

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Bill Walton's words jarred me. What a way to begin an "inspirational book!"

*"I can't do this anymore. It's just too hard. It hurts too much. Why should I continue? What's the point in going on?...
If I had a gun, I would use it. I've been living on the floor for most of the last two and a half years, unable to move, unable to get up."*

That was in 2009. What I first remember about Bill Walton was from the early 70's. UCLA came to play in Corvallis. We had good courtside seats to watch him play Oregon. Walton was a very tall, very good, red-headed 19 year-old basketball player.

I remember thinking, *"that kid really loves to play."*

We didn't know he would go on to be the number one pick in the NBA professional draft. We didn't know he would be voted one of the top 50 professional players of all time.

Jean had me at the top of the list for his book at the library closest to our cabin. I was not prepared for those first chapter words.

I should have thought about the title: *Back from the Dead.*

The book is full of stories. There are lots of names many will know...and games...and teams...and also inside stories you've never heard. Walton has plenty of candid comments about both players and coaches...and about his coach and mentor, John Wooden.

Since we had seasons tickets for 8 years we saw many of those players. His story brings names back to memory. Interesting.

It is also a book about pain.

We did not know at the time, nor did he, that he was playing with congenitally deformed feet that plagued his whole career. He most always had pain but played through it as much as he could. We couldn't tell it when we watched him.

Many athletes have joint problems in feet, knees and hips. Bone structure has not evolved fast enough to support body mass, leaving once-agile athletes hobbling throughout their lives. Walton endured at least 35 or more orthopedic surgeries.

In my pastoral years I learned about pain. I learned that many of those smiling faces were hurting every minute of their lives. This morning's paper had a page saying that 100 million Americans live with chronic pain. So there are at least 100 million people who will have a feeling for Bill Walton's life-long pain.

But can Bill Walton, or anyone, "rise from the dead?"

Seven months after an 8 and 1/2 hour spinal surgery he was continuing physical therapy. One day he was listening to a Bob Dylan song, *"Visions of Johanna,"* a song about hope and a dream of a better tomorrow *when* came a turning "moment."

*"It was at that moment
that things turned for me...
I will never forget.
I knew at that instant that I was going to make it." (299*)*

Ah, that unexpected, infusion of life and hope that comes when least expected. Those who have been down there on the floor with Bill Walton and found something to get them to rise up know about "that moment."

You will want to read the book to hear how it all turned out for Bill Walton after his moment.

For the Moment....Art Morgan, July 31, 2016