



## The Gift

The biggest gift I have ever received occurred in March 1999. On 18 March 1999 to be precise.

Here's how it unfolded...

A normally healthy, mid thirties, average type of guy. On three recent occasions that early spring I had come out in an unexplained rash, or as the medics refer to it - giant urticaria. Like a heat rash which spread from head to toe. Like an allergic reaction. But to what...? Completely unexplained, completely random in its cause (that is, with no apparent link to food or any other trigger for the reaction), and completely frightening! The fourth instance was to have almost tragic consequences.

With Elizabeth, my wife, I was to meet a business acquaintance and her partner for lunch in Edinburgh. We parked the car, and walked the short distance to the restaurant in the west end of the city. We enjoyed a light lunch and great company before leaving the restaurant to head our separate ways. In fact, Elizabeth and I were to look for an eternity ring for her for our tenth wedding anniversary. In lighter moments of reflection, we often wonder whether the thought of me buying such a gift had anything to do with what happened next!

It began, as it had done on three occasions previously, with a tingling heat sensation on the back of my head, spreading to my ears, and from my hands, spreading up my arms, and from my belly spreading to my chest, waistline and groin. It happened in seconds. Uncomfortable. And so, time to get back to the car to drive home. Mild concern, rising to panic, as it just got worse... I guess because the quicker we walked back to the car, the quicker the reaction rushed round my system. By the time we had walked the three minutes back to the car, I could hardly see, as the rash had become a puffiness and my face began to swell... forehead, cheeks, neck, eyes.

I was really starting to struggle now. I could literally see the nerve endings in my eyeballs as I went snow-blind. We reached the car, and I slumped into the passenger seat. Frantically, Elizabeth started the car, and we were off. It would be a matter of relaxing, remaining calm, and soon it would be over... just like on previous occasions.

But somehow this was worse... and I knew it.

It already felt different. It wasn't subsiding, and I could feel that my breathing was starting to be affected. The eerie silence in which I was shrouded was the same silence I had experienced only once before - when I had flown in a glider. As the chord from the towing cable releases and the drone of the towing aircraft becomes a distant memory, the aloneness has a unique soundlessness. And it was this **soundlessness**, not just silence, that I was experiencing now.

The blindness came over me like a white cloud, and the nauseating taste in my mouth told me I was going to pass out.

But it wasn't passing out. I was passing away.

At the moment my body slumped forward, my tongue swelled to fill my mouth, my mind went into overdrive, I felt myself stop breathing. and I knew for a split second that this was it! I was away! This must be how it ends.

When they say your life flashes before you, that's not true. It's your **values** that flash before you. And as I cruised down that tunnel of white light (yes, all that stuff you hear about this aspect *is true*), it was my **values** that flashed before me... in my final instant.

What about the children? What about the love I wanted to give?  
What about the things I hadn't seen, done, achieved yet?

**What about all the things left undone?**

I reached the infinite threshold... the moment of clarity... and then I was gone.

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I didn't even hear Elizabeth make the emergency call. Didn't hear her words.

Blue light. Flashing.  
Strange hands. Voices... but distant.

Waking up on the pavement (I subsequently learned that it was several minutes later), with my body constrained on a stretcher, and a mask being put to my face was an incomprehensible shock.

What? A car crash? Is Elizabeth alright? What about the children? What happened?

No, mate... an anaphylactic shock they call it. You died. And now you are alive.

It was later explained that my body had simply shut down like a computer shuts down. Each function simply closed down, like the functions on your laptop close down after a day is done. And eventually, your vital functions stop.

Since then, after numerous tests, no hint has been found as to the cause, or the trigger for the reaction. It has been years now... and every day like many others who have suffered similar attacks, I have carried the epi-pen (an emergency adrenalin injector) with me in case of another severe occurrence.

When asked, I struggle to describe what happened completely, but have often referred to it as "Heaven and Hell, in a nutshell". That's about it.

They call it an anaphylactic shock.  
I call it my Light on the Road to Damascus.

And that's a gift.

**By the way, conference organisers, and press interviewers, and journalists, I don't always talk about this, but if you ever ask me to tell this tale in public, be aware, there could be tears. I am unashamedly crying as I write it, relive it... it's that important and powerful for me...**

**God bless you, and may you live a Life on Purpose...**

**Phil Olley**