when it’s your turn.
5. **Laugh and smile—a lot.** It’s contagious.
6. **Discover the many talents and skills you have.** We are all really good at something, usually many things; we just need to take time to figure out exactly what they are.
7. **Exercise as best you can.**
8. **Eat healthy foods and portions.**
9. **Take time, every day, to be quiet**—meditate, listen to nature, pray, or simply relax and rejuvenate.
10. **Finally, don’t take yourself too seriously.** Angels can fly, ’cause they take themselves lightly. Unburden yourself from grudges, anxieties, and hatreds that weigh you down and prevent you from realizing more of your potential. Lighten your load, and you’ll go further down the road!

You Will Survive

About 67 years ago, Amyloid Floyd survived a deadly car crash,
Thrown 50 feet through the air, banged a huge tree, head was trash!
Probably should have died, but was blessed to pull through,
Now the world must put up with his preachin’ and poems, even you!
Comatose, several days, massive skull fracture, but when awakened, he could talk,

Then the real trick began: all over, I had to learn how to walk!
Not sure my “scrambled egg brain” ever got back to functioning so well,
’Cause many say I live in some universe that’s not quite “so parallelll!”

Many blessings to you from Amyloid Floyd, the now Deposed King of Steroid.



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