

## One Thousand Weeks

The number of weeks in the time from the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1991 until the 9<sup>th</sup> April 2010 is one thousand. I wonder how many of us can remember what we have done throughout those one thousand weeks, what changes there have been in the World as a whole. Maybe you have been through college or university during that time, started a new job or career, got married, become a parent or a grand-parent.

In May 1997 Tony Blair became Labour Prime Minister here in the U.K.; September of that year saw the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales.

In September 2001 we witnessed the horrifying events in America, majoring on the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York.

In July 2005 there were the bombs in London, three on the underground, one on a bus, killing and maiming dozens of people.

Why one thousand weeks? It was at the start of those one thousand weeks, on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1991, that my life changed. Up until that time I had been fit and healthy. I had left school the previous year and was living in Cardiff where I was a student nurse. I was enjoying my course and studies, and was involved with a local church.

Then everything changed. I had a routine vaccination, a requirement for my training. Six months earlier a vaccination had resulted in my being unwell for a few weeks, but I had been assured that the problems I had experienced previously would not reoccur. Those assurances were unfortunately incorrect.

Within an hour of having the vaccination I started to feel ill, and over the next twenty-four hours I became increasingly unwell. At first I wasn't worried, thinking that it was just a temporary, mild reaction to the injection, and assuming that I would soon be back to my nurse training.

Over the following weeks and months things did not improve and my health gradually worsened. Rounds of hospital appointments and tests followed, but it was some ten months after becoming ill before I finally received a diagnosis for my condition: M.E., Myalgic Encephalomyelitis.

In many ways it was a help to have a name for my illness. I knew that I was ill, but not knowing what it was made it hard to understand what was happening and to find out what I could do to try and get better. Having a name for my illness did at least mean that I could start to find out about it.

However my relief at finding out what was wrong with me was short-lived. As I started to learn about M.E. I soon realised that it was (and sadly still is) a very misunderstood illness, with many people, including some family and friends and especially many members of the medical profession, not taking it seriously – in spite of the fact that it has been listed by the World Health Organisation as a neurological condition for many years and that biomedical research from around the World has indisputably shown that M.E. is in fact a multi-system failure, with no system or part of the body being unaffected. One M.E. expert has described M.E. as “one of the most disabling diseases that I care for, far exceeding H.I.V. disease except for the terminal stages” <sup>1</sup>. The Chief Medical Officer said of M.E. in 2002 that it “should be

classed as a chronic condition with long term effects on health, alongside other illnesses such as multiple sclerosis and motor neurone disease"<sup>2</sup>.

For about 8½ years I remained moderately affected by M.E., with my health just slowly deteriorating. I was not bed- or house-bound, yet at the same time I was not well enough to work at all. The doctor who had diagnosed my illness could offer no help; his parting comment to me had been, "Have you thought of alternative medicine?". I saw a medical herbalist for a time, followed by a consultant at the local homeopathic hospital. They were both Christians and were very nice to talk to, but their treatments did not bring about any relief.

During 1999 everything that could go wrong seemed to go wrong, with my M.E. becoming considerably worse due to the development of numerous problems including thyroid problems, digestive problems, liver problems, all of which are still on-going. I also suffered a number of doses of shingles. As a result, since that time I have been severely affected by M.E., with the additional development of further difficulties including a couple of major seizures and adrenal insufficiency.

In the last 11 years I have had a few months here and there where I have experienced some short-term, slight improvements, but overall it has been down-hill health-wise. I am now mainly house-bound and I have to spend much of my time in bed. It is over 5 years since I was last well enough to attend a church service. Despite being in my late 30s I am still living with my parents, both of whom are now retired, and upon whom I am very dependent; this is in itself obviously a matter of concern all round as Mum and Dad get older.

In November last year my brother Tim married Lois. The wedding took place in Northern Ireland, where they live and where Lois was born and brought up. I was unable to attend the wedding, which was a great disappointment, although the service was recorded and I was kept fully up-to-date with all that was going on via phone calls, text messages and email. Thanks to mobile phones I was able to listen to the speeches live, and I am most grateful to an extremely kind friend who came to look after me while Mum and Dad were in Northern Ireland for a week for the wedding.



Like most people, I left school with various hopes and aspirations for the future. I wanted to complete my nurse training and then work abroad, probably in East Africa, an area I had been interested in for many years. Since the age of 15 I had been involved with United Beach Missions, a Christian organisation, and had hoped to continue working with them during summer holidays. I also very much wanted to get married at some stage in the future and have a family.

In the time since leaving school I have done none of the things that I had hoped to do. The time I spent nurse training in Cardiff seems like a distant dream. My life is now mainly lived in one room, my bed-room, and my laptop computer is my main method of communication with the outside world – how thankful I am for email and the Internet! Many of the people I am in touch with I have never actually met; I have got to know them solely by email or occasionally talking on the phone. Happily I am able to listen to sermons that have been recorded onto CDs, but as a Christian the lack of Christian fellowship is hard to deal with.

So, what of the future? What of the next one thousand weeks? From a purely human point of view, the outlook is bleak. My health is not good. I remain very dependent on my parents. Although there has been much excellent biomedical research carried out into M.E. in many parts of the World, the vast majority of it is simply ignored in this country, leaving tens of thousands of us with M.E. with very little (if any) help and support from the medical profession and care services.

However, as a Christian I know that I have a Heavenly Father Who loves me and Who has promised to supply all my needs. That might sound a bit shallow, and it can be hard to take in at times, especially when feeling very ill and in pain, with everything getting worse and worse – but the Bible teaches us that we are to live “by faith”, trusting in the Lord day by day.

I don't have all the answers. I don't know what will happen in the coming months and years, and I am naturally concerned about the future. But I do have a Saviour and I know that my future is in His hands. I know that when I die, whether that be sooner or later, He will take me to be with Him in Heaven. I will then see my Saviour and I will have a new, perfect body, one that will not hurt and cause pain, one that will not decay or grow old.

Do you have that assurance? When in this World, the Lord Jesus lived a perfect, righteous life, in obedience to His Father, the life that we, because of our sin, could never live. He died on the cross, bearing the eternal punishment of sin for all those who put their trust in Him. He rose from the grave, conquering sin, and death, and hell.

The Bible states that “For God so loved the World, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John ch 3 v 16).

For those whom God has saved by His grace, we look forward to the time when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away” (Revelation ch 21 v 4).

“Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing  
of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ”

(Titus ch 2 v 13)

© Hazel Stapleton 2010.

On Eagle's Wings: A Christian Perspective on M.E. – [www.oneagleswings.me.uk](http://www.oneagleswings.me.uk)

## References:

1. Introduction to Research and Clinical Conference. Daniel L Peterson. *Journal of CFS 1995: 1:3-4:123-125.*
2. Professor Sir Liam Donaldson's comment from the 11th January 2002 is on the BBC News website at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1755070.stm>

For further information about M.E. please see the following websites:

25% M.E. Group - [www.25megroup.org](http://www.25megroup.org)  
Invest in M.E. - [www.investinme.org](http://www.investinme.org)  
M.E. Action U.K. - [www.meactionuk.org.uk](http://www.meactionuk.org.uk)  
M.E. Research U.K. - [www.meresearch.org.uk](http://www.meresearch.org.uk)

## Recommended reading:

What is M.E.? What is C.F.S? –

[http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/What\\_Is\\_ME\\_What\\_Is\\_CFS.htm](http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/What_Is_ME_What_Is_CFS.htm)

Some of the abnormalities that have been demonstrated in M.E./C.F.S. –

[http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/MECFs\\_peer-reviewed\\_research\\_data.htm](http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/MECFs_peer-reviewed_research_data.htm)

Quotable Quotes about M.E./C.F.S. –

[http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/Quotable\\_Quotes\\_Updated.pdf](http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/Quotable_Quotes_Updated.pdf)