

New Peace, New Serenity

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Bobby has experienced these things in New York. Some of his early encounters with poorly trained health-care professionals read like a horror story. "What has changed?" I asked him.

"It's like shopping around for a hair stylist," he said. "There are hospitals in New York known as leaders in research. Some have heavy experience dealing with the disease and are ready to work with PWAs (persons with AIDS). That's where you go. There are other places with uneducated staffs and that's a terrible thing. But it's a matter of someone taking the initiative, time, money and manpower to educate them — and they are in short supply."

Bobby derives strength from lessons learned through Alcoholics Anonymous.

"I don't think I would have survived this long had I not stopped drinking," he said. He has truly learned to live one day at a time, as AA teaches. We talked about the prayer, "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference." It seemed to sum up what Bobby was so passionately trying to tell me.

"Being ill helps you put other things into perspective — not only for yourself, but for others as well," he said. "Listening to other people really teaches me the meaning of trivial pursuit. I hear them worrying about things so insignificant; and here I am dealing with a terminal illness.

"Sometimes, after I speak to a group, people come up to thank me because I've helped them put their own lives into perspective. And when I see people in the hospital wasting away and dying, it helps put my life into perspective. I'm doing pretty damn well. I have to be grateful that I am not covered in lesions, have not lost all my hair and can still walk, breathe and eat and do all of the things that some others can no longer do.

"I talked to a woman 65 years old who had a transfusion and can't understand why she has AIDS. It makes you look at things differently. Each day, no matter how shitty it is, is another day and you may not have tomorrow. But the fact is that we should all be living like this, sick or not. If we could all live each day as if it were our last, things would turn out a lot differently.

"It's difficult not to project about the future or think about the past. If only — but that would drive me crazy. Live for the here and now, shitty as it may be, because it will pass. You have to be willing to accept whatever comes to pass. I believe there is a higher power at work. It's the only way I can handle this. There is a direction and order to the universe that I have no control over.

"I have learned to let go and flow with the current," he said. "I don't fight this disease. That's not the same as giving up. When you are constantly fighting, it's so negative and uses up your energy. By totally accepting what is happening and going with it, I store energy. I do what is necessary to be as healthy as possible, but I don't fight. I do believe in a higher power. That's why I'm not afraid of death."

The hours past quickly slip by as we talk. Bobby's father Bill, who has spent the afternoon shielding Bobby from unnecessary interruptions, must leave for home. He has spent the week with his son and that morning helped him home.

"Be good," he admonished as he kissed Bobby goodbye. "Will you be all right?" "I'm fine," Bobby said. "And ... thanks."



NEXT ISSUE: Bobby continues his discussion of living with a terminal illness. He shares the secret of his survival and how he is preparing for his future.

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