

Jim,

As you know I've esp. been struggling quite a bit lately with the MS, with depression and especially with the blindness. (I can't even say "my" blindness yet.) I have been getting ready for it for some time as the Multiple Sclerosis has been progressing, but nothing can truly prepare you for the reality of it once it finally happens. I'm afraid that I'm not being a very good blind person. I'm angry, even rageful, afraid, sometimes to the point of panic. I'm frustrated and disappointed and bitter. It's still relatively new and I know I have to work through the grief and drastic changes, but it's been hard. So hard.

I'm approaching the one year anniversary of The Day I Went Blind. That day last year, July 29th, 2007 was the day the "light went out." We all have days in our lives that mark anniversaries or important events or even disasters or tragedies. And July 29th at 12:34 p.m. is the moment my right eye, my "good" eye stopped working. The left eye had stopped working about 5 years ago, and it was amazing how well my body had reacted, come to my aid, and how my "good" eye kept compensating, right up till the end against the double vision that finally barred out entirely. But on July 29th I was sitting in a chair in front of my drawing table working on a drawing in progress at the Oshkosh airshow, when it happened, talking to a group of kids about art, about finding your passion. For a dozen years I had run a booth at the airshow selling my aviation drawings, drawings I had had the time to develop after my first MS attack some years before, a true case of "one door shuts and two doors open." When it happened I was able to keep my cool, and calmly called out for Melanie, and told her to, without making a fuss, help me to reach the big chairs across the aisle from our booth and then quietly inform the rest of the team what had happened.

And sitting in that chair, with the incredible sound of classic World War II aircraft performing above me, with the voices of excited kids and old friends and customers, and the general din of the exhibition hall around me, I realized two things: one was that I wished I had just stepped outside the building to see the planes that I loved just for a minute, planes that I would probably never see again, and the other was that I was at one of those moments in your life that, in many ways, other moments would be compared against. A moment when your life has taken a step in a direction and suddenly you don't have the same options to choose from, or at least you are faced with an entirely new set of options.

These moments come to us all, with car accidents, with vows of "I do," with the call that comes at 3:30 in the middle of the night, with looking into the eyes of a newborn child, with a coughing fit or a first bitter taste of liquor, or an exchanged smile across a crowded dance floor, or a first kiss in a steamy car. Sometimes we know the moment for what it is, but most times we don't. Later we realize it, but not then, not at the exact moment.

That's what the moment of my blindness meant to me: a change that I could never come back from, even if I regained my eyesight. It was in some ways a wonderful moment; how often is it in our own lives that we realize those moments of destiny. I sat there, working on keeping my fear in check, focusing on my breathing and the sounds around me while Melanie and my team, far more excited, were making plans to get me home or to a hospital. The moment was so certain, the knowledge was so clear that my life had just changed forever that I remember that I actually spoke to my old self, my old life,

now instantly changed and fading away. I said out loud, "Goodbye." I had the tiniest smile on my face. "Goodbye. Goodbye."