



# A New Song

Glimpses of the Grace Journey



“Faith is deliberate confidence in the character of God whose ways you may not understand at the time.” –Oswald Chambers

“My heart bursts its banks, spilling beauty and goodness. I pour it out in a poem to the King, shaping the river into words” (Psalm 45:1 Msg).



*Overflowing Grace*, by Lynn M. Burgher



# About the Cover

Sue Brooks—Mesquite, Nevada

It was late afternoon two days before Christmas 2010 and rain had been steadily falling for the past three days. I was headed home from work very much afraid of what I'd find. In the desert, this much rain means flooding. Mesquite is a small town, located eighty miles northeast of Las Vegas. Nearer to home, I spotted a Las Vegas news helicopter flying back and forth over the Virgin River in the direction of our neighborhood. This wasn't a good sign; it meant something big and newsworthy was happening. All manner of thoughts began racing through my mind.

Turning into our neighborhood, I drove down to the end of our street, and pulled my car into the parking area next to the bike trail. This area is less than 100 yards upstream from our home, which is also located across the street from the river with a stand of wetlands and the city bike trail in between. On the other side of the river stands the beautiful Virgin Mountain Range.

Joining a growing group of concerned homeowners and citizens, we watched the dangerously rising waters of the river as it raged down its ever-widening and thunderous path, taking along anything in the way. The sound was deafening. This would definitely make the evening and morning news! While talking with people, I heard rumors that north along the river in Utah a large dam could break. What unimaginable devastation that would bring to all those downstream! How quick I am to pray when catastrophe seems imminent! *Please stop the rain, don't allow anymore flooding. Don't let us lose our home and render us homeless. We don't have insurance, what will we do?* And on it went.

We were experiencing the second "100 Year Flood" in five years, almost to the day. Our neighborhood wasn't built at that time, so we didn't experience that flood firsthand as many others did. Because we live in a flood zone, flood insurance is either not possible or so expensive it's unaffordable. I had thought many times, *if our home was going to be flooded, what possessions would I choose to save?* The answer was always the same: my Bible, journals, photos, camera and computer with thousands of photos sitting on the hard drive, some jewelry, clothing and important papers. The time had come to get these things out of the house and move them to a safe location, which was my daughter Emma's house. Some homes upstream had been flooded and our situation was unknown at the time; it depended on how much longer the rain would fall.

After a few trips of unloading things at Emma's, we, and my youngest daughter, Charlotte, drove to another street upstream to help sandbag the road. There were a lot of people and equipment already working when we arrived and they were about finished. As we stood by, the rain subsided a little and everyone went home to wait it out. I turned on the TV to find out that we were big news all right and that the dam in Utah was going to hold—what a relief! I hesitated to go to sleep, but decided to wake up at intervals throughout the night to check on the rain and river.

The first thing after waking up early the next morning, I opened the front door and looked out—it had stopped raining and the river wasn't at my doorstep, although I could still hear it roaring as if it was. *Thank You, thank You, Lord!*

The flood of 2005 proved to be much more destructive, taking homes, businesses, bridges, cars, trees, and wiping out anything in its path beginning in Utah, then Arizona and into Nevada.

Over the next couple of weeks, the river went way down. It amazes me how this river can rise so quickly and forcefully, then dwindle to a mere trickle in a short span of time. I couldn't wait to get out and walk the riverbed with my camera where the river had been a torrent two weeks before. Heading across the street and down the bike path, I soon came to the area where the path opens up and everywhere I looked was dry sand, wet sand, and mud. The violence of that thunderous river path was evident in the myriad levels of sandbars left behind and the twisted broken branches of trees, plants, and various other items and belongings the river had picked up on its journey. The patterns in the sand were fascinating, a discovered treasure for a photographer. I walked and walked in the sand and next to the river's edge for a long way, intrigued by the powerful force of nature and the changes it can bring to a place. This was a walk I would take several times over the next couple of weeks. Charlotte walked out with me the second time and it is her feet, footprints, and hands I photographed for the front and back covers and the photo titled, *All That I Cling To*.

During these walks, I contemplated many things. I thought of the journeys of the Israelites as they wandered in the desert for 40 years—a place very much like this one. I thought of the extreme trials they went through and the ways in which God consistently led and provided for them. Then the miracle of God parting the Red Sea came to mind, allowing His people to escape the Egyptians on dry ground, and closing the sea after them. The crossing of the Jordan River came to mind as well. All of this seemed a little more personal now, physically and emotionally.

While God continued to show Himself to them, how many times did the Israelites lose their faith in Him to follow their own path, only to believe that they had been abandoned and left desolate in a dry desert place like this? How many times

did they cry out to God only to find out that He never left them and He is always faithful? God in His infinite love and mercy rescued them from a desolate pit over and over again, though they surely didn't deserve it.

I thought of myself and the human race now and how nothing has changed. We take our eyes off of Jesus and lose sight of Him for whatever reason. How easy it is to leave the firm foundation of the path our Lord has set for us to begin walking our own path in the ever-shifting sand! So our desert walk begins. We exchange security and peace for an arduous and tiring path, leaving footprints behind as we go. Some footprints are deeper than others and remain visible for years. Sometimes other people follow in those footprints, widening the destructive path as it continues. Sometimes we become stuck in the mud, unable to get out. At other times our footprints are quickly washed away by water or blown away by the wind.

The desert is an extreme place to reside. Little shelter exists to protect from the intense heat of summer and the frigid cold in the winter. The wind blows frequently, pelting the swirling sands into the eyes making it almost impossible to see. In times of rain, a flash flood rises in minutes, savagely tearing away and taking whatever is in its path. Mud in the desert can become deadly quicksand. How long until we realize that we've walked into a trap? A trap craftily and purposefully devised by the enemy of our souls? How long until we realize that the Lord is our shelter?

The connection between the physical environment and spiritual truth impacted me. We trudge along our own blind path on a shifty foundation, hunched over and burdened by circumstance and by sin. It's not long until we fall into a pit and wallow in the mud. Eventually, we realize that the temporal things we desperately try to hold on to only slip through our fingers like sand. It is when we finally call out in distress to our God that He pulls us out of the muck, out of the desolate pit, and sets our feet on the firm foundation again. He who loves us unconditionally is always Faithful and True!





*All That I Cling to*, by Sue Brooks

*Note of interest: The 162-mile-long Virgin River is a tributary of the Colorado River and flows through the states of Utah, Arizona and Nevada.*

**Sue Brooks's** profile is located on page 9.

Sue lives and works in Mesquite, Nevada.

# In Gratitude

I'm truly grateful to God for giving me the idea of creative praise and for allowing me a glimpse into the grace journeys of those who have contributed to this collection. Their testimonies, stories, poetry, essays, art, and photography have brought tears, amazement, and the exact encouragement I have been eager to share with others. Corresponding with them about their work over several months has inspired hope for a future collaboration of some kind.

I would not have been able to do any of this alone, so it is my privilege to first thank the members of my editorial team: the word editor, Georgia Herod, for bringing several writers to the project and for her meticulous reading and personal suggestions to all; the copy editor, Karen Moe, for thoroughly scouring each page for consistency; the early proofreaders, Nancy D'Oporto and Julie Reyes; the first copy proofreaders, Randi Hunsaker and Karen Moe; and the final copy proofreader, Suresh Kulkarni; the layout/design editor, Brenda Reyes, for a unique and masterful showcase, as always; and the art/photography editor, Sue Brooks, for her powerful artistic vision in the cover and photo placement. Friends, your fingerprints are all over this document for God's glory. What would I have done without each of you!

Finally, I'm all praise for my husband Suresh, who gave me a new flatbed scanner, an excellent printer, and a new iMac a couple of years ago so I could create all kinds of books. During the last several months, it's because he has granted me extraordinary amounts of time and space that I have been able to complete this project.

Blessings to you all!

Diane Kulkarni, Managing Editor

Bible versions used in this compilation:

Amp	Amplified Bible
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
JBPT	J. B. Phillips Translation of the New Testament
KJV	King James Version
LAB	Life Application Bible
Msg	The Message
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJ	New King James
NLT	New Living Translation
TLB	The Living Bible





# *A New Song* Editorial Board

## **Diane Kulkarni, Perry, UT—Managing Editor**

Diane has a degree in English/Communications. She has been a freelance writer/editor for 30 years. Her work has won contests and has been published in newspapers, magazines, books, and academic journals. She has edited everything from books to sports catalogues and fund-raising manuals. Her next project is to ghostwrite a woman's story about a precedent-setting medical malpractice suit. Currently, she is developing a meditative writing ministry, giving workshops demonstrating how to personally relate with Scripture toward gaining a deeper walk with Jesus.

## **Georgia Herod, Liberty, MO—Assistant Editor**

With three college degrees in English, Georgia spent 22 years as an instructor of the English language, composition, and fiction in classrooms, workshops, and writing camps. Her entire career has been spent immersed in words, having scored thousands of essays and honing her proofreading eye. Not only is she a freelance writer and editor, she's also a Bible study teacher and women's conference speaker. She believes strongly that the Biblical rationale for language is that God spoke, that He gave us His Word, that the Word became flesh, and that Jesus used stories to reveal Truth.

## **Karen Moe, Colorado Springs, CO—Copy Editor**

Karen earned a Master of Arts degree in English more years ago than she cares to remember. After a lengthy career as a computer software manager, she turned her hand to technical writing, working part-time in the same industry from 2002 until 2011. In addition, she has written, edited, or proofread various publications for friends, organizations, and ministries.

## **Sue Brooks, Mesquite, NV—Art/Photography Editor**

Sue is a photographer and a multimedia artist. She has pursued studies at Boise State University and Utah State University in art, general, and medical disciplines. She was on her town's volunteer fire department as a firefighter/first responder while living in Utah. Sue was director of the Mesquite Fine Arts Center for two years and implemented several new programs and gallery shows which have continued on and grown. She served as Chairperson and coordinator of The Great Mesquite Chili & Arts Festival for three years, representing fine art vendors and crafters from all over the west, Midwest, and southern U.S. Sue's artwork has been displayed in galleries and won ribbons, and has been sold. She also served as a judge for the artwork and crafts at the Clark County Fair for two years. Sue has been an adult Sunday School

teacher and a Women's Bible study teacher for several years in her church and loves learning and teaching God's Word. She enjoys sparking great discussions in class. Sue loves her big family of 10 children, 16 grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter-on-the-way, creating pieces of art, learning, teaching, reading, movies, traveling, cultural diversity, cooking, and extreme sports. She has traveled to many places meeting interesting new people, exploring, scuba diving, and taking thousands of photos.

**Brenda Reyes, Boiling Springs, PA—Layout/Design Editor**

Brenda is a full-time business consultant within the technology field. She has a strong background in communications, marketing, business development, human resources and project management. She has a passion for process improvement, supporting employees to focus on strategic, high-value work rather than the administrative workload. She also works as a marketing consultant and has served with numerous non-profit organizations over the years. Her two children are home schooled and happily spend each day with their stay-at-home dad, Jeremy—Brenda's high school sweetheart and husband of 16 years.

Want to Connect?

You may order books by calling Diane Kulkarni at 435-723-8486 or by sending an email to: [dinahwriting09@gmail.com](mailto:dinahwriting09@gmail.com).

You may send your comments and questions to either Diane at [dinahwriting09@gmail.com](mailto:dinahwriting09@gmail.com) or Georgia at [gpherod@gmail.com](mailto:gpherod@gmail.com). Any story responses directed to our contributors will be forwarded to them.



*Spread Your Wings*, by Lynn M. Burgher

*A New Song: Glimpses of the Grace Journey* is produced by Watkins Printing, Ogden, UT.



# Contributing Photographers and Artists

**Barbara Ali** enjoys taking photos of the colors and patterns of creation because they are so fascinating. The diversity and ever-changing characteristics are microcosms of the universe. The way that everything in nature works together and is totally interdependent is amazing. We are the same. No person can stand alone and function. We were created to be a part of our Creator. Photos should tell stories about creation as well as people, their personalities revealed.

**Michael Barrett** has had extensive traveling opportunities as a missionary with Carpenter Tools International in his high school years. In his month-long visit to Switzerland, he fell in love with the spectacular countryside, the warm-hearted people, and family members who live there. He met his bride in the Philippines three years ago and they have a son named, Lance. He and his wife, Precy, specialize in individual and family portraits: [www.mpinstylephotography.com](http://www.mpinstylephotography.com).

**Lynn M. Burgher** started moving around the country seven years ago after living in a small town in Montana all her life. Since then she has moved five times, living in four different states. She currently lives in both Missouri and Indiana. Although she always had an interest in photography, once she started moving, it became important for her to hold on to all of the beauty that God had surrounded her with. Lynn feels that God blessed her with a passion for photography and is grateful to be able to capture His creation in so many different areas, whether that be the morning dew on a leaf of grass, the rising of the sun with its promise of a new day, or the love a family shows for one another. Her camera is always within reach as she anticipates every moment of God's blessings.

For over 40 years, wood sculptor **Dennis O. Collier's** hand-carved wood designs have graced the halls of America's most prestigious businesses, institutions, and

private homes. He has established himself as the choice master wood carver and designer for architects including Allan Greenberg, Robert A.M. Stern, and Johnson & Wanzenberg. A privileged and discreet private clientele as well as institutions such as Yale University, Ursinus College, Simon and Shuster, the Smithsonian Institute, and the United States Department of State have commissioned him for works including furniture, architectural ornament, original sculptures, reproductions, restorations, and fine woodwork. Dennis Collier has earned the reputation of exceeding his patrons' expectations. His carving skills are matched only by his artistic agility and collaborative spirit. He and his son, Dennis D. Collier, have worked together for 20 years in their studio in Bangor, PA. A portfolio of their work can be seen at [www.woodsculpture.com](http://www.woodsculpture.com).

**Nancy D'Oporto** grew up on the beaches of CA and now resides in Brigham City, UT. Her love of photography came with 30 years of camping in Colorado. She says she needed to take the beauty of the state home with her through photographs. Nancy once owned a Shabby Chic business and loves tea parties with her friends. She is a daughter of The King.

**Josh Felix** moonlights as an architect, designing Christian schools and churches. He is the husband of one beautiful bride and two busy, rambunctious children. In his spare time, he enjoys reading, yard work, home improvement projects, and photography, especially photography and editing with the use of his iPhone. Josh and his family live in Perry City, UT.

**Sharmila Felix** lives in Perry City, UT, with her hardworking husband and two miracle children. She enjoys home design, color, and taking the occasional photograph—well, enough photographs to fill her entire hard drive.

**Pam Geniac** is a blogger who loves the power of a good photograph. Photography enhances her writing, helping


her to express her point. After she writes a blog, she picks up her amazing and complicated camera, a gift from her generous husband, sets it on “automatic” and clicks away. She says after 4,000 shots, she hopes to have one good one.

**Valerie Gleave** recently retired after living in Page, Arizona, for 28 years. She plans to spend a lot more time on her photography. She currently resides in Marysvale, Utah, in the summer and Yuma, Arizona, in the winter. She has been interested in landscape photography for many years but has expanded her interest to butterflies and wildflowers. Hot air balloons have been an interest for many years since Valerie and her husband have several friends who are balloon pilots, and they enjoy chasing them and photographing them.


**Randi Hunsaker** from Brigham City says she takes photos hoping to capture what the eye sees, but rarely finds satisfaction.

**Scott Johnson** lives in Perry City, UT, and works as a media producer at Main Street Church in Brigham City, UT.

**Adam Lilly** views life through his camera's lens. He works as a night auditor, allowing time during the day to chase his dream of building a freelance photography business. Adam is married and the father of two children. His family attends Highlands Community Church in Renton, WA, where he is slated to serve as a volunteer photographer for Vision House's "Jacob's Well Project." You may contact Adam at [thef\\_stop@hotmail.com](mailto:thef_stop@hotmail.com).



**Marsha McLaren** lives in Woodland Park, CO, one of God's most beautiful places in the state. Everyday she is so grateful to get up, look out her window, and call the place home. Spring and summer are her most favorite seasons, planting a garden and then patiently waiting for the end result. A lot of her photography comes from the desire to savor the moment and share what she is seeing with others, because she says, if someone else gets an “aha” moment or a great big smile, that fills her heart with joy.



**John Lee Montgomery III** has been capturing images and personalities on film since his early teens. Travels as a young man flamed his imagination and desire to live life to its fullest, while capturing the many images around him. His easygoing manner and honest curiosity about people and places have given him the vision to look

beneath the façade of his subjects into the true persona of the people whose image he sets out to capture. Montgomery has worked in fashion and commercial photography, but it is with people where his talent really comes through. “I strive hard to bring out the unique personality of the individual or group,” John says. “The key to a successful shoot is to put the participants at ease, and to just have fun. That’s how I actually capture the true story as well as the intensity and energy of the moment.” After relocating to Nashville, Montgomery established himself as one of the most creative photographers in the music business. He has shot everyone from the Rolling Stones to Willie Nelson, and early in their careers, Faith Hill, Billy Ray Cyrus, and Tim McGraw.

**Gregory Moser** is a sophomore at Whitworth University in Spokane, Washington. A Computer Science major, he enjoys his photographic work on the side. Largely self-taught, he specializes in macrophotography. To expand his photographic skills, he now does private portraiture part time. Greg has a keen eye for detail and continually learns new techniques with which to observe the world around him. Greg enjoys swimming and is an experienced lifeguard. An excellent student in high school, Greg holds three letters in Varsity Swimming from Interlake High School in Bellevue. He is a graduate of Academy Northwest in Seattle.

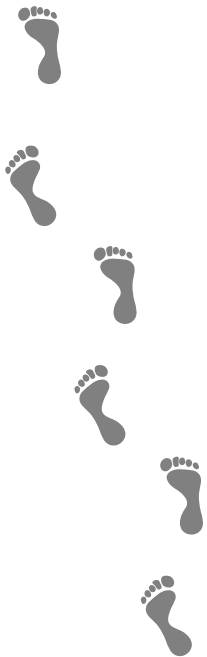
**Steve Whitehorse** is originally from the Four Corners area of New Mexico and is from the Dineh tribe. Formerly a Mormon, Steve is now a Christian, a member of the Native American Church and the beautiful Main Street Church in Brigham City, UT. He currently lives in Salt Lake City. Steve loves the desert native lands as well as the crisp Utah landscape and its people. He loves to travel and see the great country in all its splendor.

**Anne E. Williamson** lives in Fairbanks, AK, with her husband, Jim. She is a part-time art student and full-time employee for University of Alaska Fairbanks as a Human Resources Manager. Anne enjoys creating art with all media, but has a special interest in sculpture and graphic design. She enjoys reading thick books, cooking too much food for people, volunteering with the youth at her church, teaching lessons, and giving away as much artwork as possible.

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*The Heavens Proclaim His Glory*, by Sue Brooks

“Every morning, lean thine arms awhile upon the windowsill  
of heaven and gaze upon thy Lord. Then, with the vision in  
thy heart, turn strong to meet thy day.” –Unknown

# Foreword

As I sat around the kitchen table with my grown cousins from Kentucky, I realized that my love of story-telling must be genetic. Here we sat waiting in vigil for our favorite uncle to lose his battle to cancer in the next room, all the while enduring the hours by passing the baton, telling story after story. At first they were all about our colorful uncle, many about him and Grandpa cooking moonshine up the holler during Prohibition. In the end, they were all about life in general, spanning the surreal to the sobering.

Enjoying a good story is universal. But telling a good story, now that's a rare art-form. I daresay cousin Larry is the "Picasso" of the story-telling guild. But regardless of which you are, a teller or a listener, we alone amidst God's creatures have a penchant for stories. Surely it is one of the many components included in that mysterious package of being created in His image. So it should come as no surprise to discover that God intends to regale the vast inhabitants of eternity with our stories. Stories of the manifold and unique expressions of His grace in our most undeserving moments. We are the amazed recipients of His love so that *"in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus"* (Ephesians 2:7).

Consider this collection a starting point to the ages of the telling of the untold stories of His grace. Our hearts are indebted to these artisans who crafted their stories onto the page, to Diane and Georgia for the compilation and refinement of them, and preeminently to the *"kind intention of His will"* (Ephesians 1:5) which left upon these hearts such indelible marks. With one voice these many stories rally *"to the praise of the glory of His grace"* (Ephesians 1:6).

**Jim Catlin** pastors at Main Street Church in Brigham City, UT. He and his wife of 35 years, Dorothy, have four grown children and are delighting in their new role as grandparents. Their passion is to equip believers through the Word to be story-tellers of the unique grace of God to a culture burdened by the false demands of religious performance.



**“BUT YOU**

**ARE**

a CHOSEN people,

a ROYAL priesthood,

a HOLY nation,

a people for GOD'S  
OWN possession,

so that you may proclaim the  
excellence of Him who  
has called you out of darkness  
into HIS marvelous LIGHT.”

1 Peter 2:9 NASB

# PREFACE

*“We were meant to remember together, in community. We need to tell our stories to others and to hear their stories told... ‘This, God has done,’ we say; ‘This He will do.’ Remembering... is an act of survival, our way of ‘watching over our hearts with all diligence.’”*—Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance*

I have been involved in a writing ministry for many years, producing my own work and also providing opportunities for believers to write about God’s unique handiwork in their lives. But I didn’t realize how long this has been going on until just this year when I began writing my memoir in earnest. Then I remembered that my first assignment as a new believer back in 1967 was to write for and edit my church College Class magazine called *The Throbbing Mind*. When my classmates wrote their testimonies and I saw the pleasure on their faces as they held the publication in their hands, I knew I’d found my niche. Over the years, my delight continued to be providing believers a reason to write and a place to publish.

With so much to be thankful for following a second surgery for breast cancer in 2007 and heart surgery in 2010, I decided to gather a praise band of the grateful to sing God’s praises with me. We who believe in Jesus are called to let our lights *“shine before men in such a way that they may see and glorify our Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 5:14-16). Bringing our stories together in one place like this is one powerful light-shining tool!

The proposed book, our third in ten years, was titled *A New Song*, based on Psalm 40:1-3 (HCSV).

*I waited patiently for the LORD,  
and He turned to me and heard my cry for help  
He brought me up from a desolate pit,  
out of the muddy clay,  
and set my feet on a rock,  
making my steps secure.*

*He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the LORD.*

After creating a proposal, the next step was to go fishing—not for trout or salmon, but for Christians who would be willing to write their testimonies, personal journey narratives, essays, and poetry, and for photographers to share their art. The Amy Foundation has a website listing Christian writing groups in each state, so I sent out over 55 proposals to those groups. Then the title evolved into *A New Song: Glimpses of the Grace Journey*, which has a clearer purpose and a promised result based on Psalm 40. If all of us follow the psalmist’s example by remembering our histories with God, describing His rescue, our salvation, His comfort in a time of crisis, or leading when we needed a new direction, then our collective hymn of praise will cause many to *“see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.”*

When the stories began coming in, I felt like a kid on Christmas morning. With wonder and amazement, I opened each attachment and marveled at the variety of ways God reveals Himself as the Almighty I AM to human beings everywhere and, in the process, transforms their lives.

What you have in your hands today is far more than a praise band with a lead singer—it’s a full symphony and choir.

Diane Kulkarni  
July 2011





*A Quiet Place*, by Sue Brooks

“Loneliness, loss, pain, sorrow: these are disciplines; they are God’s gifts to drive us to His very heart, to increase our capacity for Him, to sharpen our sensitivities and understanding, to temper our spiritual lives so that they may become channels of His mercy to others and so bear fruit for His Kingdom. But these disciplines must be seized upon and used, not thwarted. They must not be seen as excuses for living in the shadows of half-lives, but as messengers, however painful, to bring our souls into vital contact with the Living God that our lives may be filled to overflowing with Himself in ways that may perhaps be impossible to those who know less of life’s darkness.” –Author Unknown

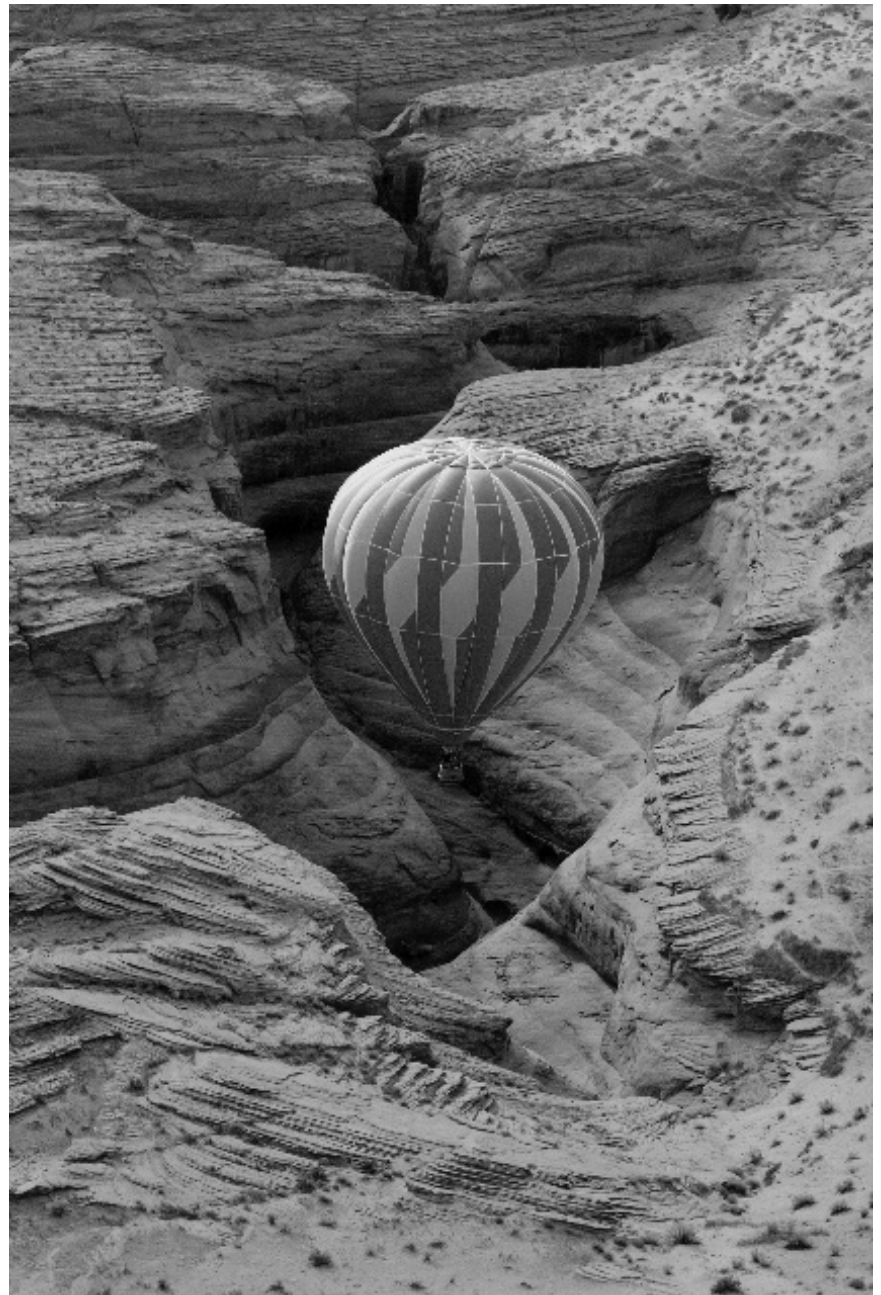
# Invitation to Read Receptively

Dear Reader,

As you read *A New Song: Glimpses of the Grace Journey*, we urge you to read reflectively regarding your own faith journey and to engage actively with the stories of fellow travelers. Take pen in hand and write yourself notes in the margin. Does the Holy Spirit get your attention with a poem? Mark that. Do you want to reread? Put two stars by that title. What do you learn about God? Is the Father confronting you about some lack in your character? Does He give you a much-needed word of encouragement? Write it down!

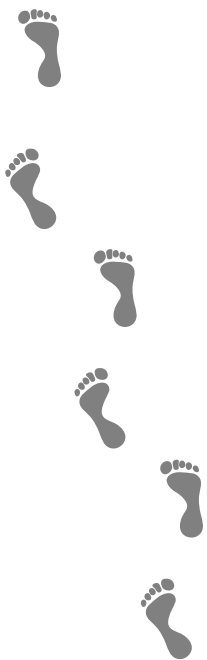
After you've seen how God has worked in the lives of others, He may say to you, "I won't be robbed of My glory! Tell the story!" Then when you come to the end of this travelogue, we invite you to write your own story on the blank pages provided. Meanwhile, I hear our Guide calling, "Come, follow Me." It's time for us to share the "Grace Journey."

Georgia Herod



*Incredible Journey* at Antelope Canyon near Page, AZ, by Valerie Gleave

Philippians 2:5-11 "makes it clear that moving down is the only way to become great in God's eyes. Downward mobility is not simply the best of many optional paths a Christian can take to bring God pleasure. It is the only path." ~Bill Hybels, *Descending into Greatness*





*Rest In Me, by Lynn M. Burgher*

# Reconciled

*Lynn M. Burgher—St. James, MO*

Renew my spirit  
Remembering childhood faith  
Where no doubts exist

Trusting the scriptures  
Even in the midst of pain  
Knowing You were there

The stories of saints  
Made me want to become one  
Dreams of martyrdom

When did that child change  
Trust lost in everything  
Even in You, God

What moment in time  
Was the detour of my life  
Decided upon

Was it gradual  
Or did it come like a flash  
One moment undone

I was still a child  
My mind could not understand  
The world it was in

A weak foundation  
Not enough time to become  
Who I had planned on

You were always there  
Holy Spirit guiding me  
To change direction

Knowing I am free  
Is motivation enough  
To make the right choice

All experience  
Has brought me to this moment  
Of defining grace

Significant Cross  
Bearing my burdens and pain  
Removing my sin

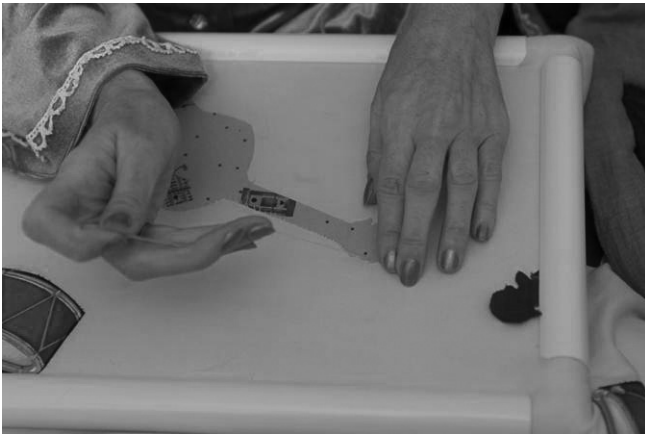
Forgiveness is ours  
And given to us always  
If only we ask

Today I thank God  
For the miracle of life  
One day at a time

**Lynn M. Burgher** currently lives in both Missouri and Indiana with her husband, Karl. She has six grown children. Recently, she fulfilled her dream of starting her own photography business, LMB Photography: [www.lynnmburgherphoto.com](http://www.lynnmburgherphoto.com).

# Guided Hands

Diane Rose—Waco, TX (as told to Diane Kulkarni)



*Diane Quilting*, by John Lee Montgomery

Diane Rose is an enthusiastic, creative quilter and designer of personal clothing and various handicrafts from saddle blankets to Christmas tree skirts. But she is unique, because she's totally blind. She does everything by touch. Diane will be the first to tell you that she doesn't consider her blindness a handicap. "It's merely an inconvenience that gets in my way sometimes," she said.

Quilting and speaking are two aspects of her motivational outreach called Rose of Sharon Ministries. "The way I look at it, if I can do what I have done without sight, how much can you do?"

"I am very thankful that my mother and father never smothered me or over-protected me when I was young, because I would not be who I am today if they had. Instead, they gave me freedom to do what I could with my abilities."

Born with eyes that didn't focus on schedule, Diane was diagnosed with glaucoma at the age of four. She could only see out of her left eye; she wore glasses, seeing colors and daylight but nothing in sharp detail. She attended public school where she had the love and support of Janice Siorek, her teacher for her first three years. Then in the third grade, she was mainstreamed into regular

classes where she began making lots of friends, such as her lifelong friend, Kim.

In the seventh grade, Donna Aiken, a Baptist classmate, took her to church. "She explained the way of salvation to me and together we prayed the sinner's prayer. I already talked to God a lot and didn't realize at the time that I was actually having a relationship with Him."

In high school she got involved in activities like drama and choir. "In 1976, I was in the Blind Snow Skiers Club—the only blind activity I ever got involved in outside of school—and won a bronze medal during competition, which I wore for a week, even to bed."

When country western singers Dolly Parton and Porter Wagoner came to her area, her bus driver, Kay, took her to their concert. "I was able to go backstage and meet both of them. That was the beginning of my desire of going to Nashville one day and doing something in the country music business," she said.

Right after that, she discovered the *Grand Ole Opry* on the radio. "I wrote a letter in Braille to the king of country music, Roy Acuff, and someone put print above the Braille to interpret it for him. A week later when listening to the show, I had a clear channel and heard Roy mention receiving an unusual letter, written not in print but in Braille. When he mentioned my name and said that this person was "a very special little lady," I cried. We corresponded after that for a couple years. He and his wife sent a gift and a card for my graduation."

When she graduated, she was the only girl who received a standing ovation. "A lot of kids respected me for what I was going to do with my life. They didn't treat me like I was blind. I thank God for each and every one of my school friends





because when we hung out and did things, they'd take me home before they'd go party. I didn't know this for years. I love them because they respected me enough not to get me involved in what they were doing. That's why I can give God praise for protecting me through other people."

After graduation, and without any job prospects, a place to live, or any contacts in the area, Diane flew to Nashville to begin her new life. "On the plane, I prayed, 'Okay, God. I am in Your hands. My life is in front of You. Please take care of me.'"

"Shortly before I left, Dolly Parton had come to the state fair. Because I knew the DJs from the country stations, they got me in and I saw Dolly again and mentioned that I was on my way to Nashville. She said, 'If you have a dream, hang on to it because it will happen if you believe in it enough.' Little did I know that two weeks later, I would be backstage at the *Grand Ole Opry* on my birthday meeting Roy Acuff and indirectly becoming a part of the *Opry* family from then on. They loved me."

A year later, standing on a balcony in downtown Nashville, Diane remembered "looking down and saying once again, 'Lord, here's my life. I don't know what to do with it, but You do. If giving my life to You means I'm saved, forgive me and cleanse me from my sin. I put You first. Protect me and take care of me.' And that's when I felt the presence of God."

"In 1984, I met Denis O'Day, a world-famous eye surgeon located at the Vanderbilt Eye Institute in Nashville. He talked to me about a cornea transplant, and we scheduled the surgery for October."

"However, because of my glaucoma, at that time the pressure on my eye with partial sight was very high and a bubble formed. Four days before the transplant, something happened and the bubble

burst, things blurred and eventually everything went black. The fluid that was in my eye fell back to the retina and ate it away, killing the optic nerve as well." O'Day sewed the cornea back together because he said it was thin like a Kleenex.

"Adjusting to living in the dark was not easy because I would go to sleep dreaming of seeing and wake up to blackness. As a child, I was scared of the dark, but now that I live in darkness, I'm not afraid at all."

The first year after completely losing her sight was filled with difficult adjustments. Diane realizes now that it was a year of grieving. "There is a process in working through grief, no matter what you lose—whether your sight, your hearing, your spouse, a child, a limb. This was my personal loss."

"Lord, here's my life. I don't know what to do with it, but You do. If giving my life to You means I'm saved, forgive me and cleanse me from my sin. I put You first. Protect me and take care of me."

Throughout this time, she continued as a Nashville reporter for various radio stations around the country, informing them what music the fans wanted to hear. "And with this began the blind tour guide job where folks would come to Nashville and want to see the sights," she said. "And guess who they asked to show them around? I have a good sense of direction and I like to know where the landmarks are so I know where I'm going. People would have me take them sightseeing. But the sad thing is, they wouldn't let me drive their cars—imagine that!"

She also interviewed the *Grand Ole Opry* stars on audiotape and sent the tapes to small independent country music magazines. "The entertainers always

give me a lot of love, support and respect,” she added.

In 1993, Diane says the music business was changing and it was time to make a move. She decided to settle in Texas. “For the next five years, I was just floating,” she said. “Then one day in 1998, I was standing in front of my kitchen window. It was raining and I was kind of down. I raised my arms and said, ‘God, what’s the deal here? I don’t get it! Show me where my talents are.’ I remember feeling a sensation of heat starting in my hands and moving down to my elbows until they were hot. I asked Him, ‘In my hands? What do You want me to do?’”

