

Father recalls breaking with faith for daughter

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VANCOUVER -- Lawrence Hughes walked into a Calgary hospital room in February, 2002, with a Bible in his hand, ready to do everything he could for his dying daughter, Bethany -- everything, that is, short of allowing her to have a lifesaving blood transfusion.

Mr. Hughes, who had been a Jehovah's Witness for two decades, was determined to fulfill his faith, which holds that Scripture prohibits blood transfusions. He entered the hospital room, where his daughter lay with leukemia, believing that his only option was to give her comfort in her final days.

"As far as I was concerned, my daughter was going to die, and I was willing to let her die, just like all these other Jehovah's Witness parents," he said.

But as he thumbed through his Bible, reading passages aloud to Bethany, his conviction evaporated. His copy of the Bible had an index, pointing out scriptural references that underpinned beliefs of the Jehovah Witnesses, including the prohibition on blood transfusion. He recalled reading recommended passages in turn, as he sat by Bethany's deathbed, and then rejecting it as not speaking to his 16-year-old daughter's plight.

Eventually, he searched for other scriptural references -- not listed in the index -- that seemed to confirm that he should permit the transfusion, allowing Bethany to live. By the time he left the room, he had broken with two decades of belief, setting him on a collision course with his church, wife and friends.

The parents of Vancouver's sextuplets, only four of whom remain alive, have not voiced any similar doubts about the court action that has allowed the B.C. government to transfuse blood into three infants.

Indeed, in a court filing, the father of the sextuplets professes both his love for his children and his family's determination to stand by his beliefs.

"We owe our lives and the lives of our children to our Creator. . . . We are not willing to turn our backs on Him now."

Mr. Hughes is just as adamant that the prohibition against transfusions is counter to what he believes.

"They go against God-given instincts to protect your children, and let your children die," he said, recalling that the reaction from other members of the Jehovah's Witnesses to his change of heart five years ago was fierce and immediate. "I was called an apostate," he said.

"It's someone who's working against Jehovah, and for Satan. You're not supposed to talk to that person."

Bethany did not want a transfusion, but the Alberta government successfully argued that she was not mature enough to make decisions about treatment. Mr. Hughes said his daughter rallied after receiving 38 transfusions, but the teen died in September, 2002.

He sued the Jehovah's Witness organization, but that suit was dismissed last year by the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench.

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