*Talent and hands.* The connection of the two words brought her back to an event several years before when a visiting evangelist had come to her church and asked to pray for her. “He first laid his hands on my head, and then took my hands in his and looked at me intently,” she recalled. “He said, ‘It’s not your physical eyes I’m praying for. It’s for your spiritual eyes to be opened. God has a talent that you are not aware of now, but you will find out later. Your talent will be in your hands. You will make a mark on the world and become well known. When you give God the glory, He will honor you and provide for you. You won’t need anything.’”

The day after she prayed in the Texas rain and received God’s answer, she was visiting her friend Pat and began tracing her friend’s quilt with her fingers and admiring it. “I remembered seeing a colorful quilt as a child. I couldn’t see the pattern, just the many bright colors.”

“Pat asked me if I knew how to quilt and I said, ‘No.’ ‘Well, do you want to learn?’ she asked, and I said, ‘Yes! I would love to.’”

Peggy, another friend, who worked for the non-profit organization, Friends for Life, had already given Diane a sewing machine, so she was ready to learn.

“On August 14, 1998, we started to cut polyester material into five-inch squares with a rotary cutter to make a baby quilt. I was able to feel the different textures of each colored fabric square,” Diane said. “The next quilt I made was king-size. These first two quilts won blue ribbons in the state fair. Within six months, I’d made seven quilts. I now work only with cotton fabric.”

A few months later, on January 6, 1999, she was on the front page of the *Waco Tribune Herald* under the headline, “Pattern of Life.”

It was then that people began calling her and bringing her material. “Wherever I travel, the local news reporters come out to meet me at the airport or wherever I’m going to be to do a human interest story because I try to make my life positive.”

For those who live in Texas, there is a show called “The Texas Country Reporter with Bob Phillips.” He spent the day with Diane and filmed a story which has aired two years in a row in Texas, a year on RFD (Rural Free Delivery) Television, and is also on Youtube.com. Because of this segment, Diane won the Barbara Jordan Media Achievement Disability Award from the governor’s office. “Governor Perry wanted to meet the lady who makes people laugh in Texas,” she said.

Diane has completed over 700 quilts in the last 13 years. She averages about 50 a year. Her specialty is scenery quilts because she has a very vivid imagination. She makes custom-made quilts for family, friends, and for the many individuals who contact her via her website.

“Most of my quilts are hand-quilted, not machine-quilted,” she said. “Some belong to celebrities like Loretta Lynn, Dolly Parton, George W. Bush, Governor Perry, Don Williams, Joyce Meyer, among others. A lot of folks have my quilts and it’s humbling. They could get one made by anybody in the world, but they chose me. When they wanted to buy or have one custom-made, I asked them, ‘Why me?’ And they said, ‘It’s because you’re special and you’ve changed my life. I know



it's made with love.' Interestingly, I'm finding out that my quilts are becoming family heirlooms. That's big!"

Diane speaks to churches, quilt guilds, and all organizations wherever she's invited. She will go anywhere God sends her with a positive attitude to encourage others to do something with their lives. "I believe that sitting on the couch feeling sorry for yourself will get you nowhere," she said.

When Diane is invited to speak to church groups, she shares about what God has done and is doing for her. "I also talk about what He will do for me and for others," she said. "Being safe and secure in Him, I look for His provision and that includes finding a mate who will partner with me in ministry. And I hope one day to have a museum and a gift shop. Don't know when, don't know where, but I'm saving and praying for that."

She always says, "You have to start small to build tall."

Bob Phillips said, "Although she has friends who help her pick and sort colors and patterns, all of her quilts are made 100 percent by hands not guided by eyes. Diane Rose may be blind but her quilts are a sight to see, bursting with color, inspiration and love. It's just all in a day's work for a woman who's the master of making the best out of what life offers."

"Above all, I give all the glory to God for everything that He has done for me in my life. Faith is my foundation."

"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).



*Diane Wrapped in Her Quilt,*  
by John Lee Montgomery

**Diane Rose** invites you to get to know her better by visiting her website: [www.theamazingquilter.com](http://www.theamazingquilter.com) and by seeing the *Texas Country Reporter* segment, "Blind Quilter," on [www.Youtube.com](http://www.Youtube.com). At the time of this printing, the program has been seen by over 800,000 people.

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Nashville, TN 1995

# “Reverend Mom”

Susan Cosio—Davis, CA

The nurses on pediatrics call me “Reverend Mom.” I appreciate the nickname, because I think it reflects two of the most important aspects of who I am—as a person and as a hospital chaplain.

My call to ministry came as a bit of a surprise. I was a stay-at-home mom with three kids when I sensed God directing me to go to seminary. I resisted, thinking God was crazy, and arguing that a mother in her late thirties was no candidate for the ministry! But my friends argued back, pointing out my spiritual gifts of leadership, wisdom and compassion. My husband encouraged me to respond to the promptings I felt in my heart. When I checked the mailbox one morning and found a seminary catalog I had never requested, I decided it was time to stop wrestling with God.

I took seminary classes on a part-time basis in order to balance my roles as a student, mother, and wife. The practical ministry coursework tugged most at my heart: family ministry, pastoral counseling, addictions, grief and loss. These were subjects easily applied to my personal life and to a church internship in adult and family ministries. I knew nothing about the ministry of a chaplain (although I should have known something was up when my favorite biblical study was the book of Job!). In my mind, seminary was preparation to be a traditional pastor. I assumed I was preparing for church ministry in pastoral care.

Yet I never felt quite at home in church ministry. When I preached or sat in the pew, I thought about the people who weren't there: people who were ill or in crisis; people who were angry at God or felt estranged from God or uncomfortable with church. I wondered about—and worried about—those people.

I graduated from seminary, but sensed there was something missing from my education. When I

read the book *Let Your Life Speak* by the Quaker writer Parker Palmer, I followed his advice and spent time looking for “common threads” in my experience that might be evidence of my specific call.

I reviewed the critical junctures of my childhood, adolescence and adulthood, and I began to see a recurring pattern. Beginning with my hospitalization for encephalitis at the age of six, a series of illnesses, injuries and hospitalizations—in my own life and those of my loved ones—had been the crucible through which my faith and character had been tested and refined.

A common childhood illness, chickenpox, had led to a potentially fatal complication when I developed encephalitis. I spent weeks in the hospital, often alone due to strictly limited visiting hours. I remember ambling down the hospital hallways, learning to walk again after the swelling in my brain reduced and I regained my balance.

As a teenager and college student, I suffered from the painful symptoms of endometriosis. Just five weeks before my wedding, I had emergency surgery to remove an abdominal tumor the size of a cantaloupe. The surgeon warned me I might not ever have children. I felt unconditional love when my fiancé married me anyway.

Fortunately, I was able to conceive. Our daughter was born healthy in our second year of marriage. Our second child came only 20 months later. But the first year of our son's life was a difficult one. Born with multiple heart defects, he had to have open-heart surgery at Stanford. I learned to “pray without ceasing” and accept that I was not in control.

The years that followed brought other challenges: two miscarriages and the birth of a third child;



my husband's diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis; my dad's onset of blindness; my own bout with fibromyalgia; and my teenager's battle with depression. With each of these crises, faith was my anchor. In fact, my faith and dependence on God grew as a result. I experienced God as my source of strength and comfort.

I also had opportunities to support others. I walked closely with a dear friend when her husband was diagnosed and then died of a glioblastoma, a particularly aggressive form of brain cancer. I frequently visited a "friend of a friend" when her daughter was born with congenital heart defects. I drove from my home in Davis to Oakland Children's Hospital to visit this woman although I hardly knew her, not knowing she would later become a close friend. I was the first person there when my friend's daughter died. (It was a new role for me at the time, but is, of course, familiar to me now.)

As I reviewed these personal experiences and "let my life speak" as Parker Palmer encouraged, I began to see hospital chaplaincy as a likely vocation. I committed to one unit of Clinical Pastoral Education, then a year-long residency in general chaplaincy, followed by another residency year focused on pediatrics and family-centered care. In the hospital context, I felt like I was standing at the "intersection" of my life, where my passions, experiences and training all came together. I recalled Aristotle's quote: "Where your talents, and the needs of the world cross, therein lies your vocation."

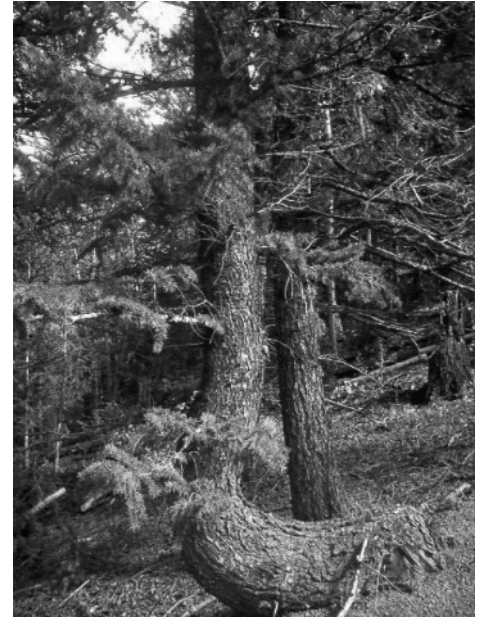
Now, I am "Reverend Mom," licensed and ordained as a minister in the Evangelical Covenant Church and working full-time as a chaplain at the hospital where two of my children were born. I smile each time I run into my son's pediatric cardiologist in the NICU, because it is a reminder that my life experiences have done as much to prepare me for ministry as seminary did.

I am familiar with loss, with pain, with heartache. I have waited for test results and the outcome of surgery. I know the fear of infertility; the loneliness of a childhood hospitalization; the agony of incurable disease. I resonate with the words of 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (Msg), which describe God as *"the God of all healing counsel,"* who comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and then brings us alongside others going through similar trials, so we can be there for them, just as God was there for us.

I'll never forget the words shared with me at my ordination interview. The committee laid hands on my shoulders and said, "Surely, your life has led you to this place. Clearly, Susan, you are the wounded healer."

*"Surely, your life has led you to this place. Clearly, Susan, you are the wounded healer."*

**Reverend Susan Cosio** is a chaplain at Sutter Medical Center in Sacramento, CA. She is ordained in the Evangelical Covenant Church and is board certified as a professional chaplain. She and her husband Gib live in Davis, CA, and are the parents of three (now young adult) children.



*Can't Keep Me Down*, by Marsha McLaren

# A Perilous Path Redeemed by Jesus

*Shelley Kancitis—Ogden, UT*

My first savior was six feet tall. We met in a journalism class in high school and almost immediately started arguing. Strong wills forge good survival skills, and we both needed them: Andy because of his immigrant background; I, because things were not right at home.

My mother was a highly educated alcoholic who morphed into a sloppy drunk at dinner time and an angry dangerous drunk as the night wore on. She remained sober during the day as she enforced strict rules of propriety for me and my sisters. Drunkenness at night, white gloves in the daytime. Danger lurked in our house like a puff of smoke that permeated my soul and lodged there, making me vulnerable to predators, the first of which were my parents.

I know now that God was there. Someone was praying for us. I think it was a childhood friend's family and our next door neighbors, who took me to a Billy Graham Crusade. I didn't answer the call to come forward probably because God knew I wasn't ready for all the blessings He had for me. God's answer at that time was Andy, who is now my husband of 40-plus years. He stood between me and predatory men. God did the same for my sisters. We defy the statistics with our lifelong marriages to good men. None of us have been addicted and all of us have sought God in our own ways.

Marriage was a relief. I loved Andy, and I loved not living in a Hansel-and-Gretel world where lost children were consumed by evil appetites. Unfortunately, I began to learn that Andy could not be my savior. He was a sinful human being just like me. I began to realize my neediness could sink our marriage. Andy was tired of being asked to tell me why he loved me, tired of analyzing every conversation I had with my mother, and tired of hearing me recount my inadequacies.

So I decided to fight despair with my unknown Strength by my side. I entered therapy to deal with the impact of my mother's alcoholism. It was one of the hardest things I ever did. How could I risk revealing to others that behind my controlled veneer, I was desperately afraid to let anyone know who I really was? My diagnosis was anxiety, which was hidden to most eyes by a refusal to reveal even the smallest clue about who I really was.

Late one night, I got a phone call. Since my job in the family was to be the "rescuer," I was tasked with rescuing my parents' abysmal marriage characterized by constant fighting and trying to stop my mother's drinking and save her life. This time I almost failed. I lived in Virginia. She lived in the Midwest. I couldn't stop her from rapidly consuming a bottle of bourbon that left her comatose on her bed in a locked house. The police, alerted by a friend of hers, broke into the house and brought her to the psychiatric ward of a nearby hospital.

After six weeks in the hospital, my mother emerged never to drink again, but still haunted by a personality disorder far more complicated than "just" depression. My father continued his "social" drinking and grudgingly took my mother to AA meetings, a pattern of supreme selfishness that characterized all his relationships.

Instead of feeling relief when my mother survived, I was intensely angry at her. One more trauma. One more attempt at trying to make sense of her life, which was grafted onto me like an unwanted branch of desolation. My husband couldn't save me. My therapist couldn't save me. What was left? By then Andy and I had a deeply loved daughter, so I knew I had to fight the web of emotions that were engulfing me as I lay on the floor of defeat and despair.



Suddenly, I remembered a book that I couldn't even recall ordering. It didn't make any sense to me so I relegated it to the Salvation Army pile. I pulled it from beneath some discarded clothes, read the title—*The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*—and belligerently challenged God, "If You are real, show me!" In a voice tinged with skepticism, I knelt by the bed and read the prayer that supposedly meant I was committing my life to God. Then I crawled into bed and tried to sleep.

The next day I went to church as usual, only nothing was as usual. The words from the hymnal penetrated my soul and stunned me with their beauty. The liturgy surrounded me like a cloak of comfort. The priest's words were life-giving transfusions for my tattered heart. I soon realized that I was gloriously born again. Although still plagued by anxiety, I was suffused with awe as God enveloped my life with His presence.

One day, while attending a prayer service, I longed to go forward for healing prayers, but I felt sure that I would faint from the dread of revealing my vulnerability. God spoke through His Word with the perfect verse, "*They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall walk and not faint.*" Armed with those words, I walked forward for prayer, terrified but determined.

Andy eventually joined me in my walk with Jesus. It brought healing to our marriage and every other part of our lives. God knew that we never would have survived our move to Germany without Him. Its blood-soaked soil frightened me as I thought about the concentration camps, which I often recalled to remind myself that my life was far from the worst that a person could survive. Germany's lack of sunlight activated my undiagnosed Seasonal Affective Depression (SAD), which uncovered, as I later learned, a Grand Canyon of genes studded with depression that wound through generations.

Andy's unavailability due to a demanding job, the challenges of living in a German village where I couldn't even ask a simple question, and that well of pain from the past fed my desolation. God grew distant as I became so depressed that medical intervention was required. While in recovery from an emotional head-on collision that left me confined to bed for periods of time, my relationship with God grew rich with gratefulness as He healed me. The verse this time was Romans 8:28 – "*God works all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.*"

The verse this time was Romans 8:28 – "God works all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose."

A Muslim psychiatrist prescribed the exact medication that was needed, and I had done enough therapy in the past to require very little during the recovery process. God was my great Healer. He prepared me for the final discovery while He restored me. I felt Him nudging me to explore a dark kaleidoscope of fragments that pierced my psyche through the years. Why did I wake up trying to scream, noises that aroused my husband from a very deep sleep? Why did I wake up thinking that my husband was touching me when he was on the other side of the bed? Why did I have every door locked and feel the need to have a deadbolt on our bedroom doors? Why was I so wary of men? Was it just because a doctor had fondled me before my survival instinct kicked in and I questioned him about what he was doing?

Something lay undiscovered, and God, as always, would be my partner as I entered therapy again. This time God gave me a male therapist, the only therapist our medical plan would cover, was a Christian. I didn't like men, but this was who my Life-giving, grace-bearing, merciful God gave me, so I went through my unfortunate pattern of pouting and self pity before I remembered Who was in charge.

“Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:6-8 NKJV).



*Never Forgotten, by Greg Moser*

Therapy revealed that my father had chosen me, his oldest daughter, to become his surrogate “wife.” He confided in me and then visited me at night to complete the process by fondling me. I responded by locking my door. I thought it was to protect me from my mother who now seemed to hate me when she was drunk. I believed that for almost 25 years until God pulled aside the curtain of denial and revealed the reasons why my healing required a very long walk.

I remember sobbing in my car as I listened to the pounding beat of zydeco music with lyrics about men who had “done women wrong.” I read book after book about incest to convince myself that it was not my fault. I started sewing decorative hearts and my husband bought me an elegant teddy bear since stuffed animals were discouraged during my childhood. I also told my sisters about my discovery and we banded together to pool our memories of the past. Their decision to support

me was a significant factor in the healing process for both me and them.

When my father received my letter detailing what he had done, he promptly wrote to an organization created to label such memories as vicious lies. He also told one of my best friends and my cousins that I was a liar, and united with my mother to convey via letter that they didn’t want to see me until I stopped acting crazy. Ironically, I felt less “crazy” than I ever had.

At last, all the submerged fears had surfaced. With the gradual shedding of shame, I began to truly enjoy who God had designed me to be—an imperfect person who could finally believe that she was lovable.

Many years later, I received a phone call from my mother’s psychiatrist saying that my mother wanted to tell me something in person. I lived in





Utah and she lived in the Middle West. The trip would be costly in every way, but I believed that God was telling me I would regret not going. As in the past when battles loomed, I “recruited” a cadre of Christian soldiers who knew my story and asked for intensive prayer.

Although I didn’t know it, one of my friends had asked God to give me a verse. He answered with take-your-breath away Wisdom:

*“Because he loves me,’ says the Lord,  
I will rescue him;  
I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.  
He will call upon me, and I will answer him:  
I will be with him in trouble,  
I will deliver him and honor him,  
With long life will I satisfy him  
and show him my salvation”*  
(Psalm 91:14-16 NIV).

There was trouble ahead and God knew that I would need this passage, and I would need it repeatedly. I hadn’t seen my mother for about five years. Waves of hostility filled the therapist’s office as she aggressively questioned me about what my father had done. My answers, unknown to me at the time, solidified her hidden belief that in actuality, my father had molested me.

Suddenly, I knew why she hated me. I was her rival for her husband’s affection. It had little to do with the person I was and everything to do with the person my father was. She off-handedly mentioned that my father had had a stroke the day before I arrived and was hospitalized. The stroke left no damage and he was released the next day. I never saw him again. Several years later, my father died in his sleep. Despite evidence to the contrary, I hope that he found Jesus and His peace.

I took God’s countless gifts to me, my wonderful life and a Man I can trust, and walked on as I do to this day. The scars are still there, but they have grown fainter with time. I earned a Master’s Degree in Special Education and returned to teaching. God has blessed us with two terrific grandsons and a wonderful marriage strengthened by adversity.

At my mother’s funeral, the nursing home chaplains told me that they believed my mother had accepted Christ. I dream of the day that I fervently hope will happen. I will meet her in Heaven. She will be the mother she truly wanted to be and I will be the daughter she embraces with the love of Christ.

Although I didn’t know it, one of my friends had asked God to give me a verse. He answered with take-your-breath away Wisdom.

**Shelley Kancitis** is blessed to live in sight of God’s incredible creation, the sky-piercing mountains of Ogden, Utah. Her husband happily skis on them, she gazes at them, and Lizzie, the schnauzer, is oblivious to their beauty. Their two grandchildren live nearby providing much heart-warming merriness. She and her husband attend Precept upon Precept Bible studies and co-ordinate the Alpha program at Washington Heights Church. Shelley tutors children with dyslexia, loves to read, and likes to sew and make cards that point to Jesus.

# Comfort Measures Only

Beth Willis-Miller—Lakeland, FL

My mother had been admitted to the palliative care unit at our local hospital. Her physician said, “I have written the orders for Comfort Measures Only; your mother will not be suffering. I have walked in your shoes with my own mother, and this is the loving choice.”

This began the closing of the final chapter of my mother’s life following a three-year decline mentally and physically due to dementia. It was also the closing of a chapter in my own life, as part of the “sandwich” generation—caring for an elderly relative while raising my own children. Our youngest child was graduating from high school and moving from our home to attend college out-of-state. During this same season of change, we also lost our two dogs to cancer within eight months of each other.

Philippians 3:10 from the Amplified Bible became my daily prayer throughout this season of change: “My determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly.”

My mother moved in with us following my father’s death and lived with us for 17 years. My parents had no life insurance, no investments, no savings, and my mother had never worked outside the home. For many years, it was a blessing to all of us: she was there for our daughter after school or when I had to work late. When our son was born, she was a great help, and it was a joy for our children to have their only grandmother living with our family. Osteoporosis fractures in Mom’s spine began to cause her more and more unbearable pain, and pain management

medications became stronger. Dementia began to take over her mind.

Philippians 3:10 from the Amplified Bible became my daily prayer throughout this season of change: “My determined purpose is that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly.”

God has answered that prayer. I am progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with my Lord. He met me at the point of my need, answering my prayer through giving me a heart to set my alarm for 5 a.m. each morning so that I would have quiet time with Him and His Word before I faced the day.

Each morning I awake and before my feet hit the floor, I begin asking Him to speak to me through His Word. After putting on a pot of coffee, and settling down at my kitchen table, I open my Bible and listen for His still small voice to minister to me. Because I have journaled over the years, I can see how a specific Scripture would be just what I would need for that day, that moment in time.

I came to a place in my life where I wanted, more than anything else, to love God more. I began to pray, “Lord, I want to delight in You!” God is so inconceivably good. He’s not looking for perfection. He already saw it in Christ. He’s looking for affection. That’s why every lasting change will invariably be a change of heart. He’ll even supply the heart, if we’ll ask him.

My daily prayer continues to this day, “Lord Jesus, give me a heart which yearns for Your Presence, a yearning for You that draws me over and over into Your Presence, a yearning that makes only a few days without time in prayer and Your Word



seem like an eternity. Give me a heart which is motivated first and foremost by a desire for You, not for what You can do for me, but a yearning for Your Presence. Give me a heart that wants You more than anything else You could give, to love You and know You more than anything in life. Give me a heart that takes what You have made known to me and makes You re-known to everyone else, a heart that makes Your name and renown the desire of my heart. Give me a heart to feel Your Holy Spirit woo me once again to the place where I meet You. In the simplicity of my prayer time, give me a heart to be suddenly confronted by the majesty of my Redeemer—the One Who is responsible for any good in me. Lord, each morning, give me a heart that seeks Your forgiveness for past sins, and welcomes Your fresh mercies which fall like manna from Heaven, and once again move my heart. I surrender all. Morning after morning.”

As my mother’s mental and physical health began to decline three years ago, God answered my prayer in helping us to find the funding for a wonderful assisted living facility nearby that provided her with the care and security she needed. I was able to go there daily to see her, interact with her caregivers and help with her care.

Mom would often ask me to pray with her, and it was such a comfort to both of us as we would come before the throne of grace together, seeking the loving arms of our Great Shepherd. He walked with us through the valley of the shadow of death as she lingered for several days in the palliative care unit before Mom stepped out of time and into eternity with our Lord.

Mom’s last year on earth was also our son’s final year in high school. One of the last things Mom was able to articulate was that our son would be able to go to the college that he wanted to attend. God answered that prayer by helping us put together the financial aid needed. God has met me

right at the point of my need, even in this season of an “empty nest” by allowing me to see our son successfully in college.



*Time of Transition*, by Lynn M. Burgher

God is into the details of our lives. As He has answered my prayer to know Him more deeply and more intimately, He has also met my needs moment-by-moment—even to the point of leading us to a little beagle-mix puppy who had been rescued from abandonment just days after we returned from taking our son to college. Our little beagle, Cookie, has filled our empty arms with love and joy. What comfort, what compassion, meeting us right at the point of our need!

Even though this has been a season of great change and great loss, I can truly say, my determined purpose is still that I may know Him, that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His person more strongly and more clearly every day.

**Beth Willis Miller’s** expertise as a creative and critical thinking specialist is steeped in years of experience as a writer, presenter, educator, and former Florida Department of Education State Consultant for Gifted Education.

# A Mother's Strength

Linda Kennedy—Port St. Lucie, FL

“My test for AIDS was positive,” my youngest son’s voice broke over the phone line. It was Easter Sunday morning, and in thirty minutes I would leave for church to sing in an hour-long cantata. I eased myself into a chair, my heart pounding out of my chest. Fingers of fear gripped my throat, leaving me unable to speak around the lump lodged there.

“Lord, help me be strong for him,” I sent up a quick prayer.

“What’s the prognosis?” I finally managed.

“I’ll know in a week. So much for hospital sanitation.” His words were bitter.

This wasn’t the first time I’d faced the possibility of his death because he was a brittle juvenile diabetic since age ten. I had rushed my child to emergency time and again, his body jerking from a brain deprived of sugar. More often than not, he was brought back from the edge of death with little time to spare. Hospitals are cold, stark places while you wait to see if your child will be revived, and you wonder at the emptiness of those who wait without God.

One episode left us on edge for 24 hours before knowing if he would be fully recovered, or a vegetable from brain damage. At the time he was diagnosed with diabetes, I was forewarned that he would probably not survive past 35. I believed, after all these years, that I was prepared, but each time I faced the possibility of him slipping from my grasp, I have begged, “Please Lord, not yet!”

“I’ll be praying for you, Jeff, and so will everyone in my church.”

“I know,” he sighed. The doubt in his voice seared my heart. His life had been one struggle

after another only to end like this. He was not encouraged with my assurances and I knew he was terribly afraid. There was no doubt in my heart that Jeff knew Jesus as his Savior, but my prayers would have to be, not only for the death he faced, but for his relationship to Jesus. He would be stretched for a dependency on Him.

His history had not developed a closer relationship, but rather a doubt that God was there for him. After a few more words of encouragement, we ended the conversation with the assurance that he would call me early Saturday morning. I had no time to break down now, no time to sit and contemplate. I had a musical to sing, praising Jesus for His sacrifice and rejoicing in His triumph. My heart was empty of joy.

The following days seemed like weeks as I struggled to maintain some kind of normalcy in our lives. I kept myself busy with the regular activities at home. I scrubbed, polished, and dusted every inch of our house. But there was only so much to do and I found myself, repeatedly, in the hall where the family photos covered the walls. I gazed at his pictures ranging from babyhood to fatherhood. Reaching out to touch the image of his face, I was once again stunned by the brevity of his troubled life.

Even as an adult, the severity of his diabetes resulted in frequent insulin reactions, causing him to lose one job after another. His young wife, immature and unable to handle the turmoil, had left him alone to parent two small children, ages three and nine months. He was devastated and overwhelmed with the responsibility of raising two babies and maintaining their support. I lashed out, “Where are you, Lord? What about his children? Is it fair to lose their mother and now their father?”



With Jeff living halfway across the country, the miles between us left me feeling helpless, and I scrambled for some way to turn this around. I had notified my pastor, requested prayer in Sunday school class, and called all of my friends. My take-charge personality kicked in as I searched the internet and the health food stores for an answer. After exhausting all avenues to pursue, I collapsed into a chair and sobbed, “I can’t handle this, Lord!”

Then ever so softly, God spoke to my heart. “I know you can’t, but I can. Let go. I’m in control.” I crawled into His lap, laid my head on His shoulder, and let Him hold me tight.

Sadness did not leave my heart, but a burden lifted from my shoulders, and I turned to the only place I could go. Each time I began to feel overwhelmed, I reached for my Bible and found a verse to sustain me. Matthew 18:19-20 was a passage I clung to. *“Again I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them.”*

I knew that God did not heal everyone, but I was certain that He would heal hearts. I also believed that I would see Jeff again where there was no pain or death. No matter what lay ahead, I could find strength in my heavenly Father.

As Saturday arrived, I was eager for possible good news, but feared the worst. A shock went through my body driving my heart to the pit of my stomach when the phone rang. Lifting the 20-pound receiver, I waited for the verdict.

“Mom,” his voice rang with excitement, “they mixed up my test!”

“What do you mean?” I gasped with renewed alarm.

“They mixed me up with another guy who has the same name. I don’t have AIDS, Mom. My test was negative!”

“You know where this comes from, don’t you, Jeff?”

“Yes,” he laughed.

“You’re right, Mom. God answers prayer.”

A dozen emotions ran through me, and relief washed over my body. I was joyful for the news, but my heart ached for another mother who would have heard the same dreadful news I had received only a week before. With tears running down my face, I closed my eyes, thanked my Lord and prayed that He would draw her into His lap and hold her close.

I had learned a lesson too. There is nothing too big for God, no matter the outcome. Had it been possible for me to make contact with this other mother, I would have shared Philippians 4:7 – *“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* I pray that she knows my heavenly Father and will be carried through the days ahead.

**Linda Kennedy** is currently living in Port St. Lucie, Florida. She is the grandmother of six and great-grandmother of seven. Now retired, she is near completion of a Christian novel dealing with abortion and the resulting guilt of a woman who makes that choice. A sequel is in the planning stages. Linda is a member of First Baptist of Stuart and actively involved as the drama-director for the musical presentations and secretary of her Sunday school class. She is also the liaison for CareNet at her church. A favorite Bible teacher is Beth Moore. She has drawn on Beth’s teaching for a closer walk with Jesus and coping with life’s challenges.



*Wings: Fifty Times a Second*, by Nancy D'Oporto

# Reconciled Enemies

Nancy Scott—Eugene, OR

On the day I picked up a Bible on a whim, I could not have been less interested in what it said. Rather, as a confirmed atheist, I was intent on winning an argument against my Christian co-worker. Looking back, it was clear that I was God's enemy. Yet on that day, the words on the page came alive to me in a way that I never could have expected. Within a few hours, I was asking this God, whom moments before I believed did not exist, to show me His way. Since then, it has been clear to me that this salvation is God's. God pursued me; I did not pursue Him.

The changes were drastic at first. I was eager to know and to understand this God who had invaded my life. I read the Bible for myself, and I tentatively attended a church where I was sure I would have been stoned just a year earlier. I longed to understand God. After spending years as His enemy, we were reconciled, and plainly, at His initiative.

"Freely you have received, freely give"  
(Matthew 10:8b NASB).

Within a few years, however, I found myself struggling. I felt oppressed with duties and obligations to attain spiritual growth, to do the right things, and to please God. I remember reading the words of Paul in Romans 5, "*while we were enemies, we were reconciled,*" and recognizing that God had tackled me against my will. And yet, now, I felt desperate to take the right steps so that God would continue to pursue me. I was afraid that if I did not please Him, He would somehow abandon me.

I longed for the spiritual maturity which I felt only God could grant, yet for which I felt somehow responsible. I struggled with this inconsistency. On the one hand, while I was God's avowed

enemy, totally disinterested in His concerns, He brought me to my senses. On the other hand, now that I was "at peace" with Him, having laid down the weapons of my warfare, I thought it was up to me to keep our relationship moving forward.

Subtly, I came to believe that my relationship with God was my responsibility. Like earthly friendship, if I did not nurture this relationship by spending time with God, the relationship would stagnate and my fervor for God would dim. My pursuit of God grew to include various practices, including routine prayer, worship, and Bible reading. I formulated much of my approach to God by reading biographies of great Christians who had found these practices significant in their own lives. Their experiences became prescriptive for mine. In my mind, my continuing fellowship with God and my deepening spiritual maturity depended upon how fervently I pursued a relationship with Him.

Having a personal relationship with God the Father and with Jesus Christ is a popular notion in today's Evangelicalism. We do not ask whether friendship is an apt analogy for our relationship with God; we assume it. To be sure, the words of the Apostle John point us to the true meaning of friendship, that "*one would lay down his life for his friend.*"

In this sense, Jesus is truly our Friend; He has bought for us what we never could have bought for ourselves: redemption. Believers are friends with God. As Paul points out in Romans 5, we are at peace with God, no longer at war, reconciled. But in important ways our modern portrait of "friendship" with God conflicts with the reality of who God is and who we are.

We are no longer cut off from God in the same way we were before believing. We are friends and not enemies. But we are not on equal footing with



God, as we are in our human friendships. God is God, and we are not. We are His creatures, and He is our Creator. He is in charge of our lives and in charge of our relationship with Him in a way that does not mirror our human friendships.

In our human friendships, we have mutual expectations of one another. When we apply this model to our relationship with God, the expectations we place on ourselves to be God's friend can be overwhelming. We often fail our human friends, and our relationships include our forbearance with one another. Though God does not fail us, we fail God routinely. If we are trying to be a friend to God in the same way He is a Friend to us, the pressure can be staggering. Again, the analogy with human friendship breaks down.

Aside from the pressure we put on ourselves to perform as a friend to God, perhaps the greater danger in our friendship metaphor is this: it distracts us from what is ultimately more important about our faith. We have come to believe that being on good terms with Jesus as our Friend involves routine interaction with Him, often in the form of a devotional or worship practice of some sort.

And yet, one who enjoys a devotional life emotionally may believe that this experience of God is evidence for his faith. This person may be distracted into thinking he is pleasing God because he engages in a worship experience, all the while making daily choices which contradict faith. This is the New Testament's picture of Saul of Tarsus. He experienced a life full of religious devotion, but later he looked back on his folly.

Our sin is subtle. Our modern Saul could be refusing to look at how his own evil works its way out in the context of his family. He "feels" in fellowship with God because he has confessed obvious infractions, but ask his wife if he is kind and loving, willing to look his own failures

in the eye in order to repudiate them. The existential choices we make—not whether we have a particular experience of God—are what is important. I am not responsible to achieve a certain experience of God. I am responsible to make choices that reflect what I say I believe.

We must not seek to measure our faith on the basis of a subjective "friendship" experience of God. Each of us has a different experience of God, based on our different personalities and life experiences. The relationship we have with God will be as unique as our fingerprints. The real evidence for the work of God in our lives as believers is not the quality of our "friendship" or our worship experience, but that over the course of our lives, our choices reflect what we believe.

Likewise, our traditional picture of assurance of salvation is misleading. We are taught that because we have a conversion experience on which we can look back with a date and time, we simply should not doubt our salvation. This may allow us to excuse our sin: "I know I accepted Christ back then and that is all that matters." On the one hand, this is true. Our abject moral failure, even after conversion, will not keep us from God. After all, He is the One pursuing us.

But on the other hand, it matters very much what we do. The hardest decision any of us faces is how we will respond when life gets difficult. Ultimately, the question is this: What are we going to do with the fact that God is in charge of our lives and we are not? How will we respond to the events and circumstances of our lives that He is authoring in ways that do not please us? Our suffering clarifies the big questions and helps us see whether or not we have faith. A routine devotional life or a subjective friendship experience of God pales in comparison as a litmus test of whether we believe the gospel.

Over the course of our lives, our existential choices, especially in the midst of difficulty, will attest to God's commitment to us. Eventually, we will see that at significant forks in the road we followed God, that He held onto us and kept our faith from failing. We are assured of our salvation when we look back—not at a conversion experience, but at those significant crossroads in our lives when we might have walked away from God, but didn't.

Furthermore, the reality of our faith is reflected in the decisions we make daily. In the course of our lives, we make choices that go beyond whether or not we will practice a certain worship observance. The decisions we make with regard to loving those whom God has placed in our lives reflect our faith more deeply than any observance. This process is not neat and tidy. We will fail miserably along the way. When we find ourselves at conflict with our spouse, how do we respond? In the moment, we may not respond well. But in the process, will we dig in our heels and refuse to be wronged or to be wrong? Or, in the midst of much uncertainty and often outright failure, will we eventually seek to forgive and to be forgiven?

One of the hardest things for us to do is to face our vulnerability in the context of our significant earthly relationships. No wonder we prefer to consider Jesus our best friend; He will never let us down. And God the Father will always exceed the expectations of our earthly one. Indeed, we are saved by Jesus' profound act of friendship on the cross, by God's relentless pursuit of us. But, rather than hiding in Him from our vulnerability, He intends for us to live out our faith in the context of frail human relationships. In Romans 12, Paul ties true worship to the choices we make in our relationships. By God's grace alone, we will seek to confront our own evil choices for avoiding pain in the midst of our significant relationships.

The burden for our relationship with God is on His shoulders, for He has laid it there. After practicing my devotional life for several years, I finally asked God to show me what was true about who was pursuing whom in my walk as a believer. In one of the most frightening moments of my

life, convinced that the result would be devastating, I abandoned my routine of devotional worship. I was certain that within six months I would no longer be a believer and that God would utterly abandon me. And yet, I had to discover what was true.

To my utter surprise, I was still a believer six months later. In fact, six years later I was still a believer. God has continued to pursue me over all these years, regardless of my varying interest in religious observance. My initial conversion experience served as evidence of God's pursuit of me. Now, I am more convinced of His pursuit than ever, because at various crisis points along the way, He has held onto me when otherwise I would have walked away. And, I have profoundly emotional responses from time to time, when I see a rainbow, or when I consider what God has done for me. But my emotions come from my particular make-up as a person; they are not prescriptive for the way others ought to experience God.

Our subjective experience of God will be as different as we are. The choices we make about how we respond to the circumstances of our lives, and not whether we pursue "friendship" with God or practice devotions, will ultimately attest to God's working in our lives. We are reconciled enemies, and over time our friendship with God will be shown by the choices we make as He grows us into mature believers, assured of our salvation.

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**Nancy Scott** currently lives in Eugene, Oregon. She served for many years on the staff of McKenzie Study Center and Gutenberg College, where she enjoyed helping college students integrate faith with their intellectual pursuits. She left there in 2009, and now works full-time in her private practice in Marriage and Family Therapy. In her leisure time she enjoys water, hiking, camping, and watching birds. She also loves live acoustic music and hosts a local community radio show.







*Relentless Grace*, by Josh Felix

# In the Valley of Shadow

Jill Carattini—Atlanta, GA

Ernest Gordon was serving as a captain in the British army during the Second World War when he was captured by the Japanese, marched with other prisoners into the Southeast Asian jungles, and forced to construct a railroad bridge over the river Kwai. The conditions of the prison camp would eventually claim the lives of 80,000 men.

The prisoners were made to work for hours in scorching temperatures, chopping their way through tangled jungles. Those who paused out of exhaustion were beaten to death by the guards. Treated like animals, the men themselves became like beasts trying to survive. Theft and betrayal were as rampant as hunger and disease among them. Life was met with indifference, deceit, and hatred—by captive and captor alike.

Yet, Gordon lived to tell of hope and transformation in the valley of the river Kwai. In [*To End All Wars*], his widely acclaimed book, he gives a firsthand account of the story behind the “death railroad” and the spiritual resurrection of the camp. “Death was still with us,” writes Gordon. “But we were slowly being freed from its destructive grip. We were seeing for ourselves the sharp contrast between the forces that made for life and those that made for death. Selfishness, hatred, envy, jealousy, greed, self-indulgence, laziness and pride were all anti-life. Love, heroism, self-sacrifice, sympathy, mercy, integrity and creative faith, on the other hand, were the essence of life, turning mere existence into living in its truest sense. These were the gifts of God to men. True, there was hatred. But there was also love. There was death. But there was also life. God had not left us. He was with us, calling us to live the divine life in fellowship.”<sup>1</sup> In the valley of the shadow of death, Christ had risen.

God had somehow reconciled their lifeless estates, and in such a way that they found themselves

unable to respond to others without a similar inexplicable grace. In fact, so complete was the transformation of the men, so real the presence of Christ among them that they were able to reach out even to their captors with the love that had taken hold of them.

While still in the hands of their enemies, a train carrying Gordon and several others came alongside another boxcar at a stop in Burma. The entire car was filled with gravely wounded Japanese soldiers. They were left alone, without medical attention or company, as if abandoned refuse of war. “They were in a shocking state; I have never seen men filthier,” Gordon recalls. “Their uniforms were encrusted with mud, blood and excrement. Their wounds, sorely inflamed and full of pus, crawled with maggots . . . The wounded men looked at us forlornly as they sat with their heads resting against the carriages, waiting fatalistically for death . . . These were the enemy.”<sup>2</sup>

Without a word, many of the officers unbuckled their packs, took out part of their rations and a few rags, and with their canteens went over to the Japanese train. The guards tried to prevent them, but they pressed through, kneeling by the side of the injured men with food and water, cleaning their wounds. Eighteen months earlier the same men of the river Kwai prison camp would have celebrated the humiliation and destruction of anyone on the side of their violent captors. Yet Gordon explains, “We had experienced a moment of grace, there in those blood-stained railway cars. God had broken through the barriers of our prejudice and had given us the will to obey His command, ‘Thou shalt love.’”<sup>3</sup>

Ernest Gordon left his three years of brutal imprisonment with an unexpected turn in his



own story. Among suffering and enemies, God had spoken. Now it was Gordon who could not remain silent. He returned to Scotland to attend seminary, eventually becoming the dean of the chapel of Princeton University where he remained until his death in 2002. Among a valley of dry bones, God had breathed men to life. In the trenches of despair and hatred, the inexplicable love of Christ called enemies—and humankind—to hope and forgiveness.

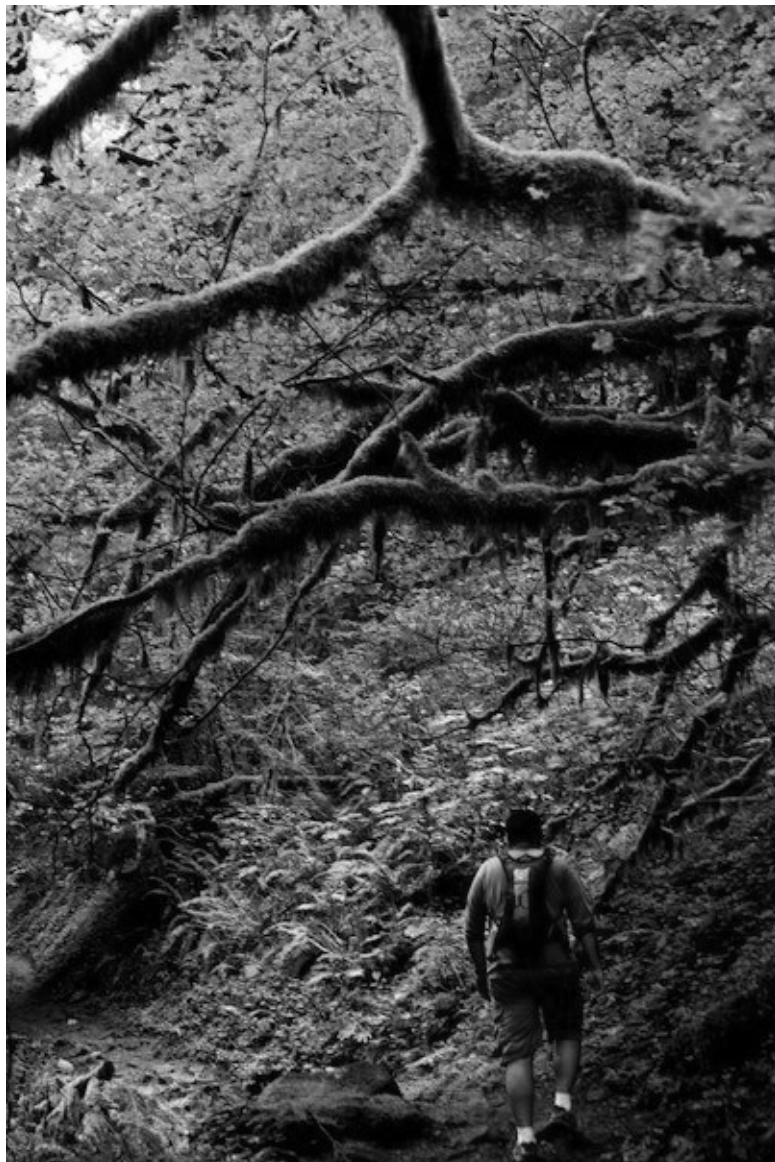
1 As quoted by Philip Yancey in *Rumors of Another World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 175.

2 Ernest Gordon, *To End All Wars* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 196-197.

3 *Ibid.*, 198.

Jill Carattini, “In the Valley of Shadow,” *A Slice of Infinity*, No. 2432, originally printed 4 April 2011 ([www.rzim.org](http://www.rzim.org)). Used by permission of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.

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*Jungle Trail*, by Sharmila Felix

# Hopeless Case

*Barbara Westfall as told to Ralph David Westfall—Cerritos, CA*

“Mother, don’t do it!”

Mona\* threatened suicide two weeks before, but I talked her out of it. Hoping she would put down the pills, I pleaded, “You promised!”

Glancing out the window at people strolling by, Mona said, “They don’t care.”

She pushed handfuls of red and white capsules into her mouth. I screamed and hit her again and again, but she wouldn’t stop.

Mona insisted I call her “Mother,” not Mom or Momma. When I called my aunt, I said, “Mother just swallowed a bottle of pills!”

When the ambulance finally arrived, the attendants put Mona in back. “Ride up here,” they said. The ambulance roared into downtown with flashing lights. I slumped down, hoping no one would see me or know what Mona had done.

I was only nine years old, but they left me alone in the deserted waiting room. I kept thinking, “Why did she? She said she wouldn’t.”

An hour later the doctor came. “Doris, your mother had a lot of bruises. Was someone hitting her?”

Tears welled up and spilled down my cheeks. In a choked voice I said, “I didn’t want her to eat those pills.”

My father, Fred, was an engineer at NBC in San Francisco. He was 10 years older than Mona and was obsessive/compulsive. One day he told her, “Doris shouldn’t play on the floor. She’ll get contaminated!”

Mona rolled her eyes. “Other kids play on the floor.”

Fred’s voice rose. “Well, they shouldn’t!”

The argument continued. Fred finally said, “I’m going out,” and drove off. After that, I didn’t play on the floor.

When they were fighting, Mona would often tell Fred, “You should see a psychiatrist.”

He always replied, “Those guys don’t know anything!”

Eventually, my father did go to a psychiatrist, but not for long. After more fights and more badgering, he went to another. But it didn’t change anything. Mona told friends, “If a doctor finds a way to help, he stops going.”

The compulsive behavior caused problems with NBC broadcasts. One day his boss said, “Fred, we can’t have an engineer who isn’t there when we need him because he’s washing his hands. You’re going to that overseas transmitter in the valley.”

So we moved to a new suburb in a Central California farm town near the station. But changing where we lived didn’t change how Fred and Mona got along.

After a few years, my parents separated. They filed for a divorce but never finalized it. Fred transferred to NBC’s Southern California studios.

We moved into a small rental in Gravenstein apple country. After high school I attended Santa Rosa Junior College for several years and then went to UCLA to major in education.

Mona tried suicide while I was at UCLA. As before, someone was there to get an ambulance to take her to have her stomach pumped.



I flew up to visit. As I left the hospital room, one nurse commented to another, “Did you see how cold she was? She hardly said a word to her daughter.”

I met Hugh at a rock 'n' roll dance at UCLA. He was tall and strong and, like me, a transplant from a Northern California farm town. A year later we married on the day he graduated.

I finished college and started teaching in South Los Angeles. I supported Hugh while he was back at UCLA getting an MBA.

We bought a house in a suburb that was transitioning from dairy farms. Our daughter, Cheryl, was born in 1970. Carter arrived in 1974. Hugh was “born again” in 1971.

Fred was still in the area after retiring. Mona moved to Southern California to be closer to us. They rented separate apartments side-by-side. People laughed at the arrangement, but Mona didn't have to adjust to his neuroses. They ate dinner together most nights. I drove out to visit them every Sunday.

Ten years later, Mona informed me, “I'm going to live with you.” I didn't want it, but she kept pushing, and I finally let her move in.

When Mona didn't get her way, she moped and said, “I won't be around much longer.” I always had to let her take control because I feared she would try suicide again.

Since we had only three bedrooms, Carter was forced to share his room with Mona. He complained, “She snores so loud I can't get any sleep!”

We got Carter some earplugs. Then we hired a friend to wall-off a separate room so he could get his room back.

Living with Mona was like walking on eggshells. I never knew what might set her off. I had to be extremely careful about what I said and did, and I had to make sure that everyone else did, too.

One afternoon while I was shopping, Carter got a snack from the refrigerator. When he put the plate in the sink, Mona said, “You need to rinse the plate for the dishwasher.”

*Living with Mona was like walking on eggshells. I never knew what might set her off. I had to be extremely careful about what I said and did, and I had to make sure that everyone else did, too.*

Continuing in the other direction, he said, “I'll get it later.”

Mona fixed her eyes on her 14-year old grandson. He rinsed the plate. She went into her room and shut the door.

When Cheryl came downstairs, Carter warned, “Watch out! Grandma is in a bad mood.”

After a while, they wondered why she hadn't come out. They knocked on her door, but there was no answer. “Grandma, is something wrong?” Cheryl asked. No response.

The door wouldn't open, but they were able to undo the lock. Mona lay on the bed with a plastic sack over her head. An empty pill bottle was on the floor. Carter called for help, as I had many years before. “My grandmother just swallowed a bottle of pills.”

After her discharge from the psychiatric hospital, my mother went into counseling. “You need your own place,” they told her. “It's not right for you to live with your daughter's family.”

Mona hardly ever changed her mind about anything, but they convinced her. We helped move her into a nearby senior citizens' apartment. She drove over in her red Volkswagen each Sunday for a visit.

After the latest suicide attempt, my relationship with Mona deteriorated. I knew she manipulated me with suicide attempts. But when I was the only victim, I didn't realize how terribly wrong it was. It all came into focus after she inflicted the same terrible distress on my daughter and son, her own grandchildren.

My mother sensed the change. One Sunday she didn't show up. Hugh and I were disturbed but decided not to call her. He said, "She wants us to beg her to come back. She wants us to apologize for something." We decided not to let her hold us hostage with suicide threats.

A week later, Mona called. In a high-pitched voice she said, "You have to come over. I need you."

I felt sick, but went to get my shoes. I fumbled through the closet but couldn't seem to find a matching pair. I felt almost paralyzed. Finally, Hugh and Carter drove off without me.

Mona was waiting at the gate to let them into the parking lot. She was upset when she didn't see me. "Where's Doris?"

Hugh said, "She couldn't find her shoes."

Hugh and Carter went into Mona's apartment. She was talking in a strained voice; her eyes were unnaturally wide. Hugh eventually called the psychiatric hospital where she had gone after the latest suicide attempt. "My wife's mother was with you a while ago. She seems to be going off the deep end. Someone needs to come get her."

"Is she in danger?" was the response.

"Uh, no."

The voice said, "If she isn't an immediate threat to herself or others, you'll have to bring her in yourself."

Hugh tried to convince Mona to go with him and Carter. "Let's get in the car, Mona."

"Are you taking me to see Doris?"

"No, you need to talk to some people."

Her face tightened and her eyes flashed. "I'm not going!"

Mona had heard the phone conversation and was angry that Hugh had called the facility. She later told friends, "He wanted to put me in a nut-house!"

By this time, I was teaching in a Christian school. The principal's husband, Clement, was a counselor whom we had visited before for marital counseling. Hugh called about a meeting between the family and Mona. Clem said, "You could do that, but it wouldn't make any difference. It's a hopeless case."

\*\*\*\*\*

I had no further contact with Mona for 14 years, except that I did see her once in a department store. I ducked out quickly. I'm pretty sure she didn't see me.

Although not with our family anymore, Mona was still much in our thoughts. When Hugh and I prayed at bedtime, he prayed for my mother. Every night he asked that Mona could be reconciled to us. But I couldn't pray for that. I later admitted, "I hoped your prayers wouldn't be answered."

Because of all the grief, I never wanted to see her again. I told myself, *If I let her be around, she will make me do whatever she wants. I won't be able to stop her.*



Others were concerned too, including Frieda, the custodian where I taught. Several times she advised me, “You need to get things straightened out with your mother before it’s too late. You’ll feel really bad afterwards if you don’t.”

Because my mother was in her late eighties, and since Fred had passed away recently, I knew Frieda was right. However, I couldn’t work up enough courage to contact Mona.

In the summer of 2003, at the age of 92, my mother suffered a stroke. Her friends told us she wanted me to see her in the convalescent hospital. Although I dreaded the thought, I knew I had to go. But instead of being mad, Mona said, “I’m sorry for all the pain I caused.”

My emotions were churning. I was happy Mona wasn’t angry, but still afraid I might say something to upset her again. I hesitated. Finally I said, “Let’s not worry about the past.”

Cheryl and Carter were both living in Northern California. It took a lot of pressure, but they finally came down to visit Mona.

We crowded into the small hospital room. Mona talked with Cheryl and Carter, catching up on what she had missed during the many years since the split. Cheryl had worked her way up to a vice presidency at a San Francisco bank. Carter was developing computer systems for a non-profit in Oakland.

Carter’s wife was studying to be a therapist, and she massaged Mona’s feet. She liked that. The tension dissipated. After about an hour, Cheryl said, “I love you, Grandma.” The whole family told Mona that they loved her before leaving.

Although Mona had attended her church regularly, she didn’t like committed Christians. She

scornfully described the people at our church as “Those holy Baptists!”

But now she was different. She was happy that I prayed with her and read the Bible almost every day until she passed away in November, 2003. Afterwards I told people, “When my mother had the stroke, God took the mean part out of her brain.”

You hear about bad family situations that go on and on until someone dies, without ever getting fixed. But this story didn’t end like that. God was gracious. He made it possible for me to reconcile with my mother, and for Cheryl and Carter with their grandmother.

Jesus said, *“If you have faith and do not doubt . . . you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done”* (Matthew 21:21 NIV). Reconciling with my mother was far harder than that.

Although I had hoped He wouldn’t, God did answer Hugh’s prayers. God can change human hearts and heal terribly broken relationships, even in a “hopeless case.” Thank you, Lord!

*\* To protect the privacy of people mentioned here, all the names have been changed.*

Although raised a Christian, **Ralph David Westfall** became an atheist. When that didn’t work, he accepted Christ. He teaches at a public university. Christian apologetics is one of his major interests.

# Just an Old Chunk of Wood

*Pam Geniac—Kalamazoo, MI*

At first I see nothing beyond the familiar form.  
The “me” I have become over the years.  
The hardened block of who I am.  
Lately though, life has come at me like an axe.  
The first swing sliced cleanly through the branches  
of who I believe I am, and is now busy lopping away  
the bark covering this persona I have unknowingly created.  
This slashing is painful to the extreme.  
I wonder if I can survive this much chiseling and gouging.  
It seems there may be nothing recognizable left.  
I study my reflection.  
It’s still me that stares back, yet not me.  
Hmm, something new there, just behind the eyes.  
Though still raw and rough hewn to behold,  
it is evident. I am changing.  
A craftsman has eyed this timber.  
Considered its natural shape and bend.  
Determined the best means to free the heart within.  
Artistic license is being taken.  
An epiphany surfaces,  
I am being sculpted.  
This artist will shape me as he sees fit,  
skillfully carving me into something useful.  
My true grain is slowly beginning to show.  
I am more than a little surprised.  
The color is deeper and richer than I thought likely.  
Much more real this “new” me.  
I know this transformation is nowhere near complete.  
So much more work to be done.  
I can only imagine what the sanding process will entail.  
When finished, I cannot fathom who I will be,  
or what I will look like. But for now, I believe  
I have found the key.  
To endure this refinement,  
I cannot fight against the sculptor’s hand.  
I must yield to his touch. Trust the skill of his knife.  
Then, waiting patiently,  
I will let the chips fall where they may.

**Pam Geniac’s** profile is located on page 166.







*The Lion of the Tribe of Judah*, by Dennis O. Collier at Bangor, PA | [www.woodsculpture.com](http://www.woodsculpture.com)

# A Lesson in Forgiveness

Wanda J. Shadle—Houston, TX

“You are the worst neighbor I have ever had. Don’t call and pretend you care about how I am. I know what you’re trying to do. I don’t want to have anything else to do with you. Don’t ever call me again.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. Sharon,\* my backdoor neighbor, was screaming at me over the telephone, whereas just a few weeks earlier while we were sitting in her living room, she hugged me and said, “Wanda, our friendship is like a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow.”

After Sharon hung up on me, all I could do was cry. I sobbed so hard that our daughters, Jeanne Ellen and Beverly, went into the garage to get my husband, Ralph. I could hardly talk as I tried to explain what happened. “Sharon yelled . . . and screamed at me . . . over the phone . . . and said . . . I was the worst neighbor . . . she ever had . . . and . . . she doesn’t want . . . to ever talk to me again . . . I’ve got to go back . . . to work . . . I can’t stay at home . . . until I’ve gotten over this.” Ralph hugged me and said, “It’ll be all right. Just give it time.”

That evening Jeanne Ellen was invited to go with a friend to her church for a special program. The friend was Sharon’s niece. When she and her mother came by, I told Sharon’s sister-in-law what had happened and asked her if she had any suggestions for what I could do. She suggested I bake a cake and take it to Sharon and try to find out what the problem was.

So, the next day, I baked a cake and took it in the car around to the front of her house, because there was no gate in our back fence. I made a mistake by not taking someone with me as a witness. As soon as Sharon saw me, she said, “No! I can’t be a hypocrite. I can’t take that cake! I told you I didn’t

want to have anything else to do with you. Now, go away and leave me alone.”

“Sharon, can’t you at least tell me what I’ve done to make you feel this way?”

“You know what you’ve done, and I can’t take that cake!” Then she slammed the door in my face. As I walked to the car, I thought, I don’t ever want to allow myself to get this close to anyone again. It hurts too much.

As I drove home, I thought of a favorite Bible verse, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose*” (Romans 8:28, KJV). I didn’t know how an experience like this could possibly work for good, but I trusted God to make it happen. I would just have to pray, be patient, and let Him do it. I had never felt this rejected before, so I prayed, and prayed, and prayed—and went back to work as a registered nurse. I had been a stay-at-home mom since my mother had come to stay with us while she went to the M.D. Anderson Cancer Clinic in Houston and had died of ovarian cancer two years earlier.

Several days later, I called Sharon’s next door neighbor. “Jane, what’s going on with Sharon? Is she okay?”

“No. She is going through a nervous breakdown,” Jane replied.

“Oh, I was afraid that might be the problem. After her brother-in-law told me she had been having the migraine headaches again, I called her to ask how she was feeling, and she screamed at me and told me I was the worst neighbor she ever had and never to call her again.”



“Oh, Wanda, I am so sorry. You know I have had a few problems with her in the past also.”

“What did you do?”

“I just didn’t call her for several weeks. Then she called me for something, and everything seemed to be okay after that. I am sure she will be better in a few months.”

“When I was taking psychiatric nursing, I remember that in most cases what someone calls a ‘nervous breakdown’ is most often caused by severe depression from stress of some kind. If I remember correctly, it usually happens when life’s demands become physically and emotionally overwhelming. I can certainly see how that would describe Sharon.”

Sharon and her family were already living in the house behind us when we moved into our new home. Jeanne Ellen and Sharon’s daughter, Becky, both three years old, played together often.

Eighteen months later, Sharon and I had our second daughters two weeks apart. Our daughter, Beverly, nursed well and grew normally, but Sharon’s daughter, Stacy, did not. While Stacy continued to respond like a newborn baby, Beverly rolled over at four months, sat alone at six months, and crawled at nine months.

One day Sharon had me place Beverly on the floor so she could watch her crawl, something Stacy couldn’t do. The doctors eventually diagnosed Stacy with cerebral palsy.

By that time, Sharon and I had become close friends. Because the fence separating our backyards didn’t have a gate, we put a bench from our redwood picnic table on each side of the fence so we could step over and visit. Sharon had not wanted a gate when they put the fence up, because

she was afraid she couldn’t watch Becky closely enough while she was caring for Stacy.

Sharon and I began to carpool when Jeanne Ellen and Becky entered kindergarten. I took care of Stacy when Sharon drove, and Beverly stayed with Sharon when I drove. We often had lunch together after we picked the girls up from school, and when we didn’t, we had a cup of coffee or a glass of iced tea.

Stacy was placed in a wheelchair when she became too awkward to handle. Occasionally, Sharon’s husband, John, put Stacy in her wheelchair over the fence to Ralph, so we could take care of her while they went out. I felt we were really becoming close friends.

“Every experience God gives you and every person He puts in your life is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see.” –Corrie Ten Boom

Then came the change. One day, Jeanne Ellen came in from the backyard crying and asked me, “Why can’t I play with Becky any more? She won’t let me climb over the fence to play with her.” I went outside and asked Becky, “Why can’t Jeanne Ellen come over to play with you?”

She said, “Mother doesn’t want me to let her.” Only a week earlier I had taken a skirt and vest I was making for Jeanne Ellen over for Sharon to see, and everything seemed fine, so I just assumed Sharon wasn’t feeling well.

The next day, I saw Sharon’s brother-in-law mowing her backyard. I asked him, “How is Sharon feeling?”

“She has had a bad headache for several days,” he answered.

I knew she had a history of migraine headaches, so I called to see how she was. That's when she began screaming at me. Because the pain was so bad every time I looked out the window over my kitchen sink and saw Sharon's house, I lowered the blinds. I kept them that way for a long time. I prayed for God to take away my pain, and I also asked him to help Sharon overcome whatever had caused her to lash out at me. I knew in my heart I had done nothing wrong. I even thought, maybe she resents me because Beverly is normal and Stacy is not. Several months later, I was finally able to raise the blinds without crying.

Nine months after the phone conversation, I saw Sharon at a neighborhood grocery store, and she greeted me as if nothing had ever happened. I thought, maybe she really had a nervous breakdown and doesn't even remember the incident. In the meantime, I had already forgiven Sharon, because I knew it would hurt me more than it would hurt her, if I harbored any grudge against her. After Sharon recovered from her nervous breakdown, we began seeing more of each other.

Several months later Sharon's sister, Audrey, who was dying of brain cancer, was staying with Sharon. She asked if I would give Audrey injections for pain that her doctor had ordered. I did that for several months. After Audrey died, Sharon and I kept in closer touch. However, I was careful not to become as close to her as I had been before, because I didn't want to be hurt again. I often found myself holding back in what I shared with her. Before I went to her house for anything, I always prayed for wisdom to speak only kind words.

Sharon called often, especially when Stacy had periods of difficult breathing. Once when Stacy almost stopped breathing, I stayed at her house for several hours, keeping in touch with her doctor until she was breathing normally again. A few days later, Sharon sent me a sweet handwritten note that said, "Thanks for being the neighbor and real

friend you are . . . . Wanda, you've always been there. I mean it! I love you and hope the feeling is the same with you." I saved the note and read it often.

Once I wrote Corrie ten Boom and told her how much the movie, *The Hiding Place*, meant to me. My former Sunday School teacher, Jeannette Clift George, played her character in the movie. Corrie answered my letter, and one thing she said has stayed with me: "Every experience God gives you and every person He puts in your life is the perfect preparation for the future that only He can see."

This really helped me in this situation as well as for many others since that time, especially while I was a Visiting Nurse and a patient of mine accused me of opening her mail on her desk and taking money out of it, or when we had a misunderstanding with my aunt and uncle, who lived in Arkansas.

I may never know exactly what caused Sharon to lash out at me as she did. I just know in my heart that I never intentionally said or did anything to hurt her. I try not to worry about being hurt again or being rejected by anyone, because I know it is impossible to please everyone. I have to do the best I can and leave the rest up to the Lord. God truly did "work all things together for good," by giving me a lesson in forgiveness.

*\*Names have been changed, except for my family members.*

**Wanda Shadle** has been a widow since losing her husband of over fifty-five years, Ralph, on 2/27/09. She lives in Houston, Texas, and is an active member of First Baptist Church, where she sings in the choir and is active in her Sunday School class. She is a retired R.N. with a B.S. in Nursing. She attended the Decision School of Christian Writing and in 1993, she founded her church's chapter of Inspirational Writers Alive! Her devotionals have been published in *The Quiet Hour*, *The Upper Room*, and *The Secret Place*. She has two adult daughters.





*Magnified*, by Lynn M. Burgher

## My Psalm 23

*Dorothy Catlin—Brigham City, UT*

The LORD is my shepherd,  
And HE is enough.

HE is my green pasture.  
HE is my still water.  
HE restores my ragged soul.

Because He has put His name on me,  
He carefully guides me in the path He has chosen  
for me.

I need not fear what lies in the deepest darkness,  
even though evil may wait there,  
Because You, LORD, are with me.  
You have ready tools for my care and defense,  
And I know that You will use them for my good.  
I find comfort in that.

You invite me to share an intimate meal with You,  
No matter who is watching, or what they may think.  
You have cleansed and cared for me,  
Bathing me with Your own sweet fragrance.  
What You pour out for me will never run dry;  
I can never exhaust Your resources.

Each and every day of my life  
Your goodness and lovingkindness surround me.  
In You, I am always and forever “at home.”  
Amen

Wife, mother, grandmother, musician, Bible teacher, gardener . . . **Dorothy Catlin** wears all of these identities in varying order on any given day; the common factor among them is a passion for encouraging and nurturing growth. From March through October, she would rather be out in the garden than just about anywhere else.

# My Roadside Prayer

Glen Davenport—Crossville, TN

*“But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31 KJV).*

On one hot summer day in late July 2009, my 11-year-old grandson came bursting through the back door into our house, crying while trying to tell my wife and me about something horrible. Among his muttered words were “Daddy” and “lawnmower.” I imagined the worst.

“Ryan, you don’t have to explain. Let’s go!” I said as I grabbed my car keys, ran out the door, my grandson close behind me, got into the car and sped away as fast as possible.

When I got within sight of his house, I saw people huddled around my 39-year-old son, Matthew, who was lying on his back beside the lawnmower. I ran to him as quickly as I could.

My emergency-trained mind kicked in. “Matthew, are you all right?” I asked as I ran a mental checklist to see what was wrong. His speech was slurred. His eyes were not focused. He had very little strength in his left hand. He could hardly move his left leg. He was experiencing a stroke.

A law officer called for an ambulance. A neighbor ran home for some aspirin, and one of the kids got drinking water. Someone else held an umbrella to shade Matt’s face from the hot sun. Some firemen arrived with oxygen. An ambulance arrived and men came running with stretchers in hand. After a few emergency maneuvers, Matt was loaded into the ambulance and carried away, sirens blaring, toward the local hospital.

Someone called his wife, Melanie, at work. She met me at the hospital where the ER doctor confirmed that it was a stroke. Matt was airlifted

to Erlanger Hospital in Chattanooga, Tennessee, 90 miles away. Melanie and I hurried home, picked up some things we might need overnight, and headed to Erlanger.

I was the driver. I had to hurry. Melanie was okay with that because she was so worried about Matt. I drove much faster than I should have, but we wanted to get there as soon as we could. Somewhere down the road, speeding across the Dunlap Mountain at 80 to 90 miles per hour, God spoke to me, asking, “Why are you driving so fast? What could you do if you were there? His life is in My hands. Why don’t you stop and pray and let Me do the fast footwork?”

So, that is exactly what I did. I slowed down, pulled to the side of the road and stopped. Melanie and I held hands and talked to God right there. We took our time in prayer because that was what God was asking us to do. Within a couple of minutes, an attending physician called from the hospital in Chattanooga to Melanie’s cell phone with information we needed to hear. He said, “Your husband has had a serious stroke, but he is receiving immediate attention and the best possible care.” The doctor told us his name and exactly how to find him and Matt.

When we had finished praying and talking with the doctor, we pulled back onto the roadway with a calmer feeling in our hearts and soon realized that phone signals were weak and scarce in the mountainous area. God had pulled me over in perhaps the only place on the mountain where we could have a long, uninterrupted signal and a full conversation with Matt’s attending physician.

While it is true, we could have talked with God from any place on the road and at any time, the same is not true with a cell phone. Is that well-timed, or what? From that point onward, the



posted speed limit was fast enough for us. We had no need to hurry. God had provided the comfort we needed. When we arrived at the hospital, we were able to go in to see Matt without a long delay in the waiting room. Our waiting time had been spent beside the road, alone with God, praying and being comforted.

That roadside prayer and phone conversation are two things I will never forget. God is GREAT!

**Glen Davenport** lives with Helen, his wife of 49 years, in middle Tennessee, where he works as a missionary/pastor. He graduated from the Eastern Baptist Seminary in Monroe, Ohio, where he received a doctorate degree in Theology. He has been preaching for more than 40 years in Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee. He continues his teaching ministry and writes Bible-study books. He has a special interest in end-time events. His latest 60-page book is titled *The Rise of the Anti-Christ and The Mark of the Beast*. Glen is a member of the Inspirational Writers' Group in Fairfield Glade, Tennessee.



*Delighting in Praise*, by Sharmila Felix

“Prayer without ceasing is only possible in a life of continual thanks. How did I ever think there was another way to enter into His courts but with thanksgiving? The only prayers are the ones mouthed with thankful lips.”  
—Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts*

# Christ Alone

*Kathleen M. Barrett—Port St. Lucie, FL*

I am an overcomer because of Christ, alone. As I have grown to trust God more every day, I reflect on how my world was shaken nearly 42 years ago and why I first trusted in Christ Jesus.

The near tragedy unfolded, not suddenly, as is often the case, but slowly and eerily. I will never forget the morning of May 30, 1969. My bridal blush was still glowing from our February wedding, just four months earlier. I had stayed home from work that day and was happily ironing my husband's many Oxford-style dress shirts. Afterward, I would run some errands. Dennis went on his way to work as a carpenter on an ocean high-rise condominium in Pompano Beach, Florida.

My first stop was the bank, but on the way I had a growing sense of "something" being wrong. I shook it off, continued on and then headed back home again. When I returned home, I received a phone call from my mother inviting us to dinner. Little did I know that she knew the "something" that I didn't.

She encouraged me to come on over. I argued a bit, saying, "But Dennis is not home from work yet. I don't want to come without him." My mother was gentle in her demand for me to come right then. When I arrived, she was just as gentle explaining to me why we had to go to the hospital. "Dennis had a little accident," she said. The little accident, I soon found out, was the beginning of an intense fight for my 27-year-old husband's life.

His work responsibility for that day had been to take down some of the metal forms holding up the ceiling of the fifth floor in the ten-story condominium the company was contracted to build. The forms were originally put in place to hold up the ceiling until the concrete set. They

were spaced about every six feet for each sheet of plywood used on the ceiling.

The one form my husband was told to take down, alarmingly, loosened all the others. The mass of plywood and concrete quickly collapsed and swept him across the floor over a pile of lumber and outside the five-story building, which was unsecured by the required guard rails. He plummeted 60 feet onto a pile of cement blocks, feet first. As his co-workers rushed to his aid, one of the men offered Dennis what was supposed to be his last cigarette. "Just like in western movies," he later recalled.

My parents and I, along with my husband's foreman, soon gathered at Holy Cross Hospital in Ft. Lauderdale. My beloved husband lay on a gurney with his feet swelling out of his work boots, as we waited for four hours for an orthopedic surgeon to arrive. Surprisingly, Dennis was still conscious as I stroked his head.

Was he bleeding internally? Would his feet need to be amputated? Would he walk again if his feet could be saved? It would be a long week of uncertainty, and at that week's end, a team of doctors and God's divine hand assured us that Dennis would, at least, live. In the meantime, he was hooked up to a morphine drip and life-sustaining equipment.

Here we were newlyweds in a hospital emergency room. In another area of the hospital God was preparing a sanctuary for me to cry out to Him in my distress. In the months to follow, I would frequently visit the hospital chapel, both before and after I visited Dennis, to plead desperately for his recovery. In retrospect, I see how God was urging me to make a decision to have a personal relationship with Him. Oh yes, I knew that He cared about my dire circumstances, but more





importantly He wanted me to know that I would need Him for the long journey ahead.

As a Catholic believer, I prayed the rosary, lit the candles, prayed to the saints, and almost did somersaults, thinking that was what I had to do to get God's attention during the weeks and months of recovery. Not true. All I had to do was take Him at His word. Psalm 18:6 expressed my circumstances: *"In my distress I called to the Lord, I cried to my God for help. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears."*

I was not a true Christ-follower at the time. However, Catholicism was the basis for a strong belief system in years to come. Before I came to know Christ as Lord, I went to church and to confession. I took the sacraments and tried to be a "good girl," but I never really let God be the Lord over the affairs of my life. I only played the part of being a Christian by trying to do all the "right" things. I came to learn that God would use the trauma of almost losing my husband to begin my journey of spiritual and emotional growth.

Now some 40 years later, as I reflect back on my husband's fragile physical condition at the time and his amazing return to normalcy, I also recall my family's wonderful support. With my mother's background as a registered nurse, she was a special blessing during those dark hours of Dennis's hospital stay. She took two city buses every day to visit her son-in-law and to be his personal nurse, making sure he got the best care possible. She would leave her duties at home to fill in the gap for me, while I was working. Her acts of love humbled me.

My dad was always there, as well, with encouragement, finances, and repair work around the house, when needed. Even my two brothers and sister were on hand for me. How I needed them all, when four days after my husband's

admittance to the hospital, I was admitted in extreme shock, just two floors below.

When Dennis was released to go home, we began dealing with how to get around in a wheelchair, the pain medications to which he had become accustomed, daily rehabilitation therapy, and how to scratch the itch which was covered with plaster. A wire coat hanger fashioned the perfect "finger" for that itch.

*"The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to . . . provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of His splendor" (Isaiah 61:1, 3 NIV).*

The legs and full body casts that imprisoned him also limited his mobility—although we were able to conceive a baby that year. Having a child was probably not the best decision, since our only income was workmen's compensation and my meager earnings as a secretary. But then, I was not listening to the Lord at that time, just my heart. Still, the joy of being able to have a baby was a miracle in itself. At least, my husband's reproductive guys were still intact! It was October 14, 1970, a year and five months after nearly becoming a widow, that we were blessed with a baby girl, Danielle.

Before Dennis could return to work in early May of 1970, he had to learn how to walk again. He had fractured his back, broken his right ankle and crushed his left, resulting in a fusion. No synthetic mobile joints were available at that time. The course of action was simply to fuse the remaining bones and somehow learn to walk, regaining use of both feet in tandem. It took months of

rehabilitation, countless prayers from friends and family all over the globe, and Dennis's strong will to learn to put one foot in front of the other.

Two weeks short of one year after the accident, he miraculously was able to return to work. Not, however, as a carpenter. A friend of the family offered him a job at the city's water department. We laughingly say that Dennis "fell" into this business, since he continued in this field and retired as Director of Utilities, followed by Public Works Director, completing a total of 34 years of service, for the town of Juno Beach, Florida. Dennis was never a couch potato throughout those years. I've never seen such courage to recover and get on with life as I did with my husband, despite severe re-injury to his left foot, 20 years later, in a tumble from a golf cart.

In May of 1973, we were blessed with a baby boy. Michael was as healthy and as strong-willed as his daddy, which was both a blessing and a challenge. Because I was flailing emotionally at the time, I battled increased depression. In two and a half short years, I had become a wife, almost a widow, a mother of two, and a very emotionally troubled young woman.

Putting one foot in front of the other took faith, mine and my brave husband's. Although I couldn't see how God was working in Dennis's life, I knew He was working in mine, patiently and lovingly. I knew because during the following months and years of emotional stress and depression and running away—literally running away—from the pain, God was faithful not to give up on me. He would always bring me back, when I would get in my car and drive off to another county, a beach or a park, or anywhere to be alone to wallow in self-pity for hours on end.

Thankfully, I would come to learn about the power and truth of God's Word through a friend who kept inviting me to her church. It was a church where the Bible was read and applied to one's life. Never had I realized that the purpose of

the Bible was to completely transform a believer—mind, body, and spirit.

I later discovered that the pain I was trying to escape was rooted in the fear of abandonment. In my confused way of thinking, I felt that because of my husband's accident, I was being abandoned by my protector, my provider, my lover. How was I to know in years to come that God Himself fulfills all of those roles? Only by accepting my friend's invitation to attend her Bible-believing church would I come to a saving knowledge of a great God and how He heals.

In my husband's healing process, he did his best to fulfill all the roles I expected of him. How wrong I was, however, to be so demanding of him. I needed to realize that God is my Protector: "*You are my hiding place, You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance*" (Psalm 32:7). God is my Provider: "*My God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus*" (Philippians 4:19). And I needed to realize that God is my Lover: "*My lover is mine and I am His . . .*" (Song of Songs 2:16).

The Lord also had to deliver me from anger, jealousy, complaining, low self-esteem, and just plain ugliness of character. All these flaws did not stem from my husband's accident, but they were all underlying culprits of being self-centered—not Christ-centered.

Until my loving heavenly Father showed me the errors of my ways and the endless mercy of His, I was a mess. Now, when I am faced with personal challenges, where I know that God wants to improve my character, I moan and groan a little while, but then I press on with my eyes focused on the prize—greater Christ-likeness. You see, God is more concerned about my character than my comfort. Thus, I've learned that He allows trials and challenges in life.

The journey is not over. Although my husband rarely complains of physical pain, the emotional



pain he has suffered remains dormant. Years later, Dennis relayed to me what he had seen as he lay on the scorching Florida beachfront in the immediate aftermath of his five-story plunge: “I was lying on the pile of cement rubble and I looked up and saw a figure on top of the building waving and smiling back at me.” Who or what it might have been is still a question mark in our minds.

Nevertheless this I know: it was Christ alone who brought my broken husband to recognize Jesus as Savior during one Easter drama at our church about 15 years later. As he worked as a stage hand in the production of *The Life Giver*, Dennis was responsible for the hoist that lifted the cross and the actor who played Jesus. It was an emotional encounter that brought him to tears.

Many of us have had to face the fires of adversity though, haven't we? Some return stronger and better because of their increasing faith. Some, bitter and hardened from battle scars and disbelief. As for me, I'm not the frazzled mess I was supposed to be. I'm not the broken and emotionally-driven woman I was turning out to be. And although I felt beaten down, I was not destroyed as the enemy of my soul—Satan—intended for me to be.

Borrowing words from a song by Christian artist Craig Koch, I hold fast: “In Christ alone I place my trust and find my glory in the power of the cross. In every victory, let it be said of me, my source of strength, my source of hope is Christ alone.”

**Kathleen Barrett** recently moved to Port St. Lucie, Florida, with her husband of 42 years, Dennis. They attend Christ Fellowship Church north campus in Stuart, FL, and enjoy an active family life with their two adult children and spouses and their 11-year-old grandson, Lance. The Lord has blessed their daughter and son-in-law with not one baby from China, but twins! Their names are Abigail Grace and Olivia Joy. God's Grace sustained them in their decade-long wait for a baby, and His double portion has brought them unspeakable Joy! Kathleen is a former pre-school teacher and a frequent contributing editor to *The Home Times* family newspaper. She has also authored a children's devotional, *Jubilee Journal*. Her heart and passion, however, is to share the truth and the healing of the Word of God with hurting women everywhere.

“He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall remain stable and fixed under the shadow of the Almighty Whose power no foe can withstand. I will say of the Lord, He is my Refuge and my Fortress, my God; on Him I lean and rely, and in Him I confidently trust!”  
(Psalm 91:1-2 Amp).

# Marriage for a Lifetime

*J. E. Lemmé—Seattle, WA*

Busso and I had met fourteen months before at a dance in April, 1960. He went back to his home in Canada the next day, and our first date was seven months later in December when he'd come south for a weekend. By letter and phone, he'd told me about himself. Born in East Germany, he had escaped six years earlier. He'd traveled through Europe, then worked his way across Canada. The way he seemed to leap toward the golden ring of his desires impressed me.



*Busso and Janette,  
still newly wed in 1962,  
by a stranger on the  
Canadian Pacific platform*

Now, because of a job lay-off, he had come from Kitimat in northern Canada to spend the summer in Seattle, and we were on our way to a drive-in movie, talking, joking, laughing with the pleasure of being together. His teasing, flirtatious manner made me giggle like a kid as we commiserated about how hard the months of separation had been. "There is a way we could be together for a lifetime," he said as he drove. "Will you marry me?"

It was almost a whisper. With his darling German accent, his English was far from perfect: had I heard correctly? I hadn't thought about marriage yet.

What should I say? His adventurous stories were captivating, and I loved his carefree, boyish way of blurting out whatever he was thinking, uninhibited by convention. My thoughts sprang like kangaroos in an open field, bouncing in all directions. Was he really ready for commitment? Was I?

His muscled arm nudged me closer. He was tall, strong, handsome, intelligent, well-traveled, and

fun to be with. His words kept echoing, "We could be together for a lifetime!" This was surely Providence. He was everything I wanted. I couldn't bear the thought of being separated again. What was I waiting for?

The movie was half over. "Yes," I said.

"Yes!" he shouted. We held each other like we'd never let go. "We'll be the perfect couple," he announced.

My parents' questioning embarrassed me as Busso asked for their blessing the next evening. "Do you have a job?"

"I'm laid off at the moment, but my company should be re-hiring soon. I'm a hard worker."

Sandi Larson, a dear friend, was my only attendant in a small ceremony in December, 1961. It was at my church, the place I'd discovered "by accident" eight years earlier, where I'd attended worship services and youth group, and first learned of the redeeming love of Jesus Christ. It had saved me from many teenage pitfalls. At the altar, I was certain God had led me to this man and this moment.

My parents need not have worried about Busso working. After our wedding, we returned to Kitimat, where he labored at two jobs, frequently talking about making money and making it rich. I worked as well. We saved his salary and lived on mine. To my delight, within a couple of years, a job opportunity brought us back to Seattle, and Busso also opened a small business on the side.

Working 12- to 14-hour days became routine. Sometimes he exploded in anger because of a negligent supplier or sub-contractor, or because of labor or tax pressures, and often, as his secretary-

bookkeeper, I took it personally. I wondered what had happened to the fun we used to have and felt criticized for wanting to go out like we used to. As the business and an expected baby grew, so did the hurdles and stress.

Meanwhile, when an amnesty was declared in East Germany for all who had previously escaped, I insisted on meeting my husband's family. The first visit led to a second, then a third, when we got caught trying to smuggle Busso's sister out of that Communist country.

The fiasco of serving time in prison, plus the rebuilding of our lives the following year, drained our savings. We had to start over. Busso threw himself full force into our collapsed business. We both worked harder than ever.

When our daughter was born in 1968, I quit my job and divided my time between home and business. Seeing my husband more, even when he got tired and bossy, and having our baby with me at our home office gave me immense pleasure. As the years passed, however, little resentments began poking irritating fingers in my thoughts. I didn't feel appreciated.

On our 10th anniversary, I looked back with dismay. I felt victimized by my husband's will and strong personality, helpless to know how to make things good again. With no real friends and no time for them, I had no one to turn to, and what would I say if I did? That I was miserable? Who'd want to hear that? And where was my husband from seven in the morning until seven at night? Working?

My suspicions were too painful to speak; they began squeezing my love for him into a smaller and smaller space. I couldn't talk to him about my anxieties and began to think about past boyfriends. It merely deepened my heartache and loneliness as I chastised myself: this marriage had

been an impetuous decision. Both of us came from dysfunctional families, and we'd made a mistake. Only one thought conflicted with the option of divorce: our beautiful child. Even if her father had little time for her, she needed him, but how could I go on in this unhappy state?

When I finally said it, Busso surprised me by declaring his love for me. He said he'd try everything to make our relationship work. "We'll start dating again," he promised and bought tickets to the symphony and the theater. But he was still the overworked, angry businessman, and I, the frustrated helpmate. Now I had to scramble weekly to get a baby-sitter. It was too much, too busy, too little, too late.

Sandi Larson, my longtime friend, who had been living in California, called one day out of the blue. I hadn't seen her since my wedding day. I was delighted that she'd moved back to Seattle. Over lunch, we talked about old times, and I kept asking questions so she wouldn't ask too many of me.

Just before I left, she queried, "How are you doing with the Lord?"

"To tell the truth, I haven't thought about all that in years," I admitted. "I don't go to church anymore."

"And your family?" she probed. "How's Busso?"

It had been a pleasant afternoon. I didn't want to ruin it now. "Not so good." I fought back the tears. "I'm thinking of . . . leaving." It was the first time I'd said it to anyone.

She didn't gasp. She didn't wave a finger in my face to remind me that she had been with me when I'd made a vow. Sandi hugged me, handed me a tri-fold and said, "Before you do anything, I'd like you to attend this seminar, both of you."

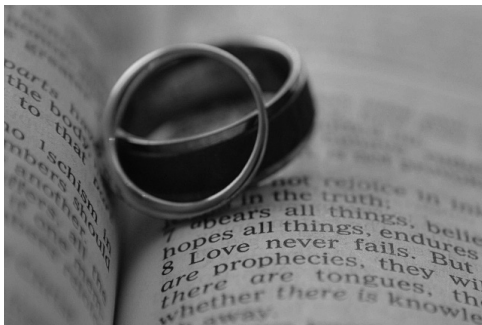
"If it's Christian, Busso won't go," I responded.

“I’ll pray for him.”

I hardly heard her last sentence.

My husband and I were barely speaking about anything but necessities, and when we did, too often it escalated into criticism and accusations. But because the pamphlet included the phrase “How to Gain Financial Freedom,” Busso committed to going to the seminar. That meant four nights plus all day Friday and Saturday. It lit a tiny spark of hope in me, something I hadn’t felt for months, perhaps years.

On the first day, Busso informed me he was going to skip that night because we had tickets to the symphony. My little candle of hope died and instead my fuse was lit.



*Love Never Fails*, by Lynn M. Burgher

“You promised!”

“I forgot we had these tickets. The seminar goes on for a whole week!”

“I should have known you’d renege.”

“And I should know you’d say something negative. The concert tickets were expensive!”

The arena was packed with thousands of people. A hall next door held thousands more where the speaker was viewed via live, closed-circuit television. Excitement reverberated as everyone registered, received a large notebook, and found a seat. Numb with anger that Busso wasn’t there, I chose to sit near the back. If he didn’t come, what was the point? I especially didn’t like the idea of leaving my child with a sitter every night that week. I should have stayed home with my daughter, I thought.

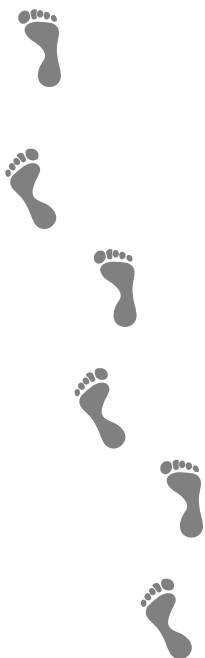
The Reverend Bill Gothard came on stage and welcomed his audience. In a pleasant, forthright

manner he spoke of God’s desire for everyone to have a close relationship with Him. His intriguing presentation offered illustrations from the Holy Scriptures unlike anything I’d heard before. It was history, sociology, and psychology painting a realistic picture of the human condition. Bill’s stories demonstrated that, left to ourselves, human beings make a mess of relationships. The pastor was speaking directly to me. My chest tightened in pain, yet I felt lightened, bathed by truth, sound principles, and hope. It was like taking a shower, washing the debris of confusion from my heart and soul.

On Tuesday night, Busso drove downtown with me. We didn’t say much. Again, in practical ways, Rev. Gothard presented aspects of God’s plan for the world that made me reflect on things in my own life. With no idea what my husband was thinking, I decided, even if he didn’t go again, I wanted to hear more. By the end of the week, I realized that the seeds of faith that had been planted almost twenty years earlier in my teenage heart had not been watered in nearly a decade. I’d been dying of thirst.

Since the source of the teaching was the Bible, I decided I’d have to read it all the way through to really know if it was valid. At first, it was daunting and mysterious, hard to understand, but as the weeks passed, something happened. I felt a connection with God as never before. With it came the uncomfortable feeling that I had to alter my course. The years of frustration and anxiety had taken their toll. I loved what Busso and I had had in the beginning, but because my feelings for him had changed drastically, I didn’t want to give up the option of divorce. It was sad to realize that the things that I’d fallen in love with—his charm, charisma, and strong will—were now the things that distanced me. “The perfect couple” had been an illusion, and now I had a new problem: he didn’t like my reading the Bible or listening to religious programs on the radio.

While I kept reading the New Testament privately, a curious pressure to stay married grew. It made



me angry with God. It wasn't fair! Did this mean, no matter what Busso's attitude or behavior was, I should be a good wife? Was God kidding? After months of inner turmoil, without telling my husband, I gave in and silently promised that I would stick with it. "I can't do it on my own!" I cried. "If you have faith like a mustard seed, mountains can be moved," His word promised me.

As I confessed my sins, the revelation that my problems were not all my husband's fault was both astonishing and empowering. I had no way to control what he said or did, but I could work on my own words, actions, and reactions. I didn't know how to begin, but I knew God would help me. He challenged me to examine myself, identify my fear, resentment, anger, and lay them at the foot of the cross. It was freeing to humble myself in the sight of the Lord, and feel Him lift me (James 4:10). I was my own problem; Busso was God's.

And just about the time I thought that life would always be a struggle, that I'd always be doing the heavy lifting in marriage, Bill Gothard came back to town, and Busso said he wanted to go again. This was the man from whom I was hiding my Bible? God was up to something amazing and sure enough, that second seminar marked a huge turning point.

In the months that followed, Busso and I began to attend church, read the Scriptures together, and communicate like we'd never conversed before. The same gospel that confronted the whole Roman Empire, that reconciled Jew and Gentile, and that grounded the early church, applied to me personally, to my darling husband, and to all generations. *"Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"* (Acts 3:19 NASB).

To be sure, the knitting together of the broken parts of our relationship was neither quick nor easy. There was pain. There were tears. It took

a couple of years for understanding, trust, respect, and commitment to grow, but to our amazement and delight, romance and laughter returned, far richer than before. Our "times of refreshing" have been manifold.

With renewed love came the blessing of two adorable sons. Raising three great children and running a business together has presented countless challenges, and over the ensuing years, we've needed encouragement from wise friends and professional counselors. But God ". . . according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope . . ." (I Peter 1:3), and that hope has materialized in the fruits of the Spirit: patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control—well, maybe not always!

As we plan to celebrate our 50th wedding anniversary, I praise God for His faithfulness. I'm grateful for Sandi Larson and Bill Gothard, and for many others who've brought wisdom and goodness to my life. God uses His people, His Word, and His mysterious Holy Spirit to bless us and *"to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think"* (Ephesians 3:20). Although Busso and I are not the perfect couple, by looking to Jesus Christ for direction, we are very happily committed to be together for a lifetime.

**J. E. Lemmé's** first book, *Conviction*, was published by W. W. Norton in 1970. It is the non-fiction account of her imprisonment in Communist Hungary when trying to help people escape from behind the Iron Curtain. Owner of a landscape company, she has published with *American Nurseryman* and the Associated Landscape Designers and Contractors. The mother of three, Janette enjoys writing about child raising, marriage, and family issues. She has recently finished her first novel.



*Celebrating 50 Years Together,*  
by Robert Gotshal

# A Butterfly for Keyes

Margaret Keyes Tate—Nashville, TN

Jim and I had what many considered a storybook marriage. It began December 6, 1941, the day before the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. Jim had already been on active duty, and for two years we moved steadily westward with the Sixth Armored Division in the US Army. A re-assignment moved him into an amphibious tank battalion, which trained in the turbulent Pacific coast waters. He departed to fight in the Pacific War, leaving me to return to Louisville, Kentucky, with a broken heart and a month-old baby girl. Gay was almost two when God answered our prayers for her daddy's safekeeping. He returned suntanned and lean but unharmed.

Jim began his business career in Louisville, and our family was blessed with two more little girls and a son. We were both involved in many responsibilities within our church and community. Educating our children was a top priority and eventually all four of them were graduated from Vanderbilt University, began careers, and married their Vandy sweethearts. Five grandchildren expanded our family and enlarged our hearts. Two divorces and subsequent re-marriage changed, and yet broadened, life for all of us.

Tragedy struck when our oldest grandson, a senior in medical school, committed suicide. He had suffered with depression through college and was still under treatment. Our children rushed to the side of his mother, and our family bonds grew stronger as we weathered this devastating loss. We never questioned God. We just asked Him for comfort and strength to move us through.

After 66 years of marriage and only minor health concerns, Jim had emergency surgery for an abdominal stricture. His heart presented an increasing problem, and he was never well again. We went through 15 months of seven hospitalizations, three visits in our adjacent

healthcare facility, and constant loving care from our children and friends. Jim put his affairs in perfect order and was able to tell each of our children how much he loved them and how proud he was of them.

The week before he died during his last hospital visit, he said sweetly to me, "You're a great lady." I was holding his hand and reading a psalm to him when he slipped away to be with Jesus on August 16, 2009.

In eulogizing his dad, our son said, "He set high standards for us. We learned the value of a job well done, and that we would suffer the consequences of a poor effort because he wasn't going to fix it for us. We learned that with blessings come obligations, and that it is a gift to have interesting work to do with responsibility to others."

Going ahead without the love of my life was a lonely prospect. For many years, I have sent sympathy notes with a butterfly picture on the front, along with an explanation of the butterfly as a beautiful symbol of the resurrection. Several days after Jim's home-going, I was sitting in his place by the picture window when a small, yellow butterfly lit on the glass, something I've never before seen. The butterfly stayed a while, and then fluttered to a neighboring tree. The next day what may have been the same yellow butterfly flew ahead of my car as I drove out of the garage. It's mystical, I know, but I really think God let Jim send me a butterfly to tell me how wonderful life is in Heaven with other loved ones and Jesus.

In those early days and months of bereavement, I leaned heavily upon Isaiah 40:28-31. I didn't expect to "*run and not be weary*." I just wanted to "*walk and not faint*." I changed furniture around to accommodate my oneness after spending most of my life as a close twosome. I attended







*Prepared Especially for You, by Marsha McLaren*

three sessions of grief counseling at church and visited with two different counselors over several months.

Most helpful in my journey was implementing plans to travel separately with each of our three daughters. They each put their careers on hold to travel with a grieving mother. Lucy and I went on a Caribbean cruise. Christy escorted me on a fabulous train/coach trip to the Canadian Rockies, and Gay met me in Branson, Missouri, for entertaining shows and a visit to her nearby home in the Ozarks. Lucy and her husband, Larry, also surprised me with a luxurious week at a nephew's elegant home in Hilton Head.

I have been reading everything I could about Heaven, including stories of life-after-death experiences. I continue to speculate about what Jim is doing in Heaven. I think of him almost all the time and wonder if he misses

me as I miss him. Surely, there are no sad feelings in Heaven. Jim knows how well he provided for me, and he must know that I'm really doing okay. Though Heaven's mystery remains elusive, I remain confident that God is loving me through my sorrow and helping me make it day by day.

Manifold blessings have come from a little book titled *Healing After Loss—Daily Meditations for Working through Grief* by Martha Whitmore Hickman. I read each day's meditation as part of my morning devotions. Some readings seem tailor-made for me on that day. This one I copied to keep on my refrigerator door:

“When everything is dark, when we are surrounded by despairing voices, when we do not see any exits, then we can find salvation in a remembered love, a love which is not simply a recollection of a bygone past but a living force which sustains us in the present. Through Memory, love transcends the limits of time and offers hope at any moment of our lives.” —Henri Nouwen

When sadness starts to overcome me, I begin counting my blessings, reminding myself that God has provided all my needs. I have a fine apartment in a lovely senior facility which Jim and I shared for 19 years in Nashville. My health problems are manageable, and I'm still driving our Prius to church and for neighborhood errands. Our son and his wife live a few blocks away and are loving caregivers. Our two granddaughters have moved to a neighboring suburb with their husbands (and one little great-grand—my other great-grands live in Brownsville, TN). My Sunday School class provides weekly blessings studying God's Word with couples who knew and loved Jim and remember him to me. Life is unfolding in positive ways. I can't help looking forward to the time when God calls me home. Not only will I meet my Savior face to face, but I'll be united with my beloved.

**Margaret Keyes Tate** at 92 has a lot of remembering. A dedicated Christian, she taught Sunday School classes for many years. She co-founded *Youth Speaks*, a national award-winning youth leadership program, and headed its inter-faith, inter-racial board for five years. The Tate guestbook includes names of their international "family" from more than 40 countries after hosting internationals became a family hobby. In addition, Keyes led workshops in three states to fashion Chrismons (Christ-monograms) to decorate Christmas trees, and she has knitted personalized Christmas stockings since the 1940s. Writing letters has also been a lifelong passion, including Letters to the Editor wherever she resided. She has also maintained a five-line diary since she was 12 and has been writing her memoir for the past decade, which now numbers about 1,000 pages. Her four children are all professionals, active in their churches, and devoted to each other. They have produced seven grandchildren (one now in Heaven) and five great-grands.



*Canyon Plunge*, by Nancy D'Oporto





# A Love Letter to God

*Sandy Holly—Elwood, UT*

Dear Lord,  
You always know where to find me, how to move me  
You allow me to easily pull your ear to my lips  
You delicately hear my softest silent prayer

You are God alone, all in one  
The beautiful Father, the magnificent Son, the amazing Holy Spirit  
You are my All in All

My heart thuds when You are near me  
When dining alone I set a place for You  
You always come

Lord, in this life we are physically separated  
Thank you for lifting me into Your arms,  
Draping me across Your shoulder and holding the back of my head with Your hand  
You strongly walk on and You never miss a beat,  
Scooping up Your children who need You

I am Your child  
You love me like only You can, Father

Lord, when I see You face to face I will dance with You forever  
Until then, Lord, please use me as You see fit  
Let me be Your hands and feet  
Let me not rest until Your name is sung from all hilltops which blend into Heaven

Your Blessed Servant,  
Sandy

**Sandy Holly** lives in Elwood, UT, with her amazing husband James, five wonderful dogs, and one beautiful calico cat. Sandy is a servant of God and a fighter of injustice. She serves as Director of a Christian ministry that counsels young women and teens at the Brigham City Pregnancy Care Center, vice chair of the fundraising committee at the Cache Humane Society, and serves up the occasional dish at Acts Six Soup Kitchen. She spreads the word of the gospel whenever she can, especially teaching Sunday School kids, ages kindergarten through second grade.

# Life Raft

Sue Gardner—Washington, VT

*“The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Galatians 5:6).*

I was happy—or so I thought—young, strong, newly launched into motherhood. Besides, I had found the truth! You see, all of my life from the earliest glimmer of memory, I had wanted to know what was real. What mysterious vibrant land lay beyond this stage-set of a life?

I'd lie awake at night and wonder what would happen if I weren't there in my room, with Ann, my sister, above me in her bunk. If I weren't here, where would I be? None of my clothes on my side of the closet. None of my toys. Only five Hulley children, not six. Though I had a vivid imagination—shadowy, scary figures haunted the dark space behind doors and in the far corners of closets—I always knew of a benevolent, protective force hovering nearby, keeping me from harm. I had no name for it.

As I grew older, I drifted away from my parents' church. Though I was “confirmed” at twelve, somehow who Jesus was and the possibility of having a personal relationship with Him went over my head, and church-going gradually became meaningless. I continued to seek for ultimate answers, devouring many books about religion and spiritual things: Buddhism, the Essenes, Baba Ram Dass. I can't remember most of them. I practiced Transcendental Meditation and yoga.

You name it, I tried it, until on a lark, I took a trip to Vermont with some friends. (You might have called me a hippie.) We ended up renting rooms in a youth hostel in Rochester and getting night shift jobs in the local Weyerhaeuser wood paneling plant. A Baha'i community existed there. My friends and I soon met members of the group and began attending meetings and becoming close to them. After reading a couple of Baha'i books, I was

hooked. What I was reading had to be true—all of that sensible advice for living a coherent life! Because I had never read the Bible through, I had no standard with which to compare the Baha'i teachings. I joined the community.

As I became more and more involved in the local Baha'i group, my three roommates and I forged very close friendships—the closest companions I had ever had: we lived together, learned together, and worked together for about a year. Over time, Judy got married and moved out. Julie moved to Rutland to pursue her career as an artist, and I met Lee, the love of my life, and also got married.

After a couple of months on the hill in a cabin that Lee had built out of scrap materials on the job, we moved to Montpelier. I worked; he went to school to finish a degree in architecture. We continued to be active in the Baha'i faith, though in Montpelier. Lee graduated from his program, and in order for him to pursue an architect's license, we moved to South Carolina. His job was in Charlotte, N.C., where we bought a nice old house for \$15,000 from a Baha'i couple who were going to “pioneer” to Transkei, a newly created country in Africa. We settled in and became active in the Baha'i group there.

My husband met a man who, along with his wife, was an avid Christian. This fellow, Dan, was questioning a young Baha'i friend of ours, who kept telling us about how he was harassing her about her beliefs. Lee arranged to meet him to “set him straight” and in the process, loaned him a book of Baha'i Scripture. A bit later, Dan proposed a meeting including us and some other Baha'i leaders, where he proceeded to tear apart the Baha'i interpretation of Bible prophecy.

This brought me to a crisis. What was I going to do with this information? The pressure was on.



Dan began coming over to our house on a regular basis, and it felt to me like he was challenging the very ground I stood on. His persistence brought me to the point where I dreaded to see him coming up the walk. He and Lee had become friends. I was pretty much spitting nails.

*“Every inspired (word of God) scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind” (II Timothy 3:16-17 NEB).*

Somewhere along the way, the light began to dawn in my heart. I got past my annoyance. At this point Dan was discipling me. We went to a bookstore, where he helped me select a New International Version of the Bible. I read it from Genesis to Revelation out loud to Lee before he left for work every day. It took about a year to get through it. I guess I was ready, because miraculously, it made total sense to me! God’s Word was like a jigsaw puzzle whose pieces fit together perfectly with none missing. During this time I went to the Rock Hill library and studied what was available on the Dead Sea Scrolls and other manuscripts to verify in my mind the historical accuracy of Scripture.

Now at a distance in time, I can no longer remember my exact thoughts. What I do recall is the difficulty I had pulling away from my former religion—now ashes—and my very close friends, who couldn’t understand what had happened. I wrote letters to them in an attempt to express the anguish I was feeling for their souls and mine. I don’t recall receiving replies. What was there to say?

Soon we were in the process of moving back to Vermont. Our three-year experiment in the Carolinas was accomplished. Lee’s job with the architect hadn’t worked out. I started and

stopped nursing school six months later, having unexpectedly conceived a second child. Lee had remodeled our kitchen and our house sold quickly. During those years, the value of real estate had surged, thus rendering our purchase into a grand investment!

We found our gorgeous hill farm—the only building left an old milk house—in Washington, Vermont, and moved into an old trailer that we had purchased cheaply. The plan was for Lee to build a house. This was a painful, searching time of utter isolation for me way up in the remote, beautiful hills.

As I look back on it, this desert time was essential for me in my spiritual journey. I had by this time realized completely the fallacy of the Baha’i faith; I no longer had it or my good friends, yet I still had not asked Jesus into my heart. The Bible trumped all else. What was I waiting for? I read Dostoyevsky and thought a lot and kept journals. I worked full-time and played with my toddlers. Lee worked opposing shifts so that one of us was always home with them.

*This was a painful, searching time of utter isolation for me way up in the remote, beautiful hills.*

Lee began attending the Baptist church in the village with the children. The minister asked him if he could come up and talk to me. Not long after, he came and simply led me to the next step in my journey. For me this meant acknowledging that Jesus was necessary, first of all, as I came to see that no one is capable of being righteous. Sounds so obvious, but a Savior is needed.

Further, Jesus is the Son of God, the ultimate Master of all creation, which included me! To know the importance of this, you have to know that the Baha’i faith declares that Jesus is just

one in a series of messengers from God to man. I honestly don't remember the conversation, but what I do remember is experiencing the balm of a surrendered will. The weariness of treading the endless waves of doubt was over as I hoisted myself onto the Life Raft: Jesus.

After a while, when I went back and tried to read the Baha'i writings, I could make neither heads nor tails of them. They had amazingly become gibberish! I learned that when a heart seeks the truth, the searching heart will find it, though a long circuitous inefficient route may ensue. The luminous path is there waiting for one's feet to choose to traverse it.

Why did I start out my story with Galatians 5:6, "*The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love*"? I am aware that I have a tiresome analytical streak, but I also know that life in essence boils down to faith expressing itself through God's huge-hearted love.

*"The Lord redeems His servants; no one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him"*  
(Psalm 34:22).

**Sue Gardner** has kept a journal intermittently to process her thoughts and beliefs and has written letters to record and share her life quest with whomever seems interested. She is active in a Bible-believing community and gives thanks for an opportunity to share this story. She is a hospital nurse, wife, and grandmother of five. She likes to garden, sew, read, and think as she hikes God's marvelous creation.

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life"  
(Psalm 139:23-24 NLT).





*First Bloom*, by Lynn M. Burgher

“Beginnings are very hard to trace. A thought that seems to stray into our minds like a lost puppy may actually be a nudge from God’s Spirit. A cry that rises from deep within and finds articulation in our minds can be the beginning of a path that will take a lifetime to follow.”  
–Malcolm Smith, *How I Learned to Meditate*

# When I Surrender to God, I Win

Diane Kulkarni—Perry City, UT

*“Yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will exult in the victorious God of my salvation! The Lord God is my Strength, my personal bravery, and my invincible army; He makes my feet like hinds’ feet and will make me to walk—not to stand still in terror, but to walk—and make spiritual progress upon my high places of trouble, suffering, or responsibility!” (Habbakuk 3:18-19 Amp).*

It all started for me 46 years ago when, as a teenager, I gave my life to Jesus Christ. Over the years, the same principle of surrender has played out many times, always for my good. Following my second-in-11-years breast cancer diagnosis and surgery in May 2007, I wrote a letter to friends and family who had been praying for me. An excerpt follows that explains why I believe what I do.

I want to share something God did to prepare me for being diagnosed again with breast cancer. I don’t believe that this happened just for my benefit. A few days before I had even thought to submit to any testing, I met with a friend for tea. We were talking about our spiritual journeys. As she spoke about herself, I suddenly identified completely. She told me about her long struggle with discouragement and what God had shown her to do. Strangely, I had acknowledged my own discouragement just the day before, and so it was easy to agree with her that lying down in a fetal position on the battlefield of life was not the posture God intended. He has a better plan, and that is standing up in His love and strength.

Warren Wiersbe said in his book, *What to Wear to the War*, “Discouragement comes when we forget the blessed hope we have in Christ, when we forget the Great Captain of our salvation is coming to save us and to take

us to glory. It comes when we start walking by sight and not by faith, when we give in to our feelings and quit.”

Even while my friend was still speaking, I made the decision to surrender myself anew to my Creator and to stand up, not in my own power but in God’s. I had to stop living like a victim and instead obey in the direction that He was showing me. The next morning when I looked at myself in the mirror, I saw something new in my eyes—my inner woman was up!

Because I believed that God would continue to answer a very deep need, one that I sensed was coming but had yet to understand and deal with, I began strangely anticipating His direction, actually finding peace in the testing, diagnosis, and subsequent surgery. He was leading me and watching out for my good.

In the hospital after the mastectomy, when I was feeling vulnerable in the darkness of the room, my emotions were flat and I didn’t feel at all spiritual, but I knew deep down that God was carrying me and encouraging me to keep on walking toward Him. In essence, when I chose to submit myself to Him for whatever the future held, I basically entwined myself around Him, exchanging my weakness for His strength.

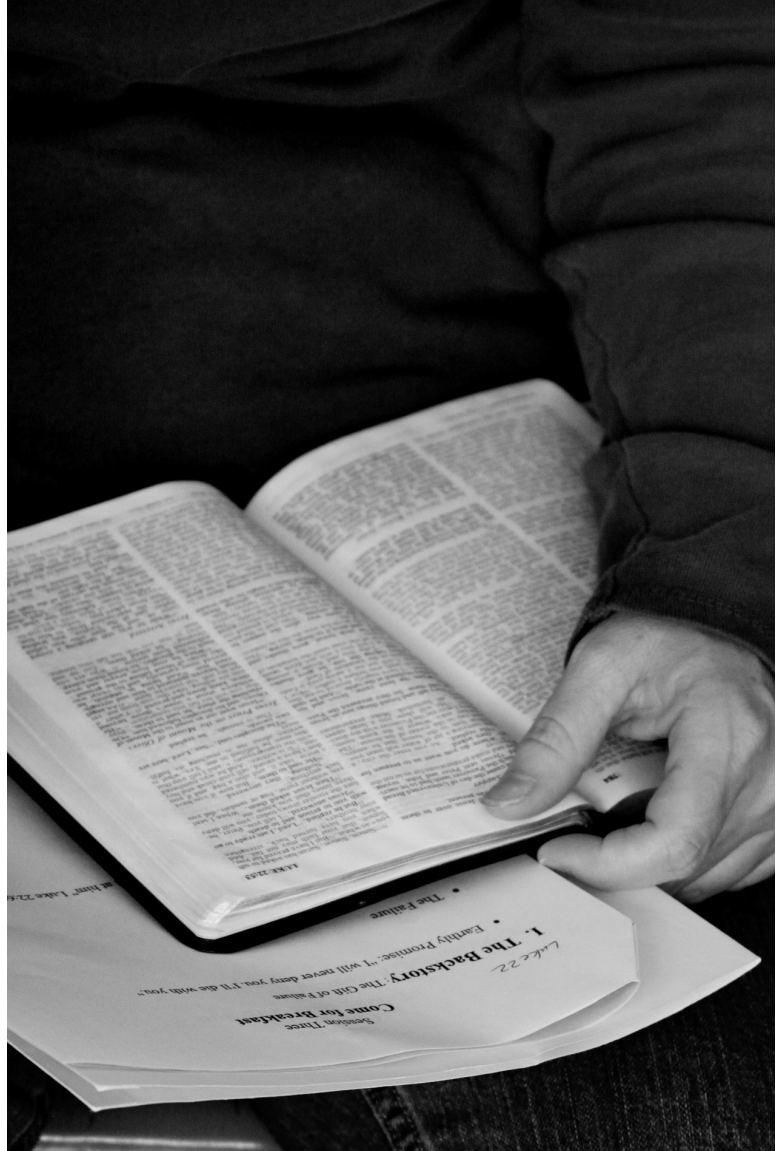




This is a happy enigma—when I surrender to God, I win!

*“The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; yes, I have a good heritage. I will bless the Lord, Who has given me counsel; yes, my heart instructs me in the night seasons. I have set the Lord continually before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved” (Psalm 16:6-8 Amp).*

**Diane Kulkarni** is a native of Denver, CO, and has lived in Utah since 1972. She has been married to Suresh, a retired rocket scientist from Hyderabad, India, for 39 years. They have two daughters and two grandchildren.



*Drawing Strength*, by Sharmila Felix

“Sing a new song to the LORD, for He has done wonderful deeds. His right hand has won a mighty victory; His holy arm has shown His saving power!” (Psalm 98:1 NLT).

# My Touch by God

Sharon Dale Nielsen—Woodinville, WA

My husband and I had decided that for our anniversary/family vacation we would go to our favorite place, Hawaii. We had been to Maui the previous year and became captivated by its pure beauty and serenity. After what we heard about Kona, the Big Island, we decided we would go there.

The previous year in Maui, my family tried to teach me the art of snorkeling (I am sure there is an art to it), but with no success. I did not want to miss seeing the beauty of the underwater sea life, so I chose to use my water goggles, hold my breath for as long as possible, and enjoy glimpses into that world. As my family advanced with their skills, I continued with my limited exposure. My family was never at a loss for words, detailing stories of absolute wonderment and awe.

On Kona, I was excited and a little hopeful that I could grasp snorkeling. My husband, Darin, said, “You just need to learn to breathe in and out of your mouth. If you try through your nose, you’ll feel like you cannot breathe.”

One morning, we chose to go to a local beach, which, of course, would include snorkeling. It was a clear blue day, with few clouds, and the purest white sand I had ever seen. I was awestruck by the beauty that engulfed me. My husband and kids were anxious to get into the water, but I felt like I needed time to sit and reflect.

I sat down, looked around, closed my eyes, and tried to let go of all the craziness of life that so often prevented me from feeling the warmth and closeness of God. As I sat still, I felt connected and close to Him. My mind started to focus on my two young nephews, Dayton and Dylan, who were around five and seven years old at the time. Their lives were difficult because they were exposed to a lot of drinking at family gatherings, including

at children’s birthday parties. Christmas time for the boys was a time when the parents tried to make the occasion festive with a well-decorated tree and many presents. Unfortunately, the day’s focus would shift to celebrating and finding joy in excessive drinking and was far from Jesus and the true meaning of Christmas.

Sitting on the beach, I made a promise to God that any time I had my nephews with me or attended any family events, I would never consume alcohol. I planned from then on to make a difference in their lives. As someone walking with the Lord, I was going to make it my priority to provide them with material to expose them to understanding God’s love.

Ideas started to flood my mind about how God could or might want to use me. I knew God was calling me to be a living example to them of the love of Jesus.

After a few minutes, I decided to go into the sea. The water was calm and its beauty magnified an overwhelming sense of awe of God’s magnificent creation. I put on my goggles and decided to try snorkeling. As I swam into the ocean, I started to panic, but almost instantly a sense of calm and peace overtook my body. My breathing adjusted automatically; I knew I was breathing correctly and snorkeling underwater! I was thrilled with all the beautiful fish.

The next thing I remember was the sound of my husband’s voice calling me, “Over here . . . look over here!” As I turned towards his voice, there beside me was a sea turtle close to my height, not quite five feet. I swam alongside it for what seemed like several minutes. When its huge eye appeared to glance over at me, I was full of joy. As the turtle and I floated side by side, I noticed a man and woman wading into the water, excitedly pointing



at something. The turtle drifted away, and I swam to shore and got out of the water. The woman asked me, “Was that a sea turtle out there?” “Yes, it was!” I exclaimed. As I made my way up the beach towards our day site, my husband was walking down from the concession area. I ran to him and exclaimed, “Darin, thank you, thank you for directing me to the turtle!”

“What are you talking about? I have been on the beach and at the concession stand the whole time with the kids. I didn’t go in the water.” That was when I realized that God had sent the turtle. I knew then that my experience with the turtle was God reassuring me that He would be alongside me as I ministered to my nephews about His love for them no matter what their circumstances.

During the next few years, I took my nephews to Sunday school during visits with my mother and stepfather, who lived in the same town as the boys. I sent them Christian children’s videos, such as the Veggie Tales movies, and inspirational, loving cards and letters regularly. I recently sent them their first nighttime prayer book. The most special gift I gave them was their first Bible.

I have celebrated birthdays with the boys and I have visited them—all without alcohol. Last year, I took both of them out for pizza to celebrate Dylan’s birthday. I bought the video game he asked for, along with an age-appropriate Bible. Leaving the restaurant, he picked up his Bible, held it firmly to his chest, and exclaimed, “This is the best gift ever! I can’t wait to go home and read it to my brother, too.” At that moment, I felt the same inner peace and joy I had experienced on that warm day on Kona.

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).*

I knew that God revealed Himself to me so that I could share Him with these precious boys. God’s



Sunset in Paradise, by Sue Brooks

seed has been planted. Along with His grace in their lives and my faithful prayers, I am confident that a relationship with Jesus will take root.

**Sharon Dale Nielsen** currently lives in Woodinville, Washington, with her husband of 20 years, Darin, and their two children, Ryan and Holly. She enjoys writing inspirational letters and cards that bring encouragement to all those who are experiencing grief. After losing her mother-in-law to dementia, followed by the death of her mother four months later, and then her stepfather shortly thereafter, she made the commitment to share her love, care, and faith that there is a greater purpose in everything with others. She quickly recognized that there was a need for a place where people could come together for support after the death of a loved one. With that in mind, she partnered with her friend Hilde Webber to start a social networking site called My End of Life ([myendoflife.com](http://myendoflife.com)).

# Devastation to Life Everlasting:

A personal testimony of God's love of a young policeman. . .

*Tom Blakely—Dumfriesshire, Scotland*

In 1972, I left my Belfast, Ireland, home at the age of 16, to go to the Metropolitan Police Cadet College, Hendon, London. From there I began to pick up many of the bad habits to which young godless men are prone. After the cadet college, I returned home and went to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) police training centre. When I graduated from there, I was given my first station. I'd never heard of it. It was a dangerous border station in County Fermanagh.

I had trouble finding it, and when I did, I couldn't believe it. The police station was a fortified police/army outpost, a far cry from the cozy establishments where I did my training. I had been there only a short time when, as a uniformed constable, I was required to deal with my first "sudden death." An army bomb disposal officer had cut the wrong wire on a booby-trapped IED, which had detonated and blown the poor man to smithereens. During my assignment there, the police station was blown up twice, mortar attacked, fired upon, along with many more terrorist attacks both when I was on patrol and off-duty.

We had a good working relationship with the regular British army, our Ulster Defense Regiment (UDR) local part-time soldiers, and the Garda, Ireland's National Police Service. The Garda station was a short distance from ours, but on the opposite side of the border in the Republic of Ireland. We all worked together to provide backup and relay essential communications, to know, for instance, who was carrying out vehicle checkpoints, especially at night. It could have been any of the above, or the Irish Republican Army (IRA). Working and sleeping there 24/7 under such stress took its toll. The only comfort I could find was in off-duty drinking, and I became more and more dependent on it. In those days, there

was no such thing as counseling after traumatic incidents.

Because my family lived a hundred miles away in Belfast and my dad was stationed there, I felt a bit out of it in Fermanagh. I had heard of the Special Patrol Group, a uniformed backup group that dealt mostly with terrorist incidents, and it really appealed to me at that time. After about two years on the border, my application for transfer to a Belfast section of the Special Patrol Group was approved.

I was leaving Fermanagh with mixed emotions. I had begun to like the place and enjoyed the comradeship of my fellow colleagues in the security forces. Living night and day with these men and being under constant threat of death has a binding effect, so I felt slightly guilty about leaving them. I countered that emotion with the thought of all the action up in Belfast, and even imagined being called to support my police sergeant father in his dangerous station. But in my daydreams there was something I hadn't allowed for.

Prior to leaving County Fermanagh, a colleague and I were having a few drinks together in a private house. If I remember correctly, we were sitting down, the television was on and the evening news had just begun. Then the door bell rang. Normally, I would have unholstered my gun and provided cover for my colleague as he checked the door. But I was focused on the news commentator who was talking about police officers being gunned down in a part of Belfast I recognized. By this time, one of two uniformed police officers who had entered the room switched off the TV. He was unknown to me, as we were in a neighbouring police division, but I knew by his uniform that he was a senior officer.



Then he called me by my first name, and my heart sank. He proceeded to tell me that my father had been shot dead by terrorists earlier that afternoon. Apparently, my father and another uniformed officer were shot in the back whilst carrying out a routine beat patrol. My dad had been shot five times in the head and back at point blank range. When I heard this, I felt physically sick. As the police transported me home that night, I was in a trance, hoping it might all be a bad dream.

On arriving home, the house was full of family, friends, neighbours, and relatives, but it was my mum I saw first that night. When I looked into her face it brought home the full reality of the situation. Then I saw my brother Elmer, only 16 years old, finally my sister Jane, only 11. We wept but found no comfort. Our family was devastated.

Unknown to me that night, amongst the many phone calls of sympathy, my mum received a different type of phone call. An unknown person called and said, "We got your husband tonight; your son will be next." They were obviously referring to me, being also on the police force. Mum kept that message to herself for some time.

After a period of compassionate leave, I moved to the Special Patrol Group. Those were turbulent days in Belfast. When we came on shift, we did not know where we might end up. We were called to riots here, there, and everywhere. In many areas of Belfast, our presence alone was enough to spark a riot. Bomb calls in and around the city centre were commonplace, and we were called to deal with constant evacuations of premises. We had many other dangerous and difficult duties, but God preserved me through them all. It was during this time that I met Christine, and a couple of years later, we were married. I must say that although we were not God's children at the time, looking back now, I know He brought us together.

Meanwhile my young brother, Elmer, had grown up fast and had picked up the same bad habits as I had. He was 19 years old and a member of the police reserve. I often wondered later if I had not been so preoccupied with myself, Christine, and our wedding arrangements, perhaps I would have been more in tune with his thinking at that time. Over the previous years we had discussed what we might do, or what should be done about our father's killers. Looking back, I feel that Elmer's thoughts about revenge and justice were much deeper than mine. The way it was then, he was just my younger brother whom I met briefly from time to time. He did a really good job as best man at our wedding.

Christine and I were only married a few weeks when I got an early morning phone call from a police station. It was the station that covered the area where mum and the family resided. I was asked to come and identify the body of my brother. He had been found sitting in the driver's seat of his car, shot dead, with his police issue firearm by his side. It was suicide. He had never got over the death of our dad.

Hate breeds hate and can eventually destroy. This was a double tragedy in our family, almost too difficult to take. Once again we wept but found no comfort. The bodies of two of the family now rested under the same gravestone.

Anyway, life must go on no matter how painful it is. About a year and a half later Christine and I had our first child, a daughter. I was so proud of her. Being a dad didn't stop me smoking, drinking, etc., but it did give me a new sense of responsibility. Just over a year later we had a baby boy. However, life was not easy for us.

As a police officer in those days, we lived under a very real personal security threat, on and off-duty. Apart from trying to deal with the impossible at work and survive, at home we lived in dread of a

late-night visit from terrorists at the door, or an early morning bomb under the family car. By this time I had been living under intense stress for about ten years, aggravated by the deaths of my father and brother. Because I had become very reclusive, as a family we had no social life at all. The only social life was the occasional off-duty drinking sessions with police colleagues.

As time progressed, I became bitter and angry with life and suspicious of strangers. I realized that I was unfit to continue in my job. At that time an unarmed ex-policeman would have been an even easier target for the IRA, so with my wife and two small children, we made plans to emigrate to South Africa.

I was working in a large office in RUC headquarters, Belfast. I remember one day looking out of the office window at the same old hills where my dad had taken my brother and me for long rambles when we were kids. No doubt feeling sorry for myself, I was thinking of how life had been so cruel to us. I began to question what life was all about. I cried out in my heart, "If there is a God out there, show Yourself!" At that time, as God would have it, there were Christians at hand, so-called born again Christians.

One of them spoke to me, telling me that I needed to get right with God, through His Son Jesus Christ. I replied by asking, "Is your God a fair God?" When the reply came in the affirmative, I challenged it: "If God is such a fair God, why did He let a good man like my father die while letting his murderers roam free to kill again? And why did God allow my brother to die?" I didn't get a satisfactory answer to my question and let the man know he could keep his God. I was prone to criticizing Christians in those days. But what I hadn't allowed for was the power of God, and that at that time some Christians were praying for me.

Anyway, I had other plans. I was looking for a new start, preferably as far away from Northern Ireland as possible. With this in mind, one day at home I decided to clear out the loft. I mention this because I came across a little Gideon's Bible I

had been given when I started high school. I lifted it, read the inscription, and then threw it out with the rest of the rubbish. Within days of doing this, however, I felt that I needed God. His power was at work in me and the prayers of many were being answered.

Another Christian in my office used to read his Bible every lunchtime while he ate his lunch in a spare office. He made no secret of it, so knowing where he went, I followed him one day. I asked, "What have you got that I haven't got?"

As I look back, I thank God for this man and his faithful witness. In the short time we had together, he showed me from the Bible how I needed to know the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal Saviour. At first I struggled with this, because I couldn't understand why there was any need for Jesus. But as the days went by, I began to see from the Bible that God could not tolerate sin, and that He sent Jesus to die as a sacrifice for sinners.

One night soon after, while I was alone at home in my living room, I had a mental picture of Jesus on a cross dying for my sin. I am not ashamed to say this: I was broken, and in tears. I kneeled before God and asked Him to forgive me for Jesus' sake. He did. I had never before known such love and inner peace in my life. Five weeks later God saved my wife Christine, sometime later my widowed mother, and then my sister.

The Lord didn't stop there either, for over the years His blessing continued. Through many difficult years since and against all the odds, God has continued to bless us. Christine and I have four children. God saved them all, and today they seek to serve Him in their daily lives in church and mission work.

If anyone reading this story thinks his life is so messed up it is impossible for God to deal with—read this testimony again! "*Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible'*" (Matthew 19:20).





*Upheaval*, by Steve Whitehorse at Shiprock, NM

As a retired police officer, **Tom Blakely** is studying theology with the Open Bible Institute, UK. He continues to write Christian poetry and song and is still happily married to his teenage bride, Christine, who stuck by him through trials and tribulation. Tom has a vision for revival, believing that it first must come through God's children when they become totally devoted to Jesus.

"I call to You from the ends of the earth when my heart is without strength. Lead me to a rock that is high above me, for You have been a refuge for me, a strong tower in the face of the enemy" (Psalm 61:2-4 HCSV).

# The Comforter

Michelle Iavarone—West Palm Beach, FL

Tonight the soul is longing  
for its distant home.  
Weary from its travels  
in a land strange and foreign.  
It grieves for losses it bears—  
cast down and burdened.  
Tired and fully torn  
by the hand of sin and shame.  
Tears have washed the face  
and swollen eyes.  
Though the heart is quiv'ring  
it remembers the Comforter near.  
Compassion whispers through  
whimpering,  
assurance settles sobbing—  
His presence offers a resting place  
in the sanctuary of peace.  
The soul rests becoming still,  
trusting cares to the One Greater.  
Quiet starts to calm  
and soothe the trembling heart.  
Oh, a gentle Comforter  
my soul does have.

“For the Lord comforts his people and will have  
compassion on his afflicted ones” (Isaiah 49:13).



*Sentinel*, by Lynn M. Burgher

**Michelle Iavarone** lives in West Palm Beach, FL. She is a Registered Nurse, working in a large inner city middle school. Her greatest joy is being the mother of three children, two of whom are married and the third in college. She takes great delight in her first grandson, Eli. She served in Women’s Ministries and Teen Mothers Mentoring Program and is involved in small groups. She is an advisory board member of Florida Classical Ballet Theatre and a member of Palm Beach Christian Writers Association.







“There is a communion with God that asks for nothing, yet asks for everything. . . . He who seeks the Father more than anything He can give, is likely to have what he asks, for he is not likely to ask amiss.” –George MacDonald

*Forest Serenade*, by Josh Felix

# The Blessing of Forgiveness

*Dr. Terry Dorsett—Barre, VT*

When I entered the crowded room, I saw her. My heart was strangely warmed to know she was here with me. Seeing her brought back a flood of memories from nearly twelve years before. Some of those memories were sweet, some painful, but all were laced with the fragrance of forgiveness. Her name is Mary,\* and she nearly killed my family in a car accident.

Mary had struggled with alcoholism most of her adult life, and on that fateful morning she had been drinking heavily. She drove her car head-on into mine. The accident was so severe that the police who responded were amazed that anyone had survived. My wife's arm was broken and required major surgery. My leg was so shattered that at first they thought it would have to be amputated, but after surgery and many months of physical therapy, I learned to walk again.

My youngest son was the most severely hurt. His back was broken and he suffered massive internal injuries. Because the small hospital in our area was unable to treat him, he was rushed to another hospital which had a pediatric intensive care unit. The doctor told us to say goodbye to him before they put him in the ambulance because the doctor did not think we would ever see him again.

For three days his life hung in the balance. But the Lord of Glory chose to use His power to spare my son's life, and though he spent months in a body cast, he made a full recovery. He is now a junior in high school and involved in both basketball and football; one would never know how seriously he had been injured as a preschooler.

Years later, the word "hate" sounds so harsh, but to be honest, that is exactly what I felt for Mary after the accident. I had moved to a small village in Vermont to serve as a missionary with the North American Mission Board. My specific ministry

was to be the pastor of a small congregation of less than 20 that was struggling to survive. I was supposed to tell people like Mary about Jesus so they could be freed from their sins and be transformed into holy living Christians.

That was such a glorious dream, until Mary nearly shattered it. I had nightmares for months about the accident. I would wake up in a cold sweat, and the hatred I felt for Mary would wash over me. One part of my mind knew that I needed to forgive Mary, but another part easily justified the fact that Mary did not deserve forgiveness.

One night, as I wrestled with those feelings, I tried once again to explain to God what Mary had done to my son. God listened patiently. He's good at that. Then He responded with a still, small voice and explained to me what I had done to His Son. God the Father showed me the depth of my own sin that had made it necessary for Jesus Christ, His Son, to die upon the cross. God reminded me that He had graciously spared my own son in the accident that Mary caused, but that Jesus, the Son of God, had to die because of my own sin. That night I asked God to help me learn to forgive; it was the first step in a long journey of healing in my own life.

It took time, but I did learn to forgive Mary. I invited her to church and she agreed to come. I sat behind her during her trial and subsequent sentencing. I went to visit her in jail as she served time for the accident. These were not easy steps for me, but they were important in the overall process of forgiveness. When Mary was released from jail, she began coming to church regularly.

One Sunday, Mary asked if I would come to her home and explain more about how she might trust Jesus. A deacon and I went, and as we sat in her kitchen, surrounded by bottles of alcohol, I





*Mantua Poppies, by Scott Johnson*

shared that Jesus loved her and had a plan for her life. It would not be an easy plan, for it would require significant change, but it would be a plan that would be for her good, and if she would choose to follow it, I promised her she would not regret it.

That day Mary gave her life to Christ, and the woman who nearly killed my family became my sister in the Lord. A few months later, after I had recovered physically, I was able to baptize Mary. In the years since, she has become a glowing Christian. She has served on the church council. She has been involved in a variety of ministry opportunities at the church. Though I have since moved on to a new ministry in a town not far away, Mary continues to serve the Lord in that little village church.

A few weekends ago, I attended the annual meeting of my denomination's regional organization. The meeting was filled with reports from the various national entities operated by our denomination as well as reports of the missionaries and staff members serving the churches in New England that are connected to our particular branch of the body of Christ. Each church sends representatives to hear the reports and vote on various issues to give direction to the denomination for the next year. As I walked into

the room full of those representatives, one of the first people I saw was Mary.

There she was, the woman who nearly killed my family twelve years before, now sitting in the same room, at the same table, helping me make decisions for how our denomination will reach other Marys with the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I can honestly say that Mary is a blessing to my life. Seeing her across the room at that meeting reminded me of the blessing of forgiveness that I have received from Christ. I can do nothing less than offer that same blessing to others as I seek to live as a Christ-follower and share the forgiveness of God with anyone who will listen.

*\*I have changed Mary's name to protect her privacy.*

**Dr. Terry Dorsett** serves as a church planting missionary with the North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. He is the author of *Developing Leadership Teams in the Bivocational Church*, published by CrossBooks, a division of Lifeway. Dorsett enjoys writing, blogging, and speaking to young adults. He has a burden for helping them discover a meaningful faith in Christ and developing their abilities as leaders in the church of the 21st century.

# A Day in the Life

Linda Kennedy—Port St. Lucie, FL

Hands clenched, arms folded across my chest, I watched out my living room window as my husband, Tony, was planting bushes in the front yard. “I’m going to sell the house,” he had said, “and move in with my son. There’s no love lost between us. The last 32 years have been a waste. You need to go live with your daughter or your mother in Kansas.”

I was shocked but certainly not heartbroken. He was right. There was no love lost between us. I was committed to the marriage because I took a vow before God that I would make it work. My distress was not of the heart but of finances. I had not worked for years and had only a small Social Security check for income. Our home had been purchased under his son’s name; there would be no profits divided with me.

My daughter, Beth, was not an option. Her youngest daughter, son-in-law and twin granddaughters were living with them. My mother had a mobile home, but she had moved in with my oldest boy and his wife. Her home had been emptied in preparation to sell. My head reeled with the magnitude of it all as I pulled myself away from the scene outdoors.

Tony would, no doubt, expect dinner as if nothing had happened. I reached for the phone to call my daughter . . . but no. She had her own issues; how could I add to her stress? Putting the phone back, I headed for the kitchen to make preparations for dinner. It was something to do in spite of the nausea that threatened. I lowered my head as I leaned against the counter and prayed. “Please God; I’m begging You for an answer.”

The familiar verses from Jeremiah 29:11, that I’ve read a hundred times in Christian novels, came to mind. “*For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you,*

*plans to give you hope and a future.*” I clutched that promise to my heart as I went about my task. “Help me recall all the times You have fulfilled that promise, Lord, and remember that you are God.”

My answer came the following day with a phone call from Beth. “Mom, I know something is going on. What’s up?” Beth and her two brothers had suffered greatly from this marriage and I was beyond concealing anything from her.

“Well.” I hesitated with how much I should share. “Tony has decided that our marriage is a waste. He says he’s selling the house and moving in with Freddie. But it will take him a long time to sell this place with the bottom dropped out of the market.” I struggled to sound positive, and as though I had things all thought out.

“Mom, how much more of this are you going to take? He won’t pay any of your medical expenses, your car is in his name, and he checks your mileage whenever you go somewhere. He won’t buy your clothes; he white-gloves your cleaning. This is not living, Mom. You deserve better.”

I closed my eyes, fighting back the tears. “What else am I going to do? You know my financial situation. It’s been 16 years since I had a job. Who is going to hire me at my age?”

“I’ve already talked to Mitch. We knew something was going on and he’s right there with me. Mom, we think you should go back to Kansas and live with Grandma. Mitch and Janice are at work all day. Grandma is leaving burners on and the faucets running. They are afraid for her to be alone. You living there would be the perfect solution. I know it’s hard to leave Florida and your friends, but with grandma’s retirement income you



can survive. Like Mitch said, there is a reason God hasn't allowed Grandma's place to sell."

"But . . . Beth." I protested. "Her place is empty. We would have nothing to set up housekeeping. And I don't have a car. We would have no transportation."

"We've got that figured out too. Alex has been after me to get a new car and we won't get anything out of my car on a trade. You can have mine. There's no loan payment. We've just had it all checked out. It has a new battery and we just put on new tires."

I felt my arguments sliding away. "What about furniture and everything else?"

"Between Mitch and Jason, they can come up with some stuff to get you started. Even if you don't have much, Mom, won't it be better than living under all this pressure? This is the third time he's dumped you."

"I suppose . . . let me think about it." I sank down in my comfy chair and fought back the grief of leaving my daughter and her family. I was in the delivery room when my twin great-granddaughters were born. I would miss all the fun of watching them grow. My home was not elaborate by most standards, but I had put my heart into decorating and it was my refuge. But . . . how can a refuge be so easily taken away?

I reached for my Bible to search for another scripture. Matthew gave it to me. *"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven"* (Matthew 16:19). I got the message. Things are temporal, and God would provide.

Three weeks later, Tony left for a ten-day vacation with his son Freddie, and I went into action. By now, I had resolved myself to the kids' ideas and

God's reassurance that He had a plan. I knew. From years of experience, Tony would not give me more than traveling money. The son with whom he planned to share accommodations had a hefty officer's retirement from the Coast Guard and my mother's place was bare.

With credit card in hand and a feeling of justification, I began to pack up everything I could fit into a box and sent it by UPS. Breakables, lamps, framed artwork, and even a favorite nightstand were set aside to be packed in my newly acquired car. My 19-year-old grandson, Mike, purchased a one-way airfare from Kansas to help me make the long drive back there.

The day before Tony was to return, we headed west with lamps, vacuum sweeper, and overnight bags piled high in the back seat. Using Expedia, I booked four-star hotels for two stop-overs and avoided hotel searching when we were weary from travel. I planned to make this a comfortable trip with soft beds and steak dinners.

Late afternoon on the second day of our journey, I got a call from Tony who was waiting for his connection in the Dallas airport.

"I just called to let you know that we are going out for dinner on our way home from the airport so you don't have to fix anything."

I smiled to myself. "Good thing, since I'm just outside of Memphis."

"What! Memphis?"

"Well, you told me to go live with my mom, so I'm on my way."

"Oh—okay. Well! Okay!" I would have given up my nightstand to see his face when he got home and saw everything I had managed to bring with me.

Late afternoon of the third day, we rolled into Mitch and Janice's yard. I was beginning to feel that peace like a river and a sense of excitement about what God was going to do with my life. A few days' rest and, yes, even celebrating with my two boys and their families; then it was time to get to work again. With a cash withdrawal on the credit card before I left, I shopped for dining room and living room furniture. I found a great couch at the Salvation Army for \$75, a dining room set from a going-out-of-business, two chairs and end tables from a discount store, put-together dressers from Walmart, and beds from the kids. I had the carpets cleaned, while I scrubbed from ceiling to floor and unpacked household goods that had arrived ahead of us. Within two weeks, we were set up and cozy.

My next step was to get plugged into a church, and found the perfect fit in the first one we tried. The best solution for homesickness, I knew, would be to get busy and take the focus off of myself. My new church offered plenty of opportunity to serve and I found lots of fellowship in several small group Bible studies. My God was, once again, proving that He can do all things and nothing is too great for Him. I was actually finding joy and contentment in my new surroundings.

One month after my arrival, my mom developed a health issue that took months to resolve. I had the time and the means to take her to multiple doctor visits and finally surgery in Kansas City. This was another piece of God's knowing, and filling a need. He did not plan the end of my marriage, but He took the situation in hand, and turned it into good. To add to my blessing, my granddaughter, Lisa, was expecting a new baby for great-grandma's new focus.

**Linda Kennedy's** profile is located on page 41.



# If You Ask Anything

Randi Hunsaker—Brigham City, UT

Our dog, Sunshine, had developed what is known as “Black Skin Disease,” common to Nordic breeds (Pomeranian being one of them) and causing hair loss. The skin turns black and the hair falls out. By last July, Sunni was mostly bald. We had tried to get vet help, tried the things he suggested, tried things I discovered online, but to no avail. She lost the hair gradually, over a period of about three years. I had begun sewing coats and scarves for her because she was feeling the cold, and we wondered how she’d survive the next winter.

We used dog estrogen for quite awhile, but nothing happened. So, we put her on a melatonin regimen, recommended by the vet and the info online. They said to give it regularly for about three months, but if there was no sign of hair growth, to stop using it and she would be one of those unfortunate dogs who would just be bald!

My husband, Blaine, always prays and this was no exception . . . he prayed daily and I looked on in unbelief! In August, we were brushing what was left and noticed that she had a dandruff problem and wondered, “What next?” We scraped off the flakes and underneath there was this reddish fuzz! You should see her now! We’re still amazed every time we look at her.

Sunni has become a daily personal message from the Lord that *“if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?”* (Matthew 6:30 NKJV)

**Randi Hunsaker** lives in Brigham City, UT, with her husband, Blaine. They have two children and four grandchildren.



*This Required Prayer*, by Randi Hunsaker



*Surprised by the Answer*, by Randi Hunsaker

# Still Be My Vision

Connie Mace—Granite Falls, WA

Steven is home with our LORD. No more pain, no more suffering. The cancerous invasion of his body completed its horrible task and could not harm my beloved husband of 28 years any more. Cancer is limited to this brief life and is not allowed to step foot into the next. GOD is Merciful.

As family and friends left one by one, I knew I needed to be alone for GOD to begin healing me. Six months before, a sympathetic doctor verbalized test results: a “carcinoma of unknown primary.” Time could be short. Specialists were not hopeful of curing the cancer, but confidently assured that the pain would be controlled.

My favorite hymn has always been “Be Thou My Vision.” The haunting melody and ancient phrases transport me to craggy rocks, which rise up off Ireland’s coastline. In ancient times, monks devoted their lives to GOD in stony shelters piled on those crags where Atlantic storms raged in vain attempt to defeat devotion. The final phrase in the hymn became my prayer: “Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.”



Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.



Would I be able to withstand the violent storm that had begun to blow in my life? Could I allow GOD to be my Vision through dark days?



My life became continual prayer, constant communion as our family walked the path laid out for us. My sustaining scripture became Job 1:21, 22—“*The LORD gave and The LORD has taken away. Blessed be The Name of The LORD. Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*”



I prayed that I would reflect those verses, whatever happened.

In the midst of my prayers, GOD revealed some bittersweet facts: He loves His frail creatures beyond all measure. He would give me strength and wisdom to be caretaker for Steven at home. The last sobering truth I kept to myself—we would fight against the disease, but we would not win the physical battle.

As the months of living with cancer passed, Steven’s pain increased and he grew weaker—despite chemotherapy, despite an arsenal of pain-easing drugs. After a “port” was inserted into Steven’s chest, I was taught how to administer strong doses of narcotics through an IV. I am not a trained nurse, but GOD was providing me with necessary skills as He promised.

Circumstances were not changing; the disease seemed relentless. When an MRI confirmed our fears that the cancer was spreading, we chose to stop chemotherapy. Still, I knew GOD was ever-present, giving our family and friends the strength needed *“for such a time as this”* (Esther 4:14).

Loved ones surrounded us with prayers, love and laughter—vital weapons needed to fight the deep anguish we all felt. We were granted lovely moments of grace as GOD’s love filled the room each day and night. GOD is indeed *“able to do far more abundantly, beyond all that we ask or think, according to The Power that works within us”* (Ephesians 3:20 NASB).

We were learning that *“The Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words”* (Romans 8:26). Spirit intercession was a welcome blessing as we could



not possibly have foreseen the magnitude and depth of all that we needed to pray.

Steven's own heart softened and opened to the Word of GOD. JESUS was drawing another soul unto Himself. Years of prayers for salvation came to fruition. Those who had been praying for that particular miracle were blessed to know that Steven was, at long last, a believer in the weeks before his passing.

Family and friends began to pray that GOD, in His Mercy, would please take Steven home. His spirit was released from the battle as a blazing sun sank beneath a waiting horizon. Much to our sadness, the pain had not been "under control" as the doctors had confidently promised. Physicians are indeed mere mortals.

After the last of my family left, I collapsed to the floor in agonizing sobs and cried out, "You are still my Vision, blessed be Your Name, but why couldn't I go also? What more do you require of me?" Even as I spoke, the answer came. "*He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does The LORD require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your GOD*" (Micah 6:8).

In that moment, GOD showed me the path through the valley of the shadow. Each day, I was to do something for another person unconnected to my grief. In those early, raw days of pain, it began with meager acts: a sewing project for someone's baby, a smile for the checker in the grocery store and inquiring how her day was going. As the days passed, these actions began to fill more of my time. My LORD was drawing me closer to Himself with healing service to others.

I would love to thank the anonymous author who penned the following and added firm resolve in my days of intense grief.

### ***Cancer Is So Limited***

It cannot cripple love  
It cannot shatter hope  
It cannot corrode faith  
It cannot destroy peace  
It cannot kill friendships  
It cannot suppress memories  
It cannot silence courage  
It cannot invade the soul  
It cannot steal eternal life  
It cannot conquer the spirit

Slowly, I was woven back into life's tapestry: able to help others, able to let JESUS be my Healer and Vision. "Heart of my own heart, whatever befall, still be my Vision, O Ruler of all."

"I have to kneel before The Father, put my ear against His Chest and listen, without interruption, to The Heartbeat of GOD. Then and only then, can I say carefully and very gently what I hear."  
—Henri J. M. Nouwen

**Connie Mace** is a mom and grandmother. She teaches preschool and lives in a wee cabin in the woods of northwest Washington. As servant of the Most High God, she seeks to draw readers of all ages into a closer walk with God while bringing glory to His Name. Connie is a member of Northwest Christian Writers Association, is "blogservant" for NCWA's blog, <http://nwchristianwriters.wordpress.com/>, and has published articles in Northwest Christian Author. Her children's picture book, *TOP O' THE MORNIN' MINI MINNIE*, is scheduled to publish in 2011 with WinePress Publishing. Visit her website: <http://conniemace.com>.

# From Marah to Elim

Sue Underhill—Gretna, Scotland

How does God feel when He has to shorten a limb, stop up ears, close the eyes, lop off an arm? The answer came to me through a picture. I imagined myself as the clay before the Potter at the wheel, and saw, not the usual bucket of water by the Maker's side to moisten, mould and shape, but His cupped hands flooded with tears washing over the whole process of remaking my very being. I believe God weeps and howls out loud for our pain. He howls for our hurts, our frustration, for our ignorance and short-sightedness. He howls for His unrelenting love for us.

## A Wingless Bird

"You're not enough for me, Sue," my husband said as he closed the door behind him for the final time. I watched in horror as he crossed the courtyard of our dream home of one month, got into his car and drove away without looking back. I felt numb, like I'd lost my love and support of the past 28 years. He was the one who had sorted out our finances, changed the light bulbs, mended a fuse, and knew exactly what to do when the central heating broke down. Whatever it was that interrupted the normal day-to-day living, I knew my husband would deal with it.

But not now. He'd gone. I was in charge now. How was I going to manage this house that now stared back at me? The finances, mortgage, overdrafts, policies, they were all alien to me. With my severe hearing problems, how was I going to hold a conversation and keep it going on the telephone? I remember thinking I'm not one of those people you read about in books. I saw myself no more than a bird pecking at the seed on the ground. When I wasn't pecking, I stood motionless gazing through the wire fence at what should be. I had wings but couldn't fly.

I would see birds soaring the skies, nestled together on rooftops and telegraph wires all with a

song to sing. I so wanted to be like those birds and fly on my own. Divorce is unbearably painful—like someone suffering from an amputated limb, I felt unwanted physically, emotionally, spiritually and of no use at all but for the incinerator. Who or what could fill the gaping void that screamed out its anguish of my loss?

## Never Alone

God wastes no time, *"For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is His name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; He is called the God of all the earth"* (Isaiah 54:5 NIV). Suddenly I'm standing as God's beautiful bride, being unveiled to the face of my God Most High telling me, *"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt"* (Jeremiah 31:3-4 NIV). Could this be God speaking to me? I felt incredibly cherished and comforted, like I had slipped under a warm comforter.

## Pushed Out Of The Nest To Fly

I put the house up for sale. It was very cold and windy outside. I couldn't afford to keep the central heating going, so I wrapped myself up, doubling the clothes I would normally wear. One day, I woke up to a flood in my house and had to squish through sodden carpets to find the source.

I found out sometime later that an underground pipe had broken, allowing the foul-smelling overflow to pour unrelentingly into my home. Meanwhile, my estate agent telephoned to tell me a young couple wanted to come and view the property. On top of this, my mail was mounting up with unpaid bills, including a summons for me to attend court. My husband now wanted the furniture in my home, plus a large slice of the proceeds from the house sale. I screamed into my pillow, "Help me!"



It's like I had taken a parachute jump at 10,000 feet! But, I was not alone, for my God Most High had jumped with me. Although we were sandwiched together, spinning round and round, I was paralysed by fear. I screamed and screamed, feeling out of control, hell raising in a downward spiral of conflicting emotions, exhausted finances, and a dwindling faith. It's in times like this that His grip took a tighter hold on me.

Suddenly, I became aware that I didn't have to pull the rip-cord and guide myself in. My God Most High had a hold on that! He had all the authority and power to hold back the biting winds, my fears of destruction and emotional suicide. It was He who was holding my life together. He had all the pieces, *"Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand . . . who can frustrate it? And as for the stretched out hand, who can turn it back?"* (Isaiah 14:24, 27 NASB). The difference I felt knowing I was not crashing down to destruction but drifting down under the parachute of God's love was peace and contentment in spite of the storm.

### Springs in the Desert

I had begun to retch violently with the crying and knew I had to try and compose myself. I picked up my Bible, my eyes swimming in tears, and turned to the story when God met Hagar in the desert, *"The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert"* (Genesis 16:7 NIV). He asked her where she was going and where she was coming from. Hagar replied, *"I'm running away. . ."* (v. 8).

This was me. I was running away in a blind panic, on the treadmill of self-sufficiency to somehow survive on a day-to-day basis. I blubbered to God exactly how I felt: "It's not fair . . . I hurt so much . . . I feel useless . . . I'm sinking financially . . . I can't . . ." Writing it all down brought a closeness to God I have never felt before. It was like He had gathered me in His arms and just held me there.

I didn't want to move away but to stay in this blanket of peace forever.

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness. I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt"* (Jeremiah 31:3-4 NIV).

Days must have passed because my journal showed a new day that followed up on my Hagar experience. It came through verse 16 of the same chapter, *"Go back."* God was telling me, "Let us go back and start again." God was saying, "Make room for Me."

*"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities"* (Isaiah 54:2, 3 NIV). Wow! There is more of God than I already had. I wanted to make room in my heart for God's possibilities, so I slipped a trusting hand into His hand. Now it was God's hand leading me, pulling me back, encouraging me to take another step forward. I had the running shoes of God on my feet and the lens of God permitting me to see and reach my goal.

### Joy and Sorrow

"We're getting married, Mum!" my eldest daughter told me a few months ago, beaming from ear to ear. I was thrilled as we talked constantly of the plans ahead. I would buy a nice dress, something that suits me well, along with a large hat. Every bride's mother wears a posh hat! Whilst I was glowing on the outside, inwardly I was taking a nose dive into a sea of bitterness and self pity. The thought of being replaced by my once-best-friend who had now become my husband's new wife was more than I could bear. I had secret periods of crying in the closet, which were becoming more

frequent than was good for me. I was dreaming every night the same dream. There were no words spoken, just the three of us in this triangle with me stuck in the corner on my own looking on. I would wake in a sweat, get up and walk about, then make myself a cup of tea before drifting off to repeat the dream once more. Until one day, I met God face to face.

### The Bitter End

*"Watch no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives"* (Hebrews 12:15 LAB). I felt bitter and angry and resented the fact that I had been rejected and replaced by another, but I had not believed my bitterness could hurt anyone else. The very thought disturbed me greatly. I knew in my heart I had to have God uproot the bad feeling I had towards my ex-husband and his new wife. After surrendering myself to God for deep inner cleansing, I prayed for a release of God's Holy Spirit to work within me.

The day of the wedding arrived. It was a hot day. The hotel in which they chose to be married stood in its own luxurious grounds in the countryside border of Wilmslow, Cheshire, England. The marriage room was very grand with its high decorative ceilings and elongated windows that shed beams of light highlighting the bridal path. My daughter, on the arm of her father, looked radiant. Her long fairy-tale gown with its extended train was followed by three elegant bridesmaids dressed in a soft pale pink satin. As they happily took their vows, my prayers were that God's love would be a part of the love they had for each other.

Photographs were taken on the lawns outside in the beautiful landscaped gardens. While the camera clicked its way through what seemed hundreds of poses, I welcomed the drinks that were being passed round. It was then I saw my ex-husband's new wife sitting some distance away from me. She looked lonely and decidedly uncomfortable, I thought. Could it be that my presence made her feel this way? Is this what God

wants? I stood for a moment watching her, not from my own eyes but through the lens of God. How sad she looked. It was then that I felt God was telling me to go up to her, sit down with her, talk to her. My first thought was, "Are you kidding?" What would I say to her? What could I say?

What was God saying to me? "Forgive her. Forgive as I have forgiven you." I have never felt this way before, but I wanted to make her feel better with such urgency. I wanted to run up to her, but instead walked steadily and sat down beside her. I don't know who was more surprised, her or me. I cannot remember what was said, only that I felt at ease talking to her.

### Sweet Beginning

There is ALWAYS a spring in the dried-out deserts. Psalm 84:6-7 is a personal testimony of mine, *"As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a spring; The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength"* (NKJ).

I felt a tremendous release like the cords that had bound me for so long had been cut and my wings were now spread out to *"soar on wings like eagles"* (Isaiah 40:31 NIV). I was free to glide with ease across the pain-free paths of my unwanted divorce. My God had healed me inside. The hurting and ache had gone. Instead of the bitter hatred, I now felt God's love towards them both.

Could this be a little of what Corrie Ten Boom felt towards her enemies? She and her father and sister Betsie had been imprisoned in one of Nazi Germany's most dreaded concentration camps and had undergone a monstrous cruelty and suffering. She eventually lost both her father and Betsie through the torture of the Nazis. It was these men she grew to forgive. There was a love given only by the Grace of God.



I thank God for what He had been for me and is for me now.

I thank God for His healing hand and His daily strength given to me.

I thank God for my new home and the God-given ability to maintain it.

I thank God for the relationship we can share together.

I thank God I was able to pass through from Marah to Elim.

**Susan Underhill** lives in Gretna, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, and her time is taken up serving the Lord in Gretna Community Church. She is the editor of the church magazine, *The Companion*, and loves to share Jesus in writing articles of what Jesus has been for her. Her aim is to encourage others to write a spiritual journal and from this get to know more of Jesus for themselves. The church Bible study and prayer meeting is what she looks forward to each week. She has two married daughters living in Stockport, Cheshire, England, with two adorable grandchildren from her eldest daughter and a new grandson from youngest daughter. Susan loves to be creative and enjoys card making and knitting for the family.



*Wings to Soar*, by Adam Lilly

“The wisdom that comes from God is first utterly pure, then peace-loving, gentle, approachable, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favoritism or hint of hypocrisy. And the wise are peace-makers who go on quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness—in other people and in themselves” (James 3:17-18 JBPT).

# My Psalm 154

Shirley Reichard—Brigham City, UT



*Weathered Yet Standing Firm, by Scott Johnson*

Oh Lord! My spirit seems willing yet my flesh so weak;  
My flesh, my bones, my mind is failing.

Where are You in my aging? Where are You  
when time goes so fast?  
There is no time nor energy to be found in the day.

My youth has gone; these things I lament were the other way.  
Days, weeks and months were so long.  
My spirit then was not as willing nor my knowledge so full.

To You, Oh Lord! I look to You to carry me through.  
With You, Oh Lord! I call on You more and more  
each hour of the day, not just in the morn.

I thank You, Oh Lord, that I can call on You  
The One I trust with my cares and my weaknesses.  
I rejoice in Your name. Praise Your Holy name.

**Shirley Reichard**, 76, and husband Floyd, 85, live in Brigham City, Utah. They love gardening and fishing and are thankful to God that they are still able to do both. Shirley is the mother of 4 daughters, 12 grandchildren, and 8 great-grandchildren. She loves the Lord and does all she can to serve Him each and every day.



“Let all that I am praise the Lord;  
    may I never forget the good things He does for me.  
He forgives all my sins  
    and heals all my diseases.  
He redeems me from death  
    and crowns me with love and tender mercies.  
He fills my life with good things.  
    My youth is renewed like the eagle’s!”

(Psalm 103:2-5 NLT)



*Delicious!* by Adam Lilly

# Numb

*Pam Apodaca—Corinne, UT*

As I lay in my bed, I heard the toilet flush. Next came a knock on my bedroom door, and my father said, “Are you all right?”

“Yes, thanks, Daddy.”

“Need anything?” he asked.

“No, thanks.” End of conversation and to me the end of everything.

I was 17, afraid, alone and did not know where to turn. My mom was in Washington, D.C., doing her volunteer work with the Red Cross, and my father had just come home from work. The conversation with my mom the morning before she left for D.C. echoed in my ears. “Oh, Pamela, how *could* you?” she screamed.

I knew she would not go through another fiasco as she had with my sister who had to get married at 17. She made an appointment for me with the family doctor that very afternoon. I went as told. The doctor was rather cold and gave me some pills with instructions to take one a day for three days.

I did as I was instructed, and on the third day began having tremendous pains and bleeding, so I ran home. Father was at work; Mom was still away, and I struggled with calling for help. Mom was adamant that no one know. I really had no one to help me, so I just tried to sleep. Finally, I went to the bathroom, and the baby came out in the toilet. I was horrified and could not flush the toilet. I broke down and called my father at work. “Just go to bed. I’ll handle everything when I get home,” he said, with irritation in his voice. I went numb.

Numb, a feeling of nothingness—not good, not bad, just deadness, no feeling, no crying—just numb, a feeling which would follow me for the

coming decades of my life. Whenever I felt afraid, confused, alone, hurt, I knew just what to do—get numb. Alcohol got me the numbest; sex was a good second.

After the abortion, I married the father of the lost baby and had a son. Throughout the second pregnancy, I was concerned that I’d lose the child. Fear ruled my life. I knew I should not drink or smoke during pregnancy, so I ate to relieve stress. Gluttony became another acceptable way to get numb.

When my son was two, I went back to business school and began smoking pot—another way to numb. My marriage was rocky and filled with arguments, raging fights, and unfaithfulness. After ten years of misery, we decided to end the marriage. My son, who was 9, chose to live with his dad and wanted nothing to do with me, so I faced my 30’s alone, but with failure and rejection my haunting companions. Again I went numb.

From 30 to 38 years of age, I led two very distinct lives. Monday through Friday, 8-to-5, I was a professional accountant who did as I was told. I got along with my fellow employees and wore the good woman mask for all to see. I was a great people pleaser, but I stuffed my real thoughts. I was outgoing and pleasant, as phony as I thought everyone else was. I rarely associated with my co-workers after work or on weekends. If they really knew who I was and what I did for fun, they definitely would not have anything to do with me at work.

After work I was free to live my real life—to be who I really thought I was. This persona was easier to maintain because I could just be my miserable self and make everyone else miserable, too. My goal in this second life was to be morning-to-night-numb: Don’t think, don’t remember, and





don't let anyone into my personal hell. I smoked pot, took pills, had sex with anyone I chose, and managed to remain drunk most of the time.

I embarrassed everyone I was around, and because I was self-centered and out-of-control, I lost friends. I attacked others verbally before they could speak to me. I deliberately offended everyone who represented anything good or wholesome so they would leave me alone. I was cold, heartless, and miserable. I tried to control everything around me, and if I could not control the situation, I would find a way to leave. My motto was, "My way, or I'm outta here."

I used people for my gain and never looked back at the messes I left behind. I ran with a rough crowd. I was living my life as I thought I really was. After all, hadn't I murdered my own child? Who could be worse than me? I was ashamed, filled with guilt and painfully remorseful over what I had done. It was a secret and a burden that I would carry with me for 40 years.

My drinking began to consume me, and it became more and more difficult to hide my hangovers. I was in turmoil, but I did not know where to turn.

While driving to the post office one day when I had been drinking, I had a car accident and was jailed overnight. This was the catalyst that I needed. I stopped drinking and began to make changes in my lifestyle. I spent the next two years controlling every aspect of how I lived. I was rigid, very judgmental, and critical. Trying to hold my life together by myself was the most difficult period of my life. I was so lonely, afraid, depressed, and sickened by my memories that I finally sought professional counseling. When I became suicidal, my therapist recommended I go into a treatment center for a week.

The center actually kept me for six weeks with aftercare meetings for another two months. In

all the time at the center, I never discussed the abortion. Why? I was so horrified by what I had done, absolutely sure I would never be accepted anywhere if people knew. I guess I still wanted control of my secret. We are only as sick as our secrets—and I was very sick. I was still trying to manage my life alone.

*"...But this is the man to whom I will look and have regard: he who is humble and of a broken or wounded spirit, and who trembles at My word and reveres My commands" (Isaiah 66:2).*

The aftercare counselor suggested I attend AA meetings, and I became a regular participant in many meetings throughout each week. I was happy with AA and with all the new people I had in my life, but something was missing. I was clean, sober, and satisfied with what AA had to offer, yet I knew there must be more. I felt my life had come to a dead end. Numb again.

I searched for a way to enlighten my life: participated in a drumming ceremony, made a dream catcher with objects found on a nature walk, researched my Indian totem animals, and even ran with wolf sisters, a new-age communing idea. All these things still left me very empty. At the end of every AA meeting the group would close by repeating the Lord's Prayer. I began to ask myself, who is my Father in heaven? It was then I began my journey towards God.

In 1995, my ex-husband died of a massive stroke. I was only 43 at the time and began wondering where he had gone after his death. This led to the question of where would I go after death? I had not been raised with any particular religion or belief. I asked some friends what they thought and did not get any satisfactory answers. My questions remained.

I contacted a friend of my mother, and she took me to her Baptist church. This was my awakening! The pastor and his wife held my hand, led me to Christ, disciplined me, and I have never looked back. Amazing what God can do with one such as me!

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. For I am the LORD your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:2-3 NASB).

In the months that followed my decision to accept God’s gift of forgiveness and healing, I began to realize that I was a different person. I loved life, enjoyed people, woke up every morning with a smile. I was loved by God, my sins were forgiven, my shame and guilt had been nailed to Christ’s cross. I was free!

As I studied the Bible and learned about God’s character, I claimed Joel 2:25 for my life: *“Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locusts have eaten . . .”* In 1998, God brought me a godly man who loves me unconditionally. I soon became a wife! No more lonely Christmas mornings, no more empty long nights. I had someone to sit beside me in church. God is so good. I was blessed, happy and content. But, God had another plan. He loved me far too much to let me remain in unforgiveness. I still needed to deal with an unrepented sin, my secret: my abortion.

In 2008, I was invited to a Pregnancy Care Center (PCC) Banquet fundraiser. The subject was abortion. I was undone. I decided to fill out a volunteer service card before I left. I then cried all the way home. I told my husband, Jack, what I had done at 17, and he held me and let me cry.

One of the women at the PCC called and explained that in order to volunteer, I would need to attend training in a nearby town. It was there I

publicly confessed for the first time that I had had an abortion when I was 17. Two other women also spoke about their abortions. I realized I was not alone.

I then signed up for a post-abortion Bible study and seminar and spent the next 12 weeks dealing with God’s character, His forgiveness and learning to forgive myself. The seminar ended with a beautiful service in which I named my baby and lit a candle for her. I know I will see my little JoJo when I leave this earth. She is with my Father God and is waiting for me.

Numb—that feeling described earlier, will still raise its ugly head from time to time. However, I no longer fear those old memories and their associated bad feelings that caused me to want to withdraw from reality by becoming numb. I no longer hide who I really am. The Bible is my only measuring tool, and I am reborn, a new creature in Christ. Still I must remember where I have come from and how Christ alone brought me to where I am today. To God be the glory forever and forever!

**Pam Apodaca** lives in Corinne, Utah, with her husband. They are both retired and enjoy gardening and watching their three granddaughters grow. She also ministers to the female inmates at Box Elder County Jail every Sunday.



# MARANATHA

*Tom Blakely—Dumfriesshire, Scotland*

Morning breaks with a gilded sun  
Across the earth all shadows are gone  
Replaced by reflected shades of blue  
As wisps of cloud come into view  
Nothing now can be hidden away  
As earth awakes to this special day  
The voice of God heralds the dawn  
His people know their Lord has come!  
As all in Jesus are carried away; no more to pray:  
MARANATHA.

**Tom Blakely's** profile is located on page 83.

“He which testifieth these things saith,  
‘Surely I come quickly. Amen.’ Even so,  
come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20 KJV).



*Morning's Promise*, by Scott Johnson

# In a Moment of Time

*Deborah Parnham—Phoenix, AZ*

I was raised in a dysfunctional, atheistic home and suffered years of physical abuse, resulting in a broken sternum, sexual abuse by my dad, and emotional abuse from my alcoholic mom. I hated my parents and could hardly wait to get out of that house. Finally, I left home pregnant at 17 and got married.

I swore that I would never be like my mom or dad. I would be a good mommy and never treat my children the way they had treated me. But in the next few years, I found myself drinking and getting high, filled with anger and hatred, clueless that my history of childhood abuse was partly responsible for my behavior.

Like most victims, I blocked out the pain of the past. Eventually, after moving into a new neighborhood with my husband and two children, I was befriended by a neighbor who was a Christian. For two years Nadine witnessed to me about Jesus. I would argue with her and taunt her

told her we would go, but I insisted on being left alone. “I do not want to be a part of the church group and I do not want to be preached to.”

We arrived at the campground, ill-prepared for unexpected cool weather. I hadn’t brought any warm clothes or shoes for my children or myself. Cold and miserable, I insisted that we pack up our things and return home. My husband refused to hear my complaints and made the decision that we would all stay and tough it out.

Seeing that we were not prepared for the cold weather, some ladies from the church brought warm clothes and jackets for my family. How could I refuse? We were all frozen. As we crawled out of the tent on Sunday morning, Nadine lured me to a camper trailer where it was much warmer and had some hot cocoa. I accepted and entered the trailer where a group of women in the trailer were discussing religion and capital punishment.

Without hesitation, I blurted out, “I think they should line them (criminals) all up against a wall and shoot them. Why should we have to pay to incarcerate them for years?” Anger and bitterness spewed out of my mouth. Suddenly the conversation abruptly stopped, and one of the women looked at me and said softly, “Who is it that has hurt you?” I was taken aback by her question. Then she shared one of my personal secrets, which I had never shared with anyone. “Who told you this?” I asked her. Only God could have revealed it to her. I was in shock and disbelief and began to cry. At that tender moment she asked if I would like to pray with her and I agreed. I prayed and accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

It took me a while to accept the reality of the decision I had made inside that camper that day, but eventually my family began to attend church regularly, and I began to grow in the Lord. I was a

“Who is it that has hurt you?” I was taken aback by her question. Then she shared one of my personal secrets, which I had never shared with anyone.

for being so ignorant and weak. “I don’t need God as a crutch in my life like you do,” I told her. “I’m a strong person just like my mom raised me to be.” To me, showing emotions was a sign of weakness and so was being a Christian.

One day, after two years of futile attempts to get me to church, she invited my family to go camping with her family for a weekend. After I learned it was with her church group, I said, “Forget it!” However, the thought of camping with the family sounded like a great idea, and I couldn’t stop thinking about it, so after a couple of weeks I



new creature almost overnight. I still hadn't dealt with my past though and slowly it began to haunt me and affect my relationship with my husband and kids.

I went through a long process of mental and physical healing. Through that process I came to the realization that I needed to forgive my parents for what they had done to me. Forgiving them for their actions had an amazing effect on me. It set this prisoner free. Free from the anger and victimization.

Being forgiven didn't do anything for my parents. My mom remained hateful and resentful until her death. My dad had already taken his own life. For me, however, forgiveness brought such a relief.

I had married an abusive man and had been married to him for over 20 years. Finally, I mustered the courage to leave that unhealthy marriage. I felt like I had given it all I had to make it work. Through my inner healing I had begun to get stronger, and as I became stronger it became apparent that I could no longer tolerate the abuse, especially the negative control he had over me, so in 1989, I left.

During the divorce, my middle son, Brent, became the pawn. My husband demanded that Brent live with him or he would make sure that all the children were taken away from me. I allowed him to bully me once again, against my better judgment. However, I later sued for full custody and on Valentine's Day, 1992, Brent came to live with my new husband, Doug, and me.

Naturally, Brent brought all of his "baggage" with him. He had been diagnosed with ADD as a young child and his behavior had worsened with the divorce. He was mad at me for leaving him because he and his dad, who had abused him, had never gotten along.

After he came to live with Doug and me, we spent the next 11 months trying to rebuild our family. However, Brent's behavior kept him in no short supply of trouble, and finally I had to clamp down on him. On December 4, 1992, Brent and I had a big argument. On Saturday, December 5th, he slept in and was finally awakened by his stepdad so he could do some chores. I was out shopping and wouldn't arrive home until the afternoon. After the chores were finished, Brent asked Doug if he could have some bus fare so he and his friend, Clint, could go visit their friend J.R. Given permission and explicit instructions to be back home by 5 p.m. for dinner, he left with Clint to meet up with J.R., who lived in a rough neighborhood, a place I would not have allowed Brent to go.

When he didn't show up for the mandatory dinner hour with us, I became uneasy. Finally, at 7:30 p.m., Brent called me. "Where are you?" I demanded. "Tell me where you are because I'm coming to pick you up!" At that time he was only 16.

"I'm getting older and you need to let me go," he replied. When I began to protest, he hung up on me. I realized that what he was saying was right; I had had a pretty tight rein on him. Those were the last words I heard from him.

About 2:30 in the morning, I heard knocking on the front door. When my 11-year old daughter, Trinity, opened the door, she saw a police officer standing outside. At first I thought, "Brent's in trouble again and the police have brought him home." But when I saw the look on the officer's face, I knew his appearance in the middle of the night was serious.

"Is your son named Brent Lorentz?" he asked. "He's been shot. Please call the hospital immediately." We did, but the person answering the phone wouldn't give us much information. She merely said, "You should come quickly." The

officer hung around until we headed to Good Samaritan Medical Center.

All the way there, I was hoping for something small, like getting shot with a BB gun, which had happened before. When we arrived, some police officers met us and took us into a room and began questioning us. I just wanted to go and see my son. They finally released us and we found him in the ICU. He had been shot in the lower part of his face at close range with a 12-gauge shotgun. The doctor said, "He's in a coma for now, and he has zero chance of surviving."

During the seven days Brent fought to stay alive, we believed that God could do a miracle, and we prayed that way; however, after several days I lifted Brent into God's hands. "Lord, if You choose to take my son, I will trust You." I had complete peace at that time knowing God was in complete control.

During Brent's remaining days, I had full access to him any time I wanted, and I saw a lot of miracles. Our pastor, Tommy Barnett of Phoenix First Assembly of God, came to be with us and prayed that Sunday morning. Several times Pastor Barnett joked it was the only time he was ever late for Sunday morning services. He shared the story of our son with the congregation, warning them, "Life is tenuous. None of us knows when something like this could happen to us—are you ready?" As a result, many people responded, making new commitments to Christ. Barnett's son, who pastors a church in Los Angeles, shared a similar message with his congregation. People responded in the same way, making peace with God.

Leo, one of my pastors, told me that someday God would use Brent's story to reach many. All but one of the kids who came to see Brent during his final day was saved. The entire school wrestling team came to see Brent and were allowed to go into the room with him.

You know how parents pray that their children will make a difference, live lives that will glorify

God, do something that counts for eternity? I had prayed that for Brent, but I had no idea that his attack and subsequent death would produce so much fruit in such a short time.

The doctors insisted that Brent couldn't hear us because he had no brain activity, but my husband put his hand on Brent's leg and said, "If you can hear me, move your leg." And he moved it. For seven days, whenever I talked to Brent, his eyes were rolling around uncontrollably due to the brain damage. But twice he fixed his eyes on my face, and I thought I saw fear or pain there.

"Patty, run and get the nurse!" I told my sister. The nurse said that he didn't have enough brain activity and that she wasn't sure of what it meant. I was concerned that Brent was in pain. She said he couldn't feel any pain. But because of my insistence, she gave him a shot of pain medicine.

As the days wore on, his doctors called together the whole family and told us that without brain activity of any kind, they thought it was necessary to pull the plug on Brent's life support system. After going around the room from person to person, hoping someone would relieve Brent of his nightmare, no one seemed to be able to make that choice, except for me. I didn't want my son to continue suffering, so we walked down the hall to Brent's room, and I approached his life support machine fully prepared to pull that plug. *I'm not finished raising this kid, so how could this happen?*

I knew Brent loved life, but he wouldn't want to live his life like this. As I approached the machine, ready to take my own son's life, he moved. "Wait!" the doctor said. "We need to take him down and do a brain scan." They had discovered that for the first time he had some brain activity. So we made the decision at that time not to remove him from life support. The same thing happened another time, and once more he mysteriously had brain activity. One doctor said, "I don't think this kid is ready to go and doesn't want you to pull his plug. So let's let it run its course."



On the seventh day of fighting for his life, Brent died of a massive stroke. We buried him on December 16, 1992. It was difficult enough without my ex-husband's wife interfering with our plans to have an open casket service. I was adamant that the young people who would come to the funeral see what had happened to Brent with their own eyes, so they would never forget the effects of senseless violence and what could happen if children refuse to listen to their parents. Many teens were saved at Brent's funeral.

Meanwhile, we had no clue about who had committed this murder. All we knew for sure was that it had been a random drive-by shooting that took place as my son and his two friends were walking, less than a half block away from J.R.'s apartment complex. For some unknown reason, my five-foot-six-inch son walking between his two taller friends became the target. In a moment of time, a car drove up beside them and the passenger chose to destroy not only our son's life but our family. His actions affected so many people, including himself and his own family.

I was not angry with God because I trusted Him with Brent's life and I knew He was in control, but I became deeply angry at people. This one act of violence changed us forever, and just like Humpty Dumpty, we couldn't put the pieces of our family back together. Trinity became fearful and we couldn't seem to help her. Less than six months after Brent's death, she began running away, getting into trouble with the law, and using drugs. I lived with the constant fear of burying another child. The thought was more than I could bear.

My rage was so deep that I had no fear showing it on the road. I was involved in some road rage one evening after a day in court. We were headed to our support group for parents of murder victims, Parents of Murdered Children. As I look back, I realize how ridiculous that must have looked. I was 100 pounds soaking wet, taking on a very large

man, even willing to fist fight him. I was saved by my husband who picked me up and carried me away from the scene against my wishes. Did this man not understand what I was going through? If he only knew, would he make such an issue of my husband's last-minute decision to change lanes to turn left? When it was all over, the man felt so bad. He could have lost his life if I had been carrying a gun in my car. When I came to my senses, I realized afresh that life is much too short to worry about little things.



*Cloud Angel*, by Don Davis at Laguna Beach, CA

Worship became a powerful tool to calm me down. I listened to worship tapes and praised, but inside I was full of anger. I became involved with the Phoenix homicide department and Randy Chapman, the detective working the case, who kept me abreast of their leads.

One day he called and said, "We got the man. We think he's good for maybe ten other homicides in Phoenix." Independent of each other, my husband and I had been out doing our own detective work. When Detective Chapman gave us the suspect's name and address, we seriously considered paying the murderer a visit. Before we could do something stupid, however, the detective called back and said he'd been cleared of the crime.

Over the coming months, we received many calls from Chapman. Around Mother's Day 1993, he said, "I'm pretty sure we have the guy this time. We got a tip after someone saw a *Cops* segment that aired regarding Brent's case." We didn't know anything about a *Cops* show and assumed that it was a follow-up to the shooting, but when we saw that segment, we were horrified to see our son down on the street, bleeding and surrounded by police and paramedics. "Who gave them permission to do this!" I screamed.

No matter who I talked to at Fox Broadcasting across the country, no one had sympathy for us because that show was a scoop for the network. The *Cops* camera crew had been on a ride-along with the Phoenix police when the call came in and so they were at the scene immediately after the shooting, recording every gory detail for the world to see.

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins" (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV).

Although I was furious because the network executives had been rude, it was that program which brought the murderer to police attention. Someone knew what had happened and called the tip to police. Two men were arrested and tried. The driver of the car, Angel, was sentenced to seven-and-a-half years for assault. Gabriel, who had pulled the trigger, was sentenced to 25-and-a-half years for second degree murder.

Each day of the trial, I was so furious. I tried to catch Gabriel's eye to show him how much I hated him. I wanted to jump the barrier and tear the killer to pieces. Didn't he know what he'd done?

Halfway through the trial, nearly giving in to intense rage, I realized that I was right back where I'd been before I'd forgiven my parents. I didn't want to go there. I wanted to be free. So I prayed.

"Lord Jesus. You have to help me. I want this guy dead. I want to put his butt in the electric chair and pull the switch. I'll do it for free!"

"Debbie. You need to forgive him."

I must not have heard correctly. "What? No. I'm not going to forgive him. Look what he's done to Brent, to us?" The passage that had prompted me to forgive my parents was always with me. It surfaced again in my mind: "*For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*" (Matthew 6:14-15 NIV).

"This kid murdered my son, Lord! How can You ask me to forgive him? You don't understand!"

"I do understand. They murdered My Son, too."

Of course! God knows what this feels like. How could I not realize that? So I asked the Lord to help me. "Lord, I can't do this without Your help. I know what I need to do, but I don't know how." After my prayer that day in court, I was released. I felt as if tons of bricks had fallen off my shoulders.

That same day after our court session, my husband and I went to our local Christian bookstore and bought Gabriel Nieto a Bible with his name inscribed in gold on the cover. I wanted to give it to him at court the next day. However, I could not get near the man because everyone thought I intended to kill him. When he was sentenced and taken away to prison, I still had not given him the Bible.

Not long afterwards, through my involvement with Parents of Murdered Children, I was in court with another mother who had lost her child to violence when I recognized Gabriel's defense lawyer, David Brewer, who had moved away to the South to retire. Our case was the last one before his retirement. What was he doing back in Phoenix in a courtroom?





As he was leaving, I stood up and said, “I know you. I am Brent Lorentz’s mom.” He replied, “How could I forget? I’m still disappointed I lost that case.” He asked me if I wanted to talk, so we went into a small room outside of the courtroom.

“Mr. Brewer, I have forgiven Gabriel,” I said.

He was incredulous. “I’d never forgive a man for killing a child of mine. I don’t understand how you can do that,” he said. I told him that I wanted to see Gabriel in prison and give him the Bible we had bought for him. In addition, I had some questions I needed answered. “I want to introduce him to my son, Brent, and to Jesus,” I said. At first, he just couldn’t understand where I was coming from, but finally he said, “I can see that you are sincere in what you say, and I would like to help you.”

Brewer contacted a man in the Attorney General’s office and within a few days we were sitting in that office with a man who had the authority to approve or disapprove that visit. He also told me, “I don’t understand why you would want to sit with the man who murdered your son, but I feel you are sincere and I will help you as long as you write a letter stating you wish the inmate no harm. If Gabriel allows you to see him, you may go.”

So I wrote a letter to him at the maximum security prison in Florence, AZ, a place providing the tightest controls over its hardened inmates. I asked him to allow me to visit, and he agreed. I told him that I had made the choice to forgive and wanted to sit and talk with Gabriel regarding the night of the shooting.

There are many gates in the prison through which I proceeded. At each gate, the guard forbade me to take Gabriel’s Bible and the pictures of Brent that I’d brought with me. Although I knew this was strictly forbidden, I insisted that I needed to bring those items into the prison for the inmate to see.

Each supervisor I requested sent me to the next gate, and finally, holding the Bible and pictures, I walked through the last one. As the large, heavy door slammed behind us, I realized a miracle had just happened.

A detail person, I wanted to know everything that had happened that night, or I just couldn’t rest. I had brought Brent’s baby pictures, photos of him growing up, his hospital stay, after death in the morgue and also a photo of the headstone over his final resting place. I wanted Gabriel to know what he had done to my son, my family, Brent’s friends, and my community, as well as his wife and two children and his community. None of us would ever be the same again. I wish now that we had taped that interview because it changed not only my life but also Gabriel’s.

I gave him his Bible and told him that I had forgiven him and that I wanted him to know not only who my son was, but his dreams and goals in life. I also wanted him to know who Jesus was.

“When they threw me into the hole, in isolation, I cried out to Jesus,” Gabriel said. “I accepted Him there.” Amazingly, as a teen he had been bussed to my church and attended Sunday school and the church services. Later, he rejected what he’d heard at that time and followed the peer pressure. Church was no longer a cool thing to do.

“Do you remember my son’s name?” I asked him.

“No ma’am, I don’t.” he said, and I wanted to wring his neck!

“I’m here today because I want you to know my son, the young man you murdered.” With each picture I showed him, I had a little story. With Brent’s baby picture, I saw a small smile. I knew he had his own children. When I asked him about them, he told me their names and said, “My

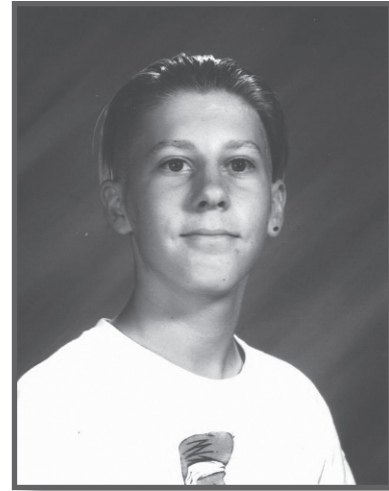
second daughter, Selena, was born the day before the shooting.”

When I brought out the hospital and morgue pictures, he turned his face away. I grabbed his hands. “You WILL look at these pictures, Gabriel!” He turned slowly and looked at each one. At the end, I noticed a small tear. We had made a connection. I don’t know how else to explain what happened that day.

At the end of the visit, I stood up and began walking around the table to give him a hug. He put up his hands to prevent me. “Please don’t,” he said, but I insisted, and when I put my arms around him, he held on for the longest time. That began our relationship of meeting, talking, and working together as a team to get our story of forgiveness out to others. Strange and incredible as it sounds, I think of Gabriel now with love, as an additional son.

Who is it that you need to forgive? Maybe a parent, spouse, child, teacher, or just your next door neighbor. Forgiveness is a choice, an act of the will that can set you free. It is a daily choice that Jesus commands of us. Gabriel and I are living in freedom.

**Deborah Parnham** and her husband live in Phoenix, AZ, with their two dogs Toby and Roxie. They have four surviving children: Brian, Trinity, Regina, and Erica. Deborah has spoken to over 45,000 teens and adults since 1998 with the organization Life Sentence. Recently, an independent documentary maker from Los Angeles, Leslie Neale with Chance Films, just finished filming *Unlikely Friends*, which is in the editing process now. It will be released soon.



*Brent Lorentz*  
*Sunrise 9-21-76 Sunset 12-12-92*  
*“A life remembered, a death not forgotten”*

“How great is the goodness you have stored up for those who fear you. You lavish it on those who come to you for protection, blessing them before the watching world” (Psalm 31:19 NLT).



# Set Free

*Laura Bradford—Walla Walla, WA*

Darkness so deep—  
Clawing, pummeling, twisting thoughts  
'til I believe the lie.

“You’re dead!” it shrieks,  
Tossing back its heinous head  
to chortle at my fate.

“I’m dead,” I echo,  
Falling limply on the ground  
to wail in tortured agony.

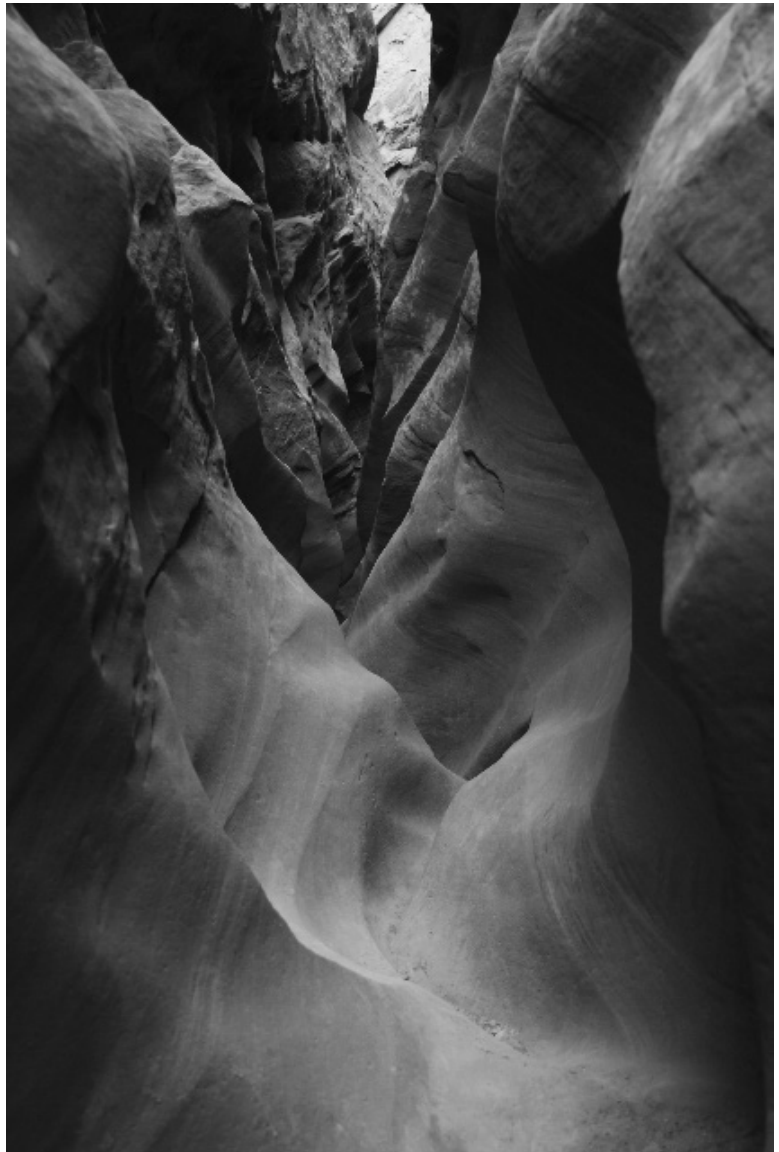
Lost, so lost.  
Weeping, longing, seeking,  
but wait ... an answer dawns.

A Light so bright—  
Comforting, healing, speaking truth  
'til I receive His love.

“You live,” He calls,  
Reaching out with wounded hand  
to draw me near His side.

“I live!” I echo,  
Rising up with strengthened heart  
to shout Good News of liberty,

“Because He lives, I live!”



*Slot Canyon in the San Rafael Swell, UT, by Josh Felix*

**Laura L. Bradford** experienced a dramatic conversion to Christ shortly after her husband, John, had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The Holy Spirit empowered her to serve as John’s caregiver for thirty years, until he went to be with Jesus. Laura now lives in Walla Walla, WA, writing about God’s greatness, while she continues her “career” as a caregiver by overseeing the needs of her elderly mother-in-law.

# Overwhelmed by a Holy Presence

*Earl Cunningham—Palm Beach Gardens, FL*

I began praying about where I should attend church the moment I received the phone call inviting me to interview on campus.

A week later, on a Saturday afternoon, I arrived in Denver, Colorado, picked up my suitcase at the baggage claim, and stood in line at the National Car Rental counter. Within the hour, the leaves on the trees glistened bright yellow and orange as I drove north on Interstate 25 toward Fort Collins, the jagged ridge of the Rocky Mountains clearly visible to my left against the soft glow of the setting sun.

I checked into a hotel on the edge of the Colorado State University campus, carried my luggage to my assigned room, and stepped outside to look around and breathe in the clear, mile-high air. The open green expanse of a large city park was across the street, with several walkways leading to the far side. Several church spires were visible above the dark green tree line. I still did not know where I was supposed to worship the next morning, but at least I knew where I might find a church or two.

Sunday morning, after a light breakfast of scrambled eggs with Swiss cheese, roasted Idaho potato chunks with sweet Vidalia onions, and black coffee, I struck out across the park. It was still early, and I was hoping to find a 9 o'clock service. The first services of the Presbyterian and Methodist churches did not begin until 9:30 and their doors were still locked. So I continued to walk until I came to the rough-chiseled gray stone Four Square Church of God.

There was no indication that anyone was about, but their welcome sign indicated that they had a 9 a.m. service, so I bounded up the steep, stone steps of the church, pulled open the heavy oak front door, and entered the dark foyer.

No one was there to greet me, and there was no one in the brightly-lit sanctuary. I hesitated, considered leaving, but, instead, took a seat near the center aisle in one of the ornately-carved, lacquered pews and waited, staring up at the gently swaying chandelier.

In the middle of the carpeted but unadorned, foot-high platform at the front was a keyboard and a simple chrome-framed institutional chair with black vinyl seat and back support. Two minutes before the 9 o'clock service was scheduled to begin, I was still the only person in the sanctuary.

Then from a narrow doorway to the left of the platform, two young men with shoulder-length hair stepped onto the platform, one holding an acoustic guitar in his lean, left hand, the other taking a seat at the keyboard. As the first quiet chord was played, I was instantly overwhelmed with a sense of a holy presence, and I began crying, tears running uncontrollably down my cheeks.

Suddenly, through every door, hundreds of people were quickly entering the sanctuary, like a crowd being released from a subway car, filling every seat and joining in the joyous, hand-clapping music. I tried to stop the tears, but could not. I tried to sing, but could not because I was quietly sobbing and my throat was constricted.

The right sleeve of my shirt was wet and my hand was damp from wiping away the tears as I left the church at the end of the service, unable to talk with anyone because of the overwhelming sense of the holy presence that still clung to me.

I walked slowly back to the hotel, still shaken from the experience and wondering what had happened. Over a cup of hot tea with lemon and sugar, I continued to think about that service and how I



should respond. Apparently, God had answered my prayers; I had worshiped, but in a very different manner than I had expected.

My spiritual awareness was certainly heightened, but I wondered if the service had been some psychosomatically-induced event, or if there was something authentic and pure at that church that I had never experienced before?

There was another service at 11 o'clock, so I determined to go again to find out what would happen. I re-traced my steps across the park and took a seat in the still-empty sanctuary at 10:54. The same two musicians entered about two minutes before the service was to begin, played that same simple chord, and my eyes filled with tears as I sensed again the same spiritual presence in the room and in my body. And again, as if on cue, people came from every direction to fill every seat.

An hour's-worth of tears later, the service concluded and I walked to the front of the sanctuary to introduce myself to the pastor. He told me that for half-an-hour before every service, all the members of the church gathered in the basement assembly room to pray that the overwhelming presence of the Holy Spirit would envelop the service and rest on those who were about to lead the worship. At the conclusion of each prayer session, they climbed the steps and joined together in the unified and joy-filled worship.



*Maroon Bells in Aspen, CO, by Nancy D'Oporto*

“When I am in the presence of God, it seems uniquely unbecoming to demand anything.” –Francis Shaeffer on his deathbed

**Earl Cunningham** is a professional fund-raiser who works for the American Red Cross. He has been married to his wife, Sherry, for 44 years. They have six children, four of whom were adopted; three of the four were siblings from Korea. They have nine grandchildren and were parents to some 60 or 70 foster children, ranging in age from infants to teenagers, some of whom were refugees from Vietnam and Cuba. Earl has an undergraduate degree with a double major in music and visual arts, and a graduate degree in music composition, with concentrations in vocal performance and conducting. He remains active as a composer, visual artist, photographer, and writer, mostly concentrating on poetry.

# Give Us This Day

Tresa Muir McNeal—Temple, TX

“It is like this disease is going to slowly strip me of everything but my soul,” my 61-year-old mother comments to me just days after being diagnosed with *amyotrophic lateral sclerosis* (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s disease in August of 2007. This neuromuscular disorder is a certain death sentence. It takes its victims prisoner only for a short time as one loses the ability to do many things—walk, eat, or talk, for instance—before casting the final insult and robbing one of the ability to breathe. It attacks each person differently but the outcome is the same. Most are dead within three to five years.

I stare at my mom not knowing what to say. I still remember sitting in a lecture hall during my first year of medical school learning about this illness which slowly takes away a person’s independence but hideously leaves the brain and all mental functions completely intact. A chill runs down my spine the same way it did when I first heard about ALS, only this time it hits much closer to home.

I have known for several months that this diagnosis was coming. I have even yearned for it to be made official so that others can grieve the way that I have been grieving...crying at night after the kids go to bed...losing my appetite...losing weight...losing sleep.

If Mom knew, she would be surprised. I have put on a good face for her and many others. She has been waiting for various doctors’ appointments, unhurried, as she seems to know what the diagnosis will be. We have talked since her foot drop started 18 months ago about the list of possibilities. ALS was one that we both quickly dismissed as something that only happens to other people. I slowly began to know that it was true. However, she kept optimistically thinking that it must be something else.

It is surreal as I visit with Mom that day. Right now she has only a foot drop, which requires a

brace and cane, and her speech articulation is somewhat imprecise. My mind painfully jumps ahead: another foot brace, walker, wheelchair, feeding tube, Hospice? “Not my mom,” I think.

“... *I will be with you. I will not fail you or forsake you...*”<sup>1</sup> I can’t remember the exact scripture reference, but God brings this to my mind. I vow to look it up later. I am thankful for the quiet reassurance of God’s presence. My aching heart leans on the promise that the God who led Joshua and the Israelites into unknown territory thousands of years ago is the same God now carrying us in the palm of His hand.

“*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You are with me...*”<sup>2</sup> This psalm of comfort penned by King David and claimed by believers through the ages is suddenly so personal to me. I didn’t understand everything about the 23rd Psalm when I was encouraged to memorize it in my first grade Sunday School class. I am thankful that I have been encouraged through the years to treasure God’s word. It calms my soul as I walk through uncharted valleys, and God uses this memorization just when I need it most.

I don’t understand why we are going through any of this, but I know that when we don’t know what to pray “*the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.*”<sup>3</sup> I know that He cradles us in His hands. I know it now more than ever. Mom is not dead, and yet I grieve as though she is. I grieve for myself, for my dad, for our family, and for her as she goes through this. It seems that “groanings” are the only thoughts that are appropriate right now.

She shares many things that day.

“Will the grandkids remember me?”

“I want to watch them grow up.”

“I wish your dad didn’t have to go through this.”



“I wish for a moment that we could go back in time before this diagnosis so I could see the twinkle in your eyes with a genuine smile,” she tells me as she gives a characteristic wink of her eye trying to put on a smile herself just for me.

That hit the nail on the head. All of our interactions now have a painfully saddened overtone. All of us seem to be in a bit of a cloud—wanting to fix things and yet we are completely helpless. I wonder, “What is the right way to face this challenge before us? How do we deal with this in the best way for Mom and for each other? What is the bigger picture here? Why is this happening? If God is all powerful, and I believe that He is, why did He allow this?”

I can only come up with one answer that seems plausible—that in some way God must be glorified in this. I cannot understand it, but I believe that somehow, some way this experience must draw us and hopefully others closer to God.

*“God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”<sup>4</sup>*

I determine to do my level best to honor God with my thoughts, time, words, and actions so that even in the midst of this crisis others will see unwavering faith in Almighty God. I do not feel strong enough to do this, but I know that at the very least, I must try. If we must travel this road with Mom, I do not want the experience to be wasted because I was too self-centered to see outside of my own box. If our own pain can somehow bring others closer to God, I want this to happen.

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”<sup>5</sup>*

Does that mean that I have to walk around with a smile on my face all of the time as though life is rosy and tell everyone to have a good day? I hope not. I know that every day God wants to give me His

*“peace...which surpasses all understanding,”<sup>6</sup>* but sometimes I fall short in claiming it as my own. I do carry an inner peace that this disease is only temporary. It will take Mom away in this life, but it cannot rob me of the true joy of heaven and knowing that I will see her and many other loved ones again.

Even though I know this in my head and believe it with my whole being, my human emotions of loss, fear, and pain are still incredibly real and seem to betray my heart. I take comfort in the fact that even the Lord Jesus Christ in His deity and perfection asked God the Father on the eve of His crucifixion, *“If Thou are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done.”<sup>7</sup>*

Our own present suffering is minor compared to that of Christ, but I still find myself mentally tossing up this same prayer to God many times a day. I know that He understands. I truly never doubt for a moment that He knows exactly what He’s doing, but sometimes I falter and try to offer Him some advice. Typically, it goes something like this, “Okay, God. This has been a great learning experience. Now would be a great time for a miraculous healing. We will give you credit for it if You do it.” I’m sure that God must want to chuckle at my feeble suggestions, and yet I think He cries with me at the same time.

Time marches on and my heart continues to ache. We all involve ourselves in trying to do “normal” things. Another grandkid’s birthday party, another leg brace, another holiday celebration, another fall on the cement getting out of the car, a new walker, another sunset while we watch the kids play. Although we all, including Mom, try hard to pretend differently, nothing is normal any longer.

I listen as her speech becomes more laborious and imprecise. Her voice, once trained to sing quite well, now quivers and her lung capacity is obviously decreased. We sit at meals to enjoy family fellowship only to have these treasured times invariably interrupted by a protracted fit of choking and gasping for air as her airways spasm

to prevent aspiration of food. This is miserable to watch and hear, and I imagine that it is much more miserable to actually experience personally. I feel guilty as I often wish that she would stop eating so that I wouldn't have to painfully listen to this any longer. Despite my own wimpiness and selfishness, Mom manages most of her difficulties gracefully. *"My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."*<sup>8</sup>

As so many things are in life, I begin to realize that this experience is a marathon and not a sprint. I wish it was a relay in which I could pass the baton to someone else. I tell myself that this is our new normal. I learn that God provides grace for the challenges we face. He does not provide grace in one lump sum to last for two or three years, but just as the manna was given in the wilderness to the Israelites on a daily basis, so He sustains me with His grace for each moment. When I think that I won't be able to bear the next step, I find that *"with God all things are possible."*<sup>9</sup>

*"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*<sup>10</sup> How is this possible? In one moment I mentally shout out the verse "I press on..." and I am ready to victoriously march through this battle called ALS with Mom and Dad keeping an eternal perspective in mind. The next moment, I am a puddle of tears mentally curled up in the fetal position telling myself repeatedly—as though trying to convince myself—*"The Lord is near to the broken-hearted."*<sup>11</sup>

My spunky, church-organ-playing-"hostess-with-the-mostest" Mom (as Dad lovingly labeled her years ago) is in a motorized wheelchair, has a feeding tube, and can barely be understood if at all. The grandkids like the "rides" in the wheelchair and climb up and down giggling and laughing. Mom thrives on the attention.

Being with the grandkids for her is like the rest of us requiring air to live. She laughs as a little one pretends to be feeding himself through a feeding tube. The kids gather around her lap to try out her "voice box," an electronic, lap-sized kid magnet

which speaks the words you type and also has games on it. We try out the various voices and give her an English or Australian accent just for fun. We all laugh and make small talk, but deep down, we all just feel like it really stinks. We try to keep an eternal perspective, but living in the human world can make it hard to think past the next day.

*"Our Father who art in heaven,  
Hallowed by Thy name.*

*Thy kingdom come.*

*Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

*Give us this day our daily bread..."*<sup>12</sup> (i.e. grace, strength, peace, rest, and anything else that You know that we need before we realize it).

Any outings are now becoming a challenge. The summer heat of 2009 is "suffocating," to use a painful word that Mom is now living as her breathing becomes more laborious. She is rarely going to church because it requires too much energy, so my boys and I stay with her one Sunday at her house while Dad goes to Sunday School. He would usually be teaching as he has done for 40+ years, but the intense care required by Mom for several months now has necessitated flexibility with his usual responsibilities. In the cooler morning air, we all go outside to let the boys run around. Mom loves watching them play.

She writes me a note on her small dry erase pad which is much easier to transport than the cumbersome electronic device. As we sit there and I almost feel that I am wasting time, I wish that I could be at church to hear a message from God. I have just completed that thought as my three-year-old starts singing "Jesus loves me" as he dances around the yard. I decide that being outside in the cool morning air, listening to the birds, enjoying Mom's company, and hearing a very sweet version of "Jesus loves me" is better than being in any church sanctuary. God provides "daily bread" once again. *"Cease striving and know that I am God."*<sup>13</sup>

In the days surrounding Mom's passing, God's ever-ready presence continues to be apparent not only in a spiritual sense but also in tangible ways that His love is shown: the blessing of a rain shower on the day of her passing after a long dry-





spell, cookies made by loving hands who did not know that I had just asked God for them, a visit from a long-distance family member unexpectedly within hours of Mom's death when he had no knowledge of her passing, and many other events that are too complex to explain with pen and paper.

Only God, our Master, Creator, and Savior, can orchestrate such events. In the midst of sadness and turmoil, God proves faithful.

*"The Lord's lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is Thy faithfulness."*<sup>14</sup>

*"For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake (and Mom may get ALS), but My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken," says the Lord who has compassion on you.*"<sup>15</sup>

We will never have the answers to all of the "why" questions in this life. We will still feel sad when we think about Mom even though we know that she is running the golden streets of heaven and feasting at God's table. We will selfishly think about what it would be like to have her here with us in this imperfect world.

But we will never question the fact that we are held in the hands of a loving God who knows us better than we know ourselves and understands the complex tapestry of His kingdom being woven across time and space. He longs to draw all people closer to Him. If somehow this scary thing called ALS has had a part in that, my heart will be glad and weep at the same time. I have become comfortable with this mixture of emotions that will likely continue for the rest of my time on this side of heaven, and I am at peace with that.

*"For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully*

*just as I also have been fully known. But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."*<sup>16</sup>

So I will do my feeble best to pass the "baton" of God's Word and teach my children to love it and tattoo it on their hearts as they run this marathon called life. They have challenges awaiting them that I cannot fathom in 2011 as they are only 9 and 5 years of age, but God already knows what they need. I just have to plant the seed.

*"So shall My word be which goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing what I desire, and without succeeding in the matter for which I sent it."*<sup>17</sup>

Although this disease may have stripped Mom of everything but her soul just as she suspected it would, I know she is victorious in heaven. And I think she is proud to know that she was faithful in passing the baton to my brother and me. Once again, God's promises stand true as His Word has succeeded in the matter for which He sent it. *"Give us this day..."*<sup>12</sup>

**Tresa Muir McNeal** lives in Temple, TX, with Mike, her high school sweetheart and husband of 15 years. They are both internal medicine physicians at Scott & White Healthcare. They have two sons, James, age 9, and Jonas, age 5. They are active members of First Baptist Church of Temple. Tresa enjoys gardening, reading, and sewing, although her favorite times are spent with Mike, James, and Jonas.

All scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible.

<sup>1</sup> Joshua 1:5b

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 23:4

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:26b

<sup>4</sup> Romans 8: 28

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 19:14

<sup>6</sup> Philippians 4:7

<sup>7</sup> Luke 22:42

<sup>8</sup> II Corinthians 12:9

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 19:26

<sup>10</sup> Philippians 3:14

<sup>11</sup> Psalm 34:18

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 6:9-11

<sup>13</sup> Psalm 46:10

<sup>14</sup> Lamentations 3:22-23

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 54:10

<sup>16</sup> I Corinthians 13:12-13

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 55:11

# My Father's Name

*Georgia Herod—Liberty, MO*

As I opened the document binder, my heart began to race. Flipping quickly through the files, I soon found what I was looking for: my birth certificate. Holding it carefully, as I'd done many times before, I glanced through the familiar data—name, date of birth, time of birth, place of birth, mother's name. I paused at the space designated for father's name. And once again those old questions echoed in my mind, keeping pace with my rapidly beating pulse.

I was born before my mother was married. That she chose to keep me has always been a curiosity to me, especially since she was 21, away from home and living alone, working jobs at both a hospital and a WWII defense plant. Nearly eight months after I was born, she married a Danish immigrant farmer who was 25 years her senior, a man she had known only a couple of months. Though she never talked much about that decision, I sensed it was a marriage of convenience: he would take me too. A few days after the wedding, they went to the court house where he signed adoption papers.

conversation and I asked my father's name, she said, "I don't remember."

If that man did know about the pregnancy, did he ever think about me? Did he ever wonder what I looked like? Did he ever try to find me? When I look at my son who is much taller than my husband or me, I wonder if he bears resemblance to the unknown grandfather whose genes he carries.

I'm not sure when I first heard the word "bastard," but before I knew what it meant, I knew it was not good by the tone of disgust which accompanied its use. I was "illegitimate." I had been abandoned, rejected, left by the very man who had given me life. As a result, I always felt I had been a burden to my mother. Shame overshadowed every part of my life.

When I was 12, my parents divorced. After that, I saw my adoptive father only twice. Once again, I felt I had been carelessly tossed aside and left behind like a useless teddy bear. As I entered my teens, my life was filled with the chaos of divorce, multiple moves, changes in schools, and assuming the roles of homemaker and mother of my two younger brothers. Those demands didn't leave much time for me to think, but looking back, I realize I had a broken heart, was often angry, resentful, scared, lonely, and starved for affection.

I lived with those holes in my soul. Illegitimacy and abandonment fed questions about my identity, worth, and belonging. At night, I'd lay awake asking myself, "What's wrong with me? Am I ever going to be good enough? Will anyone ever want me? Who will love and accept me?"

Though I didn't voice those concerns aloud, they were always lurking behind attitudes and actions, waiting to burst forth when any difficulty might

Did he ever think about me? Did he ever wonder what I looked like? Did he ever try to find me?

While I had an adopted dad, I have no idea who my biological father is—my birth certificate is blank where it says "father's name." I don't know if that man even knew I was a possibility. I've surmised that he went off to war and Mother never told him she was pregnant—or she may not have known until after he was gone. Perhaps she told him—and he walked away.

Was it a significant relationship? Was it a one-night stand? My mother never told me anything about the circumstances. When we did have a



arise. Insecurity ruled. One day a friend would say, “Back off. You’re so clingy and possessive. You’re smothering me!” The next day a different classmate might say, “I thought you wanted to be friends. You’re acting like a snob.” I was like a marionette dangling on the strings of my feelings and the opinions of others because I wanted to belong, to be accepted. Because I feared rejection, my response to even the slightest conflict was retreat or “peace at any price.”

Though I had received Christ as Savior about the time my parents divorced, I didn’t grow spiritually nor understand that God not only wanted me to be in relationship to Him, but He also wanted to transform my life from the inside out, including what I believed about myself.

When I was 26 years old, reading through the Bible for the first time, I encountered Psalm 139:13-16. The Psalmist says to God,

*For You formed my inward parts;  
You wove me in my mother’s womb.  
I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and  
wonderfully made;  
Wonderful are Your works,  
And my soul knows it very well.  
My frame was not hidden from You,  
When I was made in secret . . .  
Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;  
And in Your book were all written  
The days that were ordained for me,  
When as yet there was not one of them.*

My heart nearly jumped out of my chest—I read it again and again. Then I called a friend and said, “Listen to this.” And read it to her. “God knew all about me even before my mother knew she was pregnant,” I shouted. “It says I’m fearfully and wonderfully made.” Oh, my heart sang!

Thus began the process of God renewing my mind as I submitted all the lies I’d believed about myself

to the scrutiny of the Holy Spirit. When those old thoughts crowded in, I talked to myself: “Speak God’s Truth to that.”

A few years ago when our church studied *The Purpose-Driven Life* by Rick Warren, my heart leapt again as I read Day Two. It was as if Warren had written personally to me.

“You are not an accident. Your birth was no mistake or mishap, and your life is no fluke of nature. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. He was not at all surprised by your birth. In fact, He expected it.” –Rick Warren

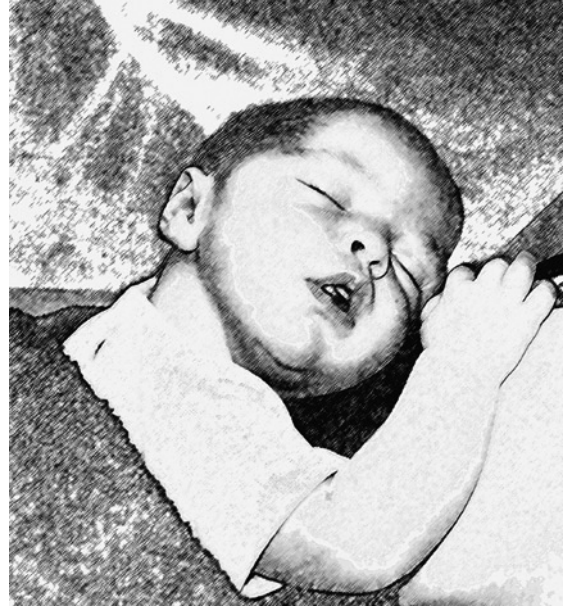
“You are not an accident. Your birth was no mistake or mishap, and your life is no fluke of nature. Your parents may not have planned you, but God did. He was not at all surprised by your birth. In fact, He expected it. Long before you were conceived by your parents, you were conceived in the mind of God. He thought of you first. It is not fate, nor chance, nor luck, nor coincidence that you are breathing at this very moment. You are alive because God wanted to create you! . . . While there are illegitimate parents, there are no illegitimate children” (pages 22-23).

God has continued to transform my thinking and my perspective through His Word. In Ephesians 1:4-5, Paul the apostle asserts that God “*chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons [or daughters] through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will.*”

As those truths have taken root and grown in the core of my being, I have accepted that I wasn’t an accident; I wasn’t illegitimate in the heart of God. Instead, He has chosen me to be holy and blameless. I have been adopted into the family of God, and He will never leave me nor forsake me.

Furthermore, according to Isaiah 43:1-5,  
God not only formed me,  
but He calls me by name;  
He knows me;  
I belong to Him;  
He loves me and I am precious in His sight.  
He is always with me.  
And because of all that, though a blank space still  
exists on my birth certificate,  
I KNOW my Father's name!

**Georgia Herod** and her husband, Jim, moved to Liberty, MO, in November, 2010, where their two children and four grandchildren reside. After 34 years of full-time pastoral ministry in Utah and Vermont, she and Jim are now providing interim pastoral leadership in churches. Georgia has a passion for God's Word and its power to transform lives. She is a Bible teacher, conference speaker, editor, and freelance writer, as well as an avid reader and a "wannabe" quilter. Her deepest desire is for women to have as their ambition to know God and to please Him (II Corinthians 5:9).



*Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, by Sue Brooks

“Satisfy us in the morning with Your faithful love  
so that we may shout with joy and be glad all our days”  
(Psalm 90:14 HCSV).



# Nana's Hope

An Introduction to Amy Sandberg

Shirley Reichard—Brigham City, UT

Amy Jane Sandberg was born April 1, 1981. Her name means “Beloved of God and Gift of God.” Her mother, Glenda, is the youngest of my four daughters. I, Nana, am the very happy grandmother who looked forward to the birth of the first grandchild born in the hospital across the street from where I live.

Seeing her for the first time was such a joy for us all. She was beautiful and appeared perfect, but the doctors soon discovered that her little heart had a serious problem. They transferred her to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City while her fearful mother was forced to stay in bed to recover from her C-section.

Right away, my husband and I put Amy and her parents on every prayer chain we knew of. Amy grew strong enough after several days in the hospital to come home, but we knew her condition was serious and in the near future open heart surgery was planned to save her life.

I am so thankful for the strength and determination of my daughter, Glenda. As Amy progressed, she took control of Amy's care and refused to believe that God would take this “Gift of God” from them. Before surgery, Amy was baptized in a private ceremony, dedicated to God's care and protection because she had to be kept as much as possible from crowds and possible exposure to infections.

Amy was recovering from her first surgery when I received a frantic call from Glenda at the San



*Standing Together*, by Steve Whitehorse at Twin Rock Bluff, UT

Francisco hospital asking for prayer. Amy was having seizures, which the doctors were unable to stop. Later, Glenda called and told me that she had been so upset watching what was happening that she finally demanded, “Let me feed her!” This calmed Amy and she had no more seizures. That was just the first time Glenda “interfered” with what the doctors advised and predicted.

Amy writes her story today living in Everett, Washington, with her sister Amanda. *God Supplies and Miracles Happen* is a compelling story. You will be inspired by who our God is and how much He does for those who love and cherish Him and His Word. Amy lives with some mental challenges, but like her mother, she refuses to let anything keep her down.

**Shirley Reichard's** profile is located on page 98.

# God Supplies and Miracles Happen

Amy Jane Sandberg—Klickatat, WA

*“I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live” (Psalm 104:33).*

God has been doing miracles for me all my life, opening new doors and windows. Sometimes the only way I could move forward was to crawl through them.

*“The Good Shepherd watches over His sheep; I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11).*

My journey began in 1981 when I was born with Truncus Arteriosus, a rare congenital heart disease in which one blood vessel exits out the right and left ventricles, rather than the pulmonary artery and aorta. The doctors assumed I wouldn't live past two months. Surprisingly, I lived to be seven months old before surgery was necessary.

At that time, heart specialists in San Francisco consented to try a new type of surgery on me. Although my parents didn't have the money for the surgery or the flight, God used the March of Dimes to provide the finances. And the new surgery worked! The doctor told my parents I would need surgery every two years to replace the shunts they had put in my heart.

My relationship with Jesus began when I was six. Back then, I had no understanding of how the real world was, nor what would be in the future. I was living in the moment. However, I knew who Jesus was, who God my Father was, and who the people were who loved me, especially my parents.

I believed Jesus when He said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). Thus, one night I climbed to the top bunk of my bed, folded my hands, closed my eyes and prayed probably one of the simplest prayers I have ever said. “Dear Jesus, will You please come into my heart, and

my life?” And with that I began my personal walk with Christ. Little did I know then what I would endure in the years ahead. But He has always been by my side.

Even as a child, I was passionate for Christ. I had my faults, but no fears. I went to God with everything: wishes, dreams, wants, and needs. And He was glad to supply me with all, whether a double rainbow or a board game. *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”* (Matthew 7:7). *“Delight yourself in the LORD and He will give you the desires of your heart”* (Psalm 37:4).

I didn't realize how much I really needed Christ until I was twelve years old, when I was preparing for the first major surgery since I was seven months old. It was just before Valentine's Day, and I was very scared. My neighbor gave me a Walkman so I would have something to listen to while I was recovering. It was uplifting, knowing that someone outside my family cared; my neighbor and her husband reminded me of God's never-ending love. Their thoughtfulness lifted my spirits immensely.

When informed of all the surgical risks, I became truly afraid. The point of the surgery was to change the shunts in my heart to pig tissue valves also known as homographs. Wrapped in a sheet, I sat on my dad's lap waiting for the surgical prep team to arrive. I was trying hard to put on a brave front, yet inside I was shaking. All the while, I knew God was with me and many people were praying for me.

*“For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on Thee”* (Isaiah 54:10). As I reflected on that Scripture, an



overwhelming peace came over me that could only be from God.

Towards the end of surgery, by no fault of any doctor, the heart and lung machine failed. We do not know the precise length of time it was not working. This caused me to have a massive stroke. I had burst blood vessels in all four lobes of my brain. I was totally brain dead. The neurologist said I would never wake up, or if I did, I would be a vegetable for the rest of my life. He encouraged my parents to pull the plug.

While this was happening, my pastor Carl Asbury and his wife Linda, along with Mrs. Shelton, a family friend, were driving in different parts of the state and were told by the Spirit to pull over and pray for me. I was also told that my Grandma Nana had put me on her church prayer chain as soon as she found out.

I was in a coma. Even in a coma a person can still hear what is going on, at least little blips, like a radio frequency coming and going. My parents started praying over me; my pastor and his wife came immediately to the hospital with praise and worship tapes, so I could hear them on the Walkman headset. It was God who provided the Walkman; He knew I would need it. *“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 4:19).

My body was slowly shutting down. Yet my family and friends did not give up believing that I would be okay, that I would survive and completely recover. While they prayed and some people argued with them, I was having a vision. I call it a vision because there is no other word to describe this.

I was in a beautiful garden surrounded by four colossal gates, one on each side. The walls and gates were made out of a glossy type of stone. Inside the garden, there seemed to be no plant life other than grass. The area was glowing with

colors; the colors alone made it a garden. Inside the walls were four square pools of water, which contained many alligators sunning. I had no fear, no questions about the scene; it was as if it was something natural to see. I sat on the edge of one of the pools and began a conversation with one of the alligators. After an uncertain amount of time, and no memory of what we discussed, the alligator told me, “You should go. He is waiting for you.” I smiled and nodded and did as he told me. I walked through one of the enormous gates.

There, I found myself looking at a sunset scene of three mountainous hills, and I knew these represented the milestones of Jesus’s life: His birth, His crucifixion, and His resurrection. There I saw Him, walking toward me. My Jesus! When He was but a few feet away, He opened His arms, and I fell into them. His love swept over me like crashing waves. I had never felt so safe, so secure in my life. And then He spoke and said, “All will be fine.”

With that I heard my mom say, *“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (II Timothy 1:7). I opened my eyes. My mom exploded with joy. “Amy, do you want to hear your other favorite verse? If so, then squeeze my hand!” I did. And she quoted my most favorite Bible verse: *“The devil comes only to steal from you, to kill you, and to destroy you; But I have come to bring you life, and to bring it abundantly”* (John 10:10).

By the time she was done with the verses, the nurses and doctors had announced to the whole floor that I was awake. It was a madhouse! I had been in a coma for four days, but God healed me. And despite what the neurologist had said, I was walking and fully functional only a few weeks later.

As I entered my teens, I was very active, praising God wherever I went, pushing my physical limits. I was having a full happy life. Despite cruel people and poor situations, I was happy most of the time. However, my body was rejecting what the surgery

had done. My cells were eating away the tissues of my heart, and my heart was expanding to protect itself.

When I was 16, I was told I needed surgery again. All my faith flew out the window with those words. I refused to listen, and I refused to agree to the surgery. “Look what happened last time! NO WAY!” I screamed inside, and I turned my back on God. He didn’t love me; He was just toying with me, my family, our money, our hearts. So I slammed the door in my heart, and I pushed Him out of my life.

Because of the news that I needed surgery again, I became an outcast at school. My friends were afraid to hang out with me for fear I would break. And my boyfriend at the time dumped me, saying, “You’re too much work!” So I turned to Wicca, modern witchcraft, and became someone I despised. Full of hate and resentment, I was malicious to the ones I loved. Yet, God was not going to let me go.

He gave my mom a vision one night of me preaching to people, saying, “I had not one, not two, but three open heart surgeries! And God has healed me.” She told me, but I refused to listen—until a week before the day I was scheduled to meet the surgeon. God did an amazing thing. Somehow He took me away from myself and turned me around, so that I could see myself, how I really felt, how I was acting, and how it was affecting people. It was as if God gifted me with inner sight. And because of that, I cried out to the Lord, asking for forgiveness, asking Him again to be the Lord of my life. I told him how fearful I was of what the future might hold. *“I cried out, ‘I am slipping!’ but Your unfailing love, O Lord, supported me”* (Psalms 94:18). It was at this time that I wrote the winning poem “A Hole of Hate,” which is included at the end of my article.

When the time came to meet the surgeon, I was shaking inside and out, even though I had full trust in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to take care of me. My physical mind and body refused to listen. I kept remembering the healing process just

a few years before, how weak I had been, how I had to learn to walk again, how easily I fell. I was completely afraid.

When I finally met the surgeon, I knew at that moment, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that he was the right person for the job. I was going to go through with it, and I would survive. *“I sought the LORD, and He answered me; He delivered me from all my fears”* (Psalm 34:4). *“You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart”* (Jeremiah 29:13).

In early November 1997, I became the third person in the world to have a heart rebuilt with donated tissue of all kinds. During recovery from the surgery, I caught a super-infection, which caused Respiratory Distress Syndrome: my lungs hardened like a rock. So the doctors decided to put me in an artificial coma to allow my lungs to recover naturally. While I slept for five weeks, between Thanksgiving and Christmas, people prayed for me, read the Bible to me, and played music for me once again. My Nana told me that I was on one of the largest prayer chains in the country.

While I was in the coma, God showed me another vision. This time I was on the sidelines watching. The following is a complex metaphorical vision in which I was floating in space watching the whole scene. Some man drilled a hole to the center of the earth, and inserted a bomb, which caused the world to explode. Within an instant, Father God removed everyone from the planet, so that the human race was just floating in space around nothing. And He put the earth back as it was, but better, and then replaced everyone. When finished, He said, “I’m in control.”

Then I woke up. I love how when He speaks things happen! *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble”* (Psalms 46:1). Knowing and believing that God is in control laid the final brick in my wall of faith, which I still have today.





The day I woke up from the coma was December 23rd. God had done it again. He had brought me out of danger; He had saved me, healed me, and made me new. I felt so fresh and pretty, so alive and happy! On Christmas I was overwhelmed with love, not just from God, but from my family who had gathered, and others who had been with me along the journey, including prayer partners, new and old friends. I was alive. My fight was won, losses remembered and supplies delivered.

God not only changed me, but He also changed the people around me. The teens who were giving me a hard time now wanted to be my friends. The girl with whom I had been fighting the most became my closest friend, and still is one of my good friends. My faith deepened greatly. And though struggles come and go, I know God is always with me. Psalm 104 reminds me that God is mighty Creator and the Sustainer of life.

God, my Father, has done so many things for me. He knows how much I can take and knows when I need Him most. He has always been there for me, pushing me along, giving me the tools I needed when I needed them to survive. I am a survivor because of the miracles and supplies He has given me!

As I look around my daily life and notice even the small things He provides, I don't take anything for granted: the parking space by the front door of a store when it's raining; finding something I thought I had lost forever; or even feeling the wind as it brushes against my cheek. Anything God does is important! He loves me with an unconditional love! *"For He loves us with unfailing love; the Lord's faithfulness endures forever. Praise the Lord!"* (Psalm 117:2 NLT).

## A Hole of Hate

By Amy Jane Sandberg

I'm falling down a deep black hole. There is no beginning nor an end, for this is a hole of hate. The more I fall, the deeper I get in all the hatred. Love can't be seen. It's not here, and deeper, deeper I fall. A circle of hate, I can't get out. Drops of blood are falling like rain forming rivers of blood flowing by.

From all murder and all rape, all hate must come to an end soon. It can't go on any more, I can't take it. I can't let it seep in under my skin. I have to keep my shield up. Or forever I'll be stuck in this hole. It's like my hands are tied behind my back.

Tumbling, twisting, and falling—forever.  
Suddenly I stop.

Something has me. What is it? It's a hand.  
But whose hand? Who would want to help me?  
It is God! Why? He says because He loves me.  
He says he wants to help me, He has a special plan for me.  
I am so surprised; I have never felt love like this before.

His love has surrounded me.

The hate is fading.  
He has rescued me. Thank you God for loving me!  
The hole is gone and now I'm free!

**Amy Jane Sandberg** is currently self-employed. She describes herself as a woman of God today and always, strong in mind, will, and faith. She is a writer and aspiring novelist, interested in non-fiction, fiction, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, and the spiritual. She was the 1998 USA Poet of the Year, thanks to a national collegiate contest.

“No prayer is too hard for Him to answer, no need too great for Him to supply, no predicament too great for Him to solve. Lay hold on this great and gripping truth: this God is your God.”  
—Selwyn Hughes, Nov. 21, *Everyday with Jesus Bible*



*Hanging On*, by Lynn M. Burgher

## Painful Blessings

*Penne Ryan—Salem OR*

Thank You, Lord, for sending painful blessings  
That masquerade as wounds, betrayals, lies  
And cause the evil, resident within me,  
To rise up face to face—caught eye to eye.

So I can put to death through crucifixion  
The thing that comes between You, LORD, and me  
To feel the cleansing wash of sweet contrition  
And sense my Lord much clearer now to me.

**Penne Ryan**, Associate Pastor over Adult Discipleship at West Salem Foursquare Church, lives with her husband Bob in Salem, Oregon. They have two grown children and three grandchildren.





*Anchored, by Sharmilla Felix*

*How happy is the man  
who does not follow the advice of the wicked  
or take the path of sinners  
or join a group of mockers!  
Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction,  
and he meditates on it day and night.  
He is like a tree planted beside streams of water  
that bears its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers.*

Psalm 1:1-3 (HCSB)

# Great is Thy Faithfulness

Karen Moe—Colorado Springs, CO

My life's journey has been a testimony to the Lord's grace, mercy, and faithfulness. Throughout my growing-up years in Denver, Colorado, my family religiously attended a mainstream major-denominational church in which I was confirmed at the age of 12 or 13, but none of us had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

Through the influence of my best friend, I began attending Youth for Christ events at early junior high age, and I trusted the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life. I was very earnest about my faith during 8th grade, but by the time I graduated from high school, I had lost interest in spiritual things.

Meanwhile, both of my parents and two of three siblings had come to a saving faith in Jesus Christ and a personal relationship with Him. I eagerly left home for college in the Midwest, where I completely lost my faith to the extent that I no longer believed in even the existence of God.

When I moved to the East Coast to attend graduate school, I became very caught up in the intellectual and godless culture of that place and those times (late 1960's and early 70's). I thought that belief in God was merely a comfortable crutch for weaklings who lacked the intellectual courage to face the existential meaninglessness of life. I considered myself one of the intelligentsia who didn't need a crutch.

As the years went on, I fell deeper and deeper into a life of immorality and sin, getting involved in inappropriate romantic relationships with one man after another. When a person has turned her back on God's standards of right and wrong, there is no moral compass to guide her behavior. I was very far from the Lord and very unhappy; although I thought I was living a life of freedom, I see now that I was actually in bondage to sin.

Paul's admonition to the Romans resonates with me: *"What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!"* (Romans 6:21 NIV).

In the summer of 1985, when I was nearly 40 years old, I joined my parents and my siblings and their spouses (all believers except one brother and his wife) and little children for a family vacation in the mountains of Colorado. I realized how much I missed Colorado and my family, and my heart was stirred to move back to Colorado. I returned home to New Jersey and put my townhouse on the market. When it sold in early 1986, I quit my computer software job and moved to Colorado Springs, living with my parents for a few months until I found a new job and a home of my own.

When my one unsaved brother (my ally in unbelief) came to the Lord a couple of years later, it perturbed me. One day as I spoke about my brother's change of heart with my mother, a mature Christian by that time, the conversation turned to the woman in Mark 5 who touched Jesus' clothes in faith and was healed from her long illness. That day, I prayed to God that if He existed, He would reveal Himself to me.

For several months, nothing happened. My mother asked me if I would like to study the Bible with her (*"faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"* [Romans 10:17 NIV]). I surprised myself by saying yes. But I told her that I wanted to study only what Jesus said, because as far as I was concerned, the Old Testament was just a collection of myths by a nomadic people as they transitioned to a settled lifestyle. So we started reading the book of John together. It was slow going as I had so many questions and so much unbelief. But the Bible is a self-authenticating book, and as



we studied, I found something in myself slowly changing.

We had finished John 4 when my parents went on a lengthy trip to Europe. I decided to continue reading on my own while they were gone. I was no longer sure that God didn't exist, but I was not yet certain that He did and that the Bible was His inerrant Word. I wanted God to make things clear by producing a definitive revelation that would prove His existence and the truth of the Bible to me—maybe some kind of little private miracle. Then I would believe.

One day while wishing that God would prove Himself, I realized that if He did so, faith would be meaningless, that the whole point of faith is to believe without iron-clad empirical proof. Soon after, I came in my own Bible reading to John 5:24, where Jesus says, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”* It suddenly became so clear to me that the point was simply to believe what Jesus said. I had a choice: I could choose to believe what Jesus said, or I could choose to believe what the intellectual pundits were saying.

I understood that this choice was not between blind faith and scientific fact; I knew that neither side had iron-clad empirical proof and that both sides required some measure of belief-without-proof, or “faith.” Either way, it would take faith. So whom would I believe and put my faith in—Jesus or the intellectuals? I knelt by my bed and told Jesus that I chose to believe His word and God Who sent Him. That was September 27, 1989. I don't know whether that is the date I was saved or the date that the Lord brought me back to Himself, but either way, I know that now I belong to Him.

He proceeded to change my life. The first thing to change was my language, which had become very

foul during my years on the East Coast. However, I didn't see any need to go to church or read the Bible, so He demonstrated Himself to me in a very unmistakable and dramatic way that really got my attention—a spanking that I richly deserved for a sin I was nurturing at that time.

I decided that I needed to know more about a God who could intervene in my life in such a personal way, and I began attending a very fundamental church and various Bible studies, as well as listening to spiritual teaching on Christian radio (especially by Dr. R.C. Sproul and Bob George). God made many changes in my life and gave me wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth. I am a completely different person now than I was before coming to the Lord—everything about me has changed: my thinking, my desires, my behavior, my interests, my worldview; people who knew me before would not think that I'm the same person, praise God! He has given me abundant blessings in so many areas of my life. Since putting my trust in Jesus, I have seen again and again the “proofs” I desired before I believed Him. As my mother later said, “It's not ‘see and believe,’ it's ‘believe and see.’”

Life since trusting Jesus has not been without some trials and struggles, including an unhappy marriage (and subsequent divorce) that I entered with disregard for His principles. But He has been teaching me year by year to trust Him more and more, not only for my eternal destiny but in all aspects of the here-and-now of everyday life. After nearly twenty-two years of walking with Jesus, I can testify that He is truly “sweeter as the years go by”!

**Karen Moe** lives in Colorado Springs, where she is newly retired and keeps busy with many activities, including participating in the life of her local church and fulfilling several personal ministries.

# Juicy Fruit

Natalie Rodriguez—West Palm Beach, FL

After our son, Nate, was born, life changed dramatically. Our finances, along with the United States economy, rapidly spiraled downward. One morning, I reluctantly sat down with coffee and laptop to find a job and make childcare arrangements. I felt overwhelmed with worry and guilt. I really didn't want to be away from my children. How would this change affect our family dynamics? Not to mention, childcare is expensive, but without a second income, we wouldn't be able to make our bills. I felt lost, abandoned, and alone. Where could I turn?

I decided to procrastinate and put aside my quest for change and go to my daily devotional instead. The reading was Luke 13:11, *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him."* Frustrated, I vented my emotions: "God, I'm heartbroken. You know I don't want this, and I know I can trust You. I thought being home with the kids was a good gift, for them. So right now, things don't make sense. How many times have I thought something was good, but it seemed we didn't agree? Please, God, show me what lesson You're trying to teach me." I closed my Bible, sighed deeply, and then returned to my job search.

A moment later, I felt a tap on my leg and a tug on my shirt. It was Nate, my tender three-year-old son. Two oval-shaped eyes with hues of espresso and chocolate stared up into mine. His tiny hand extended a flat square box of gum to me. "Mommy, pweeze open for me."

"Okay, Nate. One minute, I will open it."

He smiled. Intently, he watched me tear open a section. I handed him a piece. Anxiously, he popped it into his mouth and began chewing. The

juices flowed around his lips as he said, "Mommy, you bwake the outside, I get the inside, wight?"

Instantly, I realized how God's gifts involve the working of the Holy Spirit. He often requires my brokenness to change me into the woman that He wants me to become. *"If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"* I started to ponder, "What exactly is a good gift from God?"

Many times, what I thought was good wasn't what would grow my character, but instead crippled it. My tendency is to reach for comforts and keep things the same. Change often means challenge, and challenge means I have to face my weaknesses. In fact, the most difficult times in my life were when I needed Him most. During these periods of dependency, my character grew.

I'd like to think that God is as interested in giving me comforts as I am in taking them, but the truth is, more often, He is not. What about this period of my life? Would the best gift for me and my family be a job with good pay and benefits? Or a childcare center that I can afford? Could the better gift be for us to learn how to trust Him in spite of the circumstances and difficulties?

Change can be a lot like giving birth, and this transition felt similar to me. The struggle reminded me of my initiation into motherhood and how those changes brought me to the end of myself. I had no choice but to lean in and cling to Him because there was nothing left of me.

For some women, pregnancy is a time of glowing skin, eating for two, and joyful expectancy. However, I wasn't so lucky. In my early twenties, my husband and I decided to start a family. Since it was my first time expecting, I had no idea how



my body would react to the changes. I experienced nausea and fatigue, and I lost 15 pounds. When I was three months along, I experienced painful cramps one afternoon. My pregnancy was in jeopardy, so I was placed on complete bed rest until the delivery.

My life on the go turned into feet propped up high and a home monitoring system to detect the baby's heart rate for signs of stress. I was determined to make the most of the time. So while lying on my back, I cross-stitched a pillow and blanket and read every book on parenting that my husband could find at the local library. My body rejected the pregnancy, no matter how hard I tried to follow my doctor's protocol. I had a premature delivery, but was able to go home with my baby after a few days.

The sacrifice of waiting at home was worth every minute, and each time I looked into my newborn's face, joy was all I remembered. Of course, soon thereafter, I thought a sibling was in order. Perhaps my previous pregnancy woes were a fluke. So, naively, without consulting the doctor, we planned for another child and soon I was pregnant. As time progressed, the same symptoms appeared. Again, I was a high-risk pregnancy; only this time, I delivered two months early, and this child's lungs weren't fully developed. He couldn't go home with me, but instead was placed in the NICU for several weeks until he was able to breathe on his own. When I was finally able to take him home, I was strongly urged to abstain from having a third child. I learned that I had an incompetent cervix and that my next pregnancy could result in a miscarriage.

Fourteen years later, my boys were teenagers. My identity over the years had been wrapped up in motherhood and my sons' happiness and success. As they entered manhood, the pull away from the mother-son relationship hurt me. Yes, I had my career, but still my absolute joy was in my role as a

“Let me experience Your faithful love in the morning, for I trust in You. Reveal to me the way I should go, because I long for You” (Psalm 143:8 HCSB).



*Ready to Receive, by Sue Brooks*

doting mother. The emptiness I felt inside longed for something tangible to fill the hollowness in my heart.

Yes, I had a relationship with God, but I have to confess, for me, I wanted more. I thought what I really needed was bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. The thought that He could complete me never really crossed my mind. I remembered my pregnancy experiences and with reluctance wiped the idea of going through pregnancy out of my mind.

Yet, I still felt unfulfilled. The idea of turning to God and asking Him to complete me and redefine me as a woman never crossed my mind. I determined to place the idea of risk into God's hands. If God granted me a child, then He would carry me through. Modern medicine had advanced, hadn't it? Perhaps, there were new solutions for my physical deficiency. I visited my doctor, and was assured that there was some medical advancement that would help, and with careful monitoring, I could successfully carry a child to term.

A few months later, I discovered I was pregnant with Nate. Equipped with prior knowledge of complications, I kept in close contact with my doctor. I did everything right. I ate right. I slept, stayed off my feet, and exercised sparingly. All was going well. The baby was developing fine; I was doing great until my seventh month. I woke up and saw floating stars, then white stripes flash before my eyes. Concerned, I called my doctor. I told the medical assistant my symptoms and was told to come in for an exam.

“I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened; He saved me from all my troubles”  
(Psalm 34:4-6 NLT).

After being examined, the doctor was ready to send me home. “Everything’s normal,” he told me. I realized we hadn’t discussed my stars and stripes situation. So, I asked, “Is it normal to see stars and stripes?” Quizzically, he looked up from his clipboard and answered, “No.” Then he admitted me to the hospital to stay for one day. That evening, everything was monitored carefully. All was normal throughout the night. In the morning, my condition declined rapidly.

My legs had swollen to the size of tree trunks, my body bloated, and the baby’s heart monitor placed around my protruding belly signaled severe distress. The normal heart rate for a newborn is well into the mid-100s, yet his was in the low 50s. My blood pressure had risen to 190/150. I asked the nurse what was wrong with me. She said, “Pre-eclampsia,” a term I had never heard before. Simplified, pre-eclampsia is a condition where the body is unable to process proteins, so toxins build up in the body, causing damage to the liver and kidneys. The result is high blood pressure. When the doctor came to visit me, she said, “Natalie, you are in grave danger, but the baby is still too young to deliver. You need to receive a series of shots to

try to develop his lungs. We will closely monitor you to keep you from going into seizure or coma.”

She assured me that in the event that my body went into severe crisis, an emergency C-section would be done to save both lives. My body burned. I could not move or see. Visitors were not permitted to stay with me. Anything could cause unnecessary stress that could elevate my blood pressure. I was given medication by IV to keep my body from decompensating further. I was isolated in a dark room. No television or radio was allowed.

In the silence, my loneliness was deafening. My worst fears surfaced. I was afraid I’d lose the baby, or worse yet, I would die. What about the future of my teenagers? How would they feel about losing their mother? I felt lost, helpless, and abandoned. Tears streamed down my cheeks, as I lay unable to move, but mentally whirling, rendering silent prayer to God. “Oh, Father,” I sobbed. “I’m so sorry. I am so, so sorry for not being satisfied with what You gave me and for wanting more. I can’t do this without You. I need You. Please be with me.” For the first time in my life, I understood what it was to be broken at the core of my being and to be in utter weakness.

Suddenly, a presence filled the room. I felt the warmth of two arms wrap around my body, holding me, comforting me. Somehow, the sensation brought me peace. I knew it was my Savior, my God, who had come to rescue me. My empty heart became willingly open. My grief and fear dissipated. I felt full, experiencing this pure and divine love. Exhausted and finally relieved that no matter what happened, I was not alone, I fell asleep, basking in the tenderness of His mercy.

Days later, my condition turned for the worse. My lab results were significantly abnormal and my blood pressure had spiked dramatically. I was rushed to surgery, and as promised, Nate was delivered, via an emergency C-section. Although his lungs had developed with the shot treatment I received, he had other complications because he was born so early.





I was also not out of the woods yet. I still had low blood pressure and other complications that had manifested. For weeks and months, the two of us clung to our lives. Yet, where fear once existed, now I had confidence. The tragedy of my brokenness rendered the sweetest gifts, God's spiritual fruits. I found peace. No longer was I despairing. Fear became hope of His deliverance. In the midst of crisis, I could smile. Unhappiness became joy. I knew that God was in control of the situation and things were going to be okay. My suffering brought me closer to Him. Grace filled my heart.

I want to remember always the love I had received during that brokenness. I wanted to forgive the way that I had been forgiven. My emptiness gave room for God to pour His love into me. Now, like a child, I lift up my hand, pat His leg, and tug His heart asking, "Take my entire being, and God, will you open for me?"

"Sometimes the best place to start rebuilding your faith is by writing out your experience of a difficult impasse that, humanly speaking, seems unfair, unreasonable, and too much to bear. Then write down where you are in your walk with God. Describe what you currently believe about His character and how that impacts your ability to hold on to your faith.

If you are in too much pain to take this action step now, that's all right. Simply acknowledging that you're in a painful place and you don't have all the answers is a good place to start. In fact, it can be a humble first step to being surprised by faith in the midst of an unexpected journey."

—Carol Kent, *Between a Rock and a Grace Place*

*"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (II Corinthians 4:7 NIV).*

**Natalie K. Rodriguez** accepted Christ at the age of 16 and passionately shares her faith with others. Her blog can be found at <http://godrevealyourself2me.wordpress.com>. Natalie is a full-time writer and current President of Palm Beach American Christian Writers. She is an adjunct for pre-composition at Palm Beach Atlantic University as an ESL specialist. She obtained her Masters in Health Law at Nova Southeastern University, and her undergraduate degrees are in Comparative Religious Studies and English Literature from the University of Miami. She is devoted mother to Trevor, 18, Isiah, 17, Nate, 4, and Gianna Nicole, 2.



*Fall Glory*, by Nancy D'Oporto

# First, I Need to Know the God Who Saved Me

*Shannan Gunn—Plymouth, UT*

Low self-esteem ruled my world, unlovable was my hallmark, and working hard and taking orders were my calling. My lifestyle was pride and the blackness of immorality.

A brutal childhood led me into a marriage that was dark and unloving. But my three wounded children helped to save my soul. They encouraged me to stand my ground and be true to their needs. Without their unconditional love, I would have been lost.

The one and only breath of my grandson, Elija, started me down Christ's path. His father, Lem, my son-in-law, had taken me to church for weeks before Elija died. The songs we sang lifted my heart to a place I had never been before—soft, comforting songs that spoke of God's Word and His salvation.

Lem, too, had been lost to God for a time. Drugs and alcohol had darkened his life. Hitting rock bottom had taken him to church where he met Pastor Larry. This soft-spoken man's encouragement led Lem to the Lord in a powerful way.



*Lem with his son, Isaiah, by April Camp*

He wanted to reach out to all the bikers who were lost, so he joined “Soldiers for Jesus.” These guys are big, big men with leathers and bandanas and tattoos, lots of hair on their faces. And when they speak, you expect to hear anger but instead, you get “God bless you” and hugs that feel like God Himself has missed seeing you.

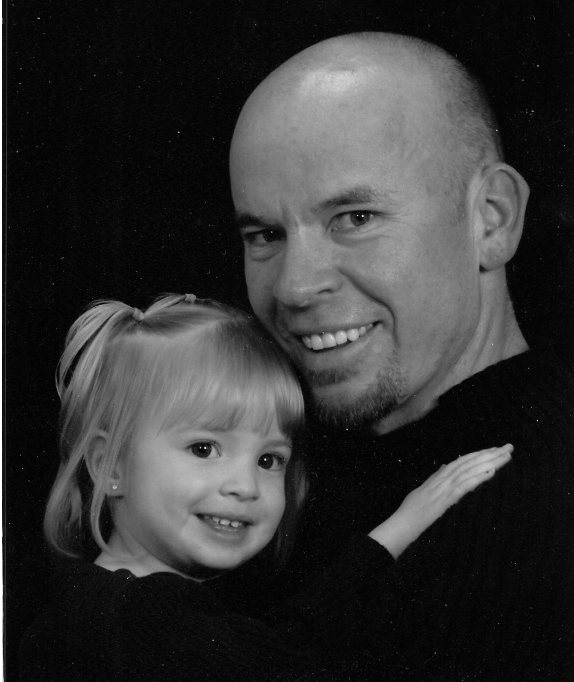
Lem, along with four other Soldiers, became a living example of what God's Word can do. Their words were of God, and His grace and mercy filled the air. Soon there were 12 men and their families dedicating their lives to God's work.

As I walked into the hospital room, some of the Soldiers were praying for Amber and Elija. As the next man showed up with something he thought might help, they prayed together again. Their hugs were as warm and loving as my kids gave me. Soon my heart started melting.

For weeks they made sure that I was okay and took Amber's two daughters back and forth to school with money for lunch. Not one of them ever came around without God on his mind. I truly had never met anyone, let alone a whole group of big men like the Soldiers, who spoke of God in such a personal way. Little did I know that was the first time God entered into my heart in any real way.

Before this, I can't remember ever going to church and feeling Christ. I can't remember ever seeking His forgiveness. But now, I wanted it. I wanted the peace I saw in Lem and the Soldiers. I wanted to feel God's presence.





*Wes and Ashtin, 2005, Family Album*

However, it took the heart-wrenching death of my granddaughter, Ashtin, to slap me in the face. My son Wes's beautiful four-year-old loved her dad, but the whims of her 24-year-old mother tore the family apart. Wes's love for Ashtin kept him on the run 24/7 to dance and gymnastics and to and from daycare. She spent every other weekend with him.

Until one early spring afternoon, when her mom came to pick her up, because she wanted to get some hair extensions so she could party.

An SUV ran a red light, hitting the car's right side where Ashtin was sitting. Her death devastated all of us. I saw no sparkle in my son's eyes. No life or harmony. Just pain.

That's when my soul cried out for God's mercy. *What have I done? Why do I have to feel this horrendous loss? Why do I have to see everyone in my family in pain?*

I have heard it said that if just one person comes to God because of the unforeseen death of a loved one, then that death is not in vain. But if it took my Ashtin's death to get my attention, I was ashamed of my lost soul.

Soon I began to listen to Christian radio stations. Their words started grabbing at something inside me. But I resisted. *God can't forgive me! I've sinned too much and for too long. Why would He want an old sinner like me? I'm not strong enough to walk His path.*

*"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am"*  
(John 14:1-3 NLT).

I heard that to walk with God you need a community to help you. I had always wanted friends with whom we could do things because my husband and I were always loners. But I really wanted more than that. I looked for a church community that would feed my soul with song and God's Word.

Then one morning my heart said *NOW, I just need to believe in Him. I can do it.* So I made a covenant with God. I begged for forgiveness. I began learning His Word and finding my truth there.

*"He went without comfort so you might have it. He postponed joy so you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow."* –Joni Eareckson Tada



*Some of the Soldiers for Jesus and Friends, by April Camp*

Although my sinfulness is still dominant and my habits strong, I can feel His presence changing me in my thoughts and in my actions. I love what is happening. I treasure the thought that I am truly loved by God and forgiven of all my sins.

I have yet to find the calling that digs deep into my soul, that makes the morning shine! What I have in mind is knowing that I have a job to do for God and that He is trusting in me to get it done. And that He needs my story to gather in His flock.

But first I need to know the God Who saved me.

**Shannan Gunn** lives in Plymouth, UT, with her husband, Carl. They enjoy fishing. They are new to Christianity and are loving it. They have eight children, 14 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren.

“The giant step in the walk of faith is the one we take when we decide God is no longer a part of our lives, He is our life.”

~Beth Moore



# Life's Road Map

*Janetta Messmer—Shenandoah, TX*

The journey on life's road map makes twists and turns.  
One day I'm traveling through mountainous switchbacks.  
Moments later, down into a spacious valley filled with an  
abundance of wildflowers, dancing all around.  
Muted colors of the rainbow spring forth from their petals.  
Peace reflects itself on nearby lakes and streams,  
soothing, caressing, touching my weary soul.  
Inner contentment found—a sigh escapes. Then  
I blink, the pavement's edge looms into nothingness.  
Darkness embodies light. Unable to see, I inch my way  
along. Groping for rays of the sun to shine down—  
to take away the blackness clinging to my very being.  
I shake, quake, scream at the tunnel of despair. Seems  
No One hears the turmoil as I try to climb higher and higher.  
Potholes almost swallow up the last of my hopes, dreams, joy.  
But wait! There's a cool breeze. It's washing over me.  
My eyes flutter open to witness a brand new day.  
Anguish disappears as the mist lifts from the mountaintop.  
Heaven surrounds me in a blanket of freshly fallen splendor.  
He heard me. I'm now resting in His arms.  
You're home, my child.

**Janetta Messmer** resides in Shenandoah, Texas, with her husband, Ray, of almost 30 years. She loves to write, but found editing a manuscript rings her bell. Janetta belongs to several writing groups and Toastmasters International. When she's not writing, editing, or speaking, she and her husband enjoy traveling, especially cruising.

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24 NIV).



*Lead Me Along the Right Path, by Pam Geniac*

# Letting Go While Holding On

Martha Willey—Northwood, OH

I fell in love with writing when I was in fourth grade. I wrote stories every day on the manual typewriter I'd received as a gift from my parents, imagining the day when I would win an Oscar for Best Screenplay. Becoming a writer became my life dream.

I went into bookstores and instantly became jealous of the writers whose work had been published. "Why them and not me, Lord?" I asked as I walked up and down the aisles. I still prayed about my writing, but my heart really wasn't in it. I was beginning to feel I was wasting my time praying for my dream to come true.

I also questioned whether or not God wanted me to be a writer. Because Jeremiah 29:11 says, "*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future,*" I believed God had put the desire in my heart. Therefore, it was part of His plan for me. But since I was no closer to realizing my dream to be a published author than I was when I started, maybe I was wrong. Maybe I was just wasting my time. The stress of my ping-pong thinking was taking a toll on me and my family who had to deal with my growing despair over my fading dream.

Finally, I couldn't stand it any longer and got down on my hands and knees and prayed something I never thought I would. I asked God to take my love for writing away because my dream was just too painful to hang onto anymore.

I shared my decision with my best friend when we were on vacation. "I'm giving up writing because God doesn't want me to be a writer."

"Why do you think that?" she asked.

"Because I haven't been published," I said.

My friend gave it to me straight. "Does it really take getting published to prove to you that God wants you to write?" she asked. "Maybe God wants you to use your writing to encourage others, not get on the best seller list."



*Exotic Find*, by Barbara Ali

I didn't seek much input from God. I wrote as I pleased about what I pleased. It didn't occur to me that God would be interested in my writing. Later, when I accepted Christ as my Savior, my attitudes about life and writing changed. After that, whenever I sat down, I prayed before I started and changed the subjects I wrote about. I wanted my writing to honor God.

I thought He would bless my endeavors, so I was stunned when the rejection letters kept coming. "How can this be?" I asked tearfully as I looked up towards Heaven. "Isn't my writing pleasing to you, God? What more do You want?"

I kept on, but discouragement was beginning to weigh me down. My file cabinet drawers were filling up with unsold stories and rejection letters.



“What do you mean?”

“You’re always sending letters and cards out to people. Isn’t that writing?”

“I guess,” I mumbled.

“And didn’t you write some skits for the kids in your church to perform?”

“Well, yeah, but that’s not the same.”

“Why isn’t it?”

When I didn’t answer, she continued, “Have you ever written something for your children? I bet it would mean a lot to them to have something you wrote.”

Her words were convicting. Shamefully, I had never considered my own family an important enough audience to write for. I saw that I had been judging my success as a writer not by God’s standards but by whether or not I had a publishing contract. I also came to see that my prayers hadn’t really been about seeking God’s will concerning my dream. Instead, I had been telling God what I wanted and how I expected Him to respond to my request.

The first thing I did was ask God to forgive me. The second step I took was to pick up my pen and paper and begin working on a mystery for my sons. They were so excited when I told them what I was doing. At the same time, I dabbled around, writing a how-to article for a magazine and a book review for an online magazine. This time I meant it when I prayed for God’s will to be done concerning these submissions and for His help to accept whatever the outcome was.

Imagine the celebration in my house when I sold both those pieces during the same week! I thanked God for this blessing and for not letting me quit.

I thanked Him for sending along my friend who not only had helped me in one of my darkest times, but also had the courage to speak to me as boldly as she had. I felt like my dream was finally coming to life all around me, and it was beautiful. Little did I know, but the biggest test of how much I trusted God was yet to come.



*Mimosa Blossoms*, by Barbara Ali

I had contacted an editor at a major publishing house and asked if I could send her a manuscript for a book I’d written. I knew I was probably wasting my time because manuscripts aren’t usually acquired that way. I was floored when she responded with a “yes” to my request. As the months went by, the editor kept me up-to-date on the favorable reports she was getting concerning my manuscript. With each hurdle my manuscript got over, I grew in confidence that it would be published. In the back of my mind, I was already planning the party to celebrate my book contract.

Then the email arrived. “Sorry, but we aren’t able to . . .” I couldn’t read the rest through my tears. I rushed to my room, fell on my knees, and wept before God. I had been so certain this was the one. I felt God had been opening up door after door for me. Now that door had been slammed. “Why, Lord, did you bring me this far and then tell me ‘No?’” I cried.

I realized in that moment of despair that I faced a question that needed answering. Did I really trust God with my dream of being a writer? Did I believe He knew what was best for me and that He could make something good come of my disappointment? Did I trust in His view of my life when I could only see the here and now?

Over the next few days, while I grieved about what happened, I began to see the bigger lesson God wanted me to learn. Psalm 46:10 says we are to “*Be still and know that I am God.*” Being still has never been easy for me. I’ve always believed that if I’m involved in the process, I can control the outcome. God used my desire to be a writer to show me that I must hand things over to Him and not continue worrying about the situation or trying to manipulate it. Had my work been published immediately, I wouldn’t have learned this valuable life lesson.

I was finally at the point where I could pray, “Yes, God, I trust You, not only with my writing, but with my family, my job, my health, my needs and my dreams. I trust You, Lord, to bring things about in my life in the time and manner that You deem best.”

Releasing everything to God was like being let out of a small, dark room. Yes, I still get disappointed when a rejection letter comes, but I no longer doubt that God wants me to write. And even though my writing career hasn’t unfolded the way I imagined, I’m trying my best to be thankful and to remember that there isn’t a safer place for my dreams or my life than in God’s hands.

*“Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for Him’”* (Lamentations 3:22-24 NIV).

**Martha Willey** lives with her husband in Northwood, Ohio. They have three boys, one in college and two in their junior year of high school. Martha works as a teacher’s aide with children who have special needs. When she’s not writing, Martha enjoys reading, watching old movies, and doing needlework.

“When we write about what matters to us most, words will take us places we don’t want to go. You begin to see that you will have to say things you don’t want to say, that may even be dangerous to say, but are absolutely necessary.” –Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace*





# Brenda's Story

Shelley Kancitis—Ogden, UT

Few people would sign up for the class I just took. I didn't sign up either. God, however, had different plans. He picked me up and placed me in a front row seat. The textbook and teacher were my friend, Brenda.

Life has never been easy for her, but the Grand Slam of Affliction entered her life when her eight-year-old son, Nathan, was diagnosed with a disease that would be terminal without a successful bone marrow transplant. As I watched Brenda respond to this fearsome diagnosis, I was reminded of the wondrous sufficiency of Jesus, along with how to respond as a Christian to heart-rending news.

Brenda's battle cry goes like this: *If God says to do it—that is what I do.* Her decision-making stems from unyielding belief in the efficacy of God's Word, the foundation of her life since accepting Jesus six years ago. Don't offer other Christian books to Brenda because she'll probably tell you that the Bible is all she needs. From this Book, her friends saw wisdom come to life as we have walked beside Brenda through tremendous trials. (She would correct me and say that plenty of other people have had crises and that is just the way life is.)

Regardless, ponder these points *when*, not *if*, suffering invades your life.

**God sees the big picture.** Leave the snapshots alone. In other words, wait upon the Lord as the picture develops; one hour, one day, or one month at a time. Nathan had a very rare form of his disease and lab tests were often inconclusive.

"Wait" was the daily prescription. In Psalm 27:14 (NIV), God says *"Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."*

**God's sufficiency is enough for *any* situation.**

He provides comfort, strength, peace, courage, Christian medical personnel, and even LEGOs. I think Brenda would say that she never lacked what she needed, even when the needs seemed overwhelming and urgent.

**Pray.** Brenda prayed continually except when she was emotionally exhausted. Then she called on the Holy Spirit. *"... We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express"* (Romans 8:26 NIV).

**In moments of utter panic, dial G-O-D first and then the troops.** Particularly when the initial diagnosis seemed so terrifying, Brenda got on her cell phone, which rarely worked within the hospital, and was able to reach the Children's Ministry leader, who mobilized people to pray immediately. In Joshua 1: 9 (NIV), God strengthens us with these words: *"Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."*

**Trust in the Lord.** He is the Great Physician even if His cure is to take our loved one to Heaven. Nathan's tests always seemed to be inconclusive so the doctors had to take risks in deciding how to treat him. The wrong decision could have been fatal. *"I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'"* (Psalm 91:2 NIV).

**Love God more than anything or anybody.**

Brenda's joy in the Lord shone through her Caring Bridge journal, a communication tool provided

at the hospital for families to maintain contact with friends and family. She always found reasons to praise Him even in the midst of setbacks, which were frequent. She praised God and He responded with peace and strength and love.

**Read your Bible even if you can only manage a few verses.**

Brenda fought the enemies of doubt, despair, and fear with the Sword of the Spirit, God's Word. Brenda's use of that Sword helped me to monitor my words so that they were in line with Scripture. (Brenda wields that Sword whenever necessary!)



*Set Your Mind on Things Above*, by Nancy D'Oporto

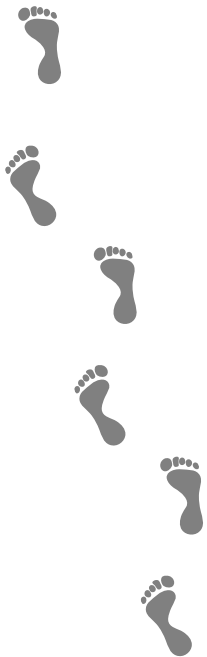
**You can advance the cause of Jesus no matter where you are and what problems you have.** This thought remained paramount in Brenda's mind as she thought of ways to leave His footprints wherever she was: the hospital room, the corridors, the lunchroom, and Caring Bridge Journal. This bridge to those who walked alongside her was often as much about faith in Jesus as it was about Nathan, who was entwined with God's Son throughout his suffering.

**Ask for help.** Brenda will tell you that trials provide many lessons in humility, but yield great rewards as God has promised. Because she made her needs known, the Body of Christ was able to respond in wonderful ways according to each giver's time and talents. One friend offered to cut her hair in the hospital room and another gave her body lotion and a hand massage. Toys flooded in from across the country, along with books, cards, and other thoughtful gifts. The most powerful gift, however, was prayer, which blanketed Brenda and Nathan with sweet peace.

**The world doesn't revolve around you, even if you are in the midst of a trial.** Brenda's world revolves around Jesus—not Brenda. When you entered Nathan's hospital room, Brenda would offer the best chair and ask how life was going for you, a surprising question from someone whose eight-year-old son was gravely ill.

**Keep your eye on the goal.** In this case, it was Nathan's recovery. Brenda praised the helpers and protested the troublemakers. It didn't matter if it was a doctor or technician, Brenda refused to be intimidated. Nathan's emotional and physical well-being was all that mattered. If the pill didn't come at the scheduled time, the nurse was given a "grace period" and then Brenda firmly pressed the call button to request what Nathan needed.

**Let the small stuff go.** That means just about everything except bottom-line physical and emotional needs of yourself and other family members. Brenda stayed with Nathan for several months at Primary Children's Medical Center, so she depended on her husband, relatives, and friends to take care of the home front.



**Be grateful.** Brenda may never be able to write all the thank-you notes she would like to write, but she was always grateful for the countless kindnesses extended to her and her family. Gratefulness leads to praise that leads to our Lord. It changes the focus from our problem to God's provision.

Brenda will probably shrug her shoulders at these words of appreciation for her class on suffering, so I will end these observations the way I think she would want me to end them. She would say that she is a fallible human being just like the rest of us. She shed tears. She was frightened. She felt anxious. But Brenda would firmly proclaim that she has an infallible, miracle-making, strength-bearing, awesome God who is the source of anything that is good in her. And, she would say, don't forget to read your Bible regularly. It truly is *the* guidebook for life.

Postscript: Nathan's bone marrow transplant from his sister successfully engrafted. He is now at home with his family. Many health challenges remain, but the medical team is hopeful that Nathan will continue to recover from aplastic anemia.

**Shelley Kancitis's** profile is located on page 37.

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the years,  
'Give me a light that I may walk safely into the unknown.'  
He said to me, 'Go out into the darkness  
And put your hand into the hand of God  
And He shall be to you brighter than a light  
And safer than a known way.'"

—Minnie Louise Haskins, 1908

# A Different Kind of Race

Laurie Glass—Viroqua, WI

I felt as if I was running a race. Squinting, I strained to see the finish line ahead. Weary, I doubted I would complete the race. Feeling breathless and like my legs were cramping up, I questioned how I would persevere.

This race took place while I struggled to break free of an eating disorder. For so long it seemed easier to give in to anorexia, but I finally reached the point where I believed there was a better life waiting for me. Although I was afraid I would go through all of the work to recover only to relapse again, I knew I had to try my best. With my running shoes on, I emerged from the starting block.

“Intimacy may not be rushed. . . We can’t dash into God’s presence and choke down spiritual inwardness . . . It is time-consuming, open only to minds willing to sample spirituality in small bites savoring each one.”  
—Calvin Miller

I had to work through underlying issues. Over time, I addressed the pain, lack of purpose, confusion, and despair. I healed from the abandonment I had felt during the difficult circumstances that led to the eating disorder. I no longer doubted God had a purpose for my life, and I could finally see hope for the future. This all took countless hours of tears, prayers, and writing in my journal, step-by-step.

Eventually, though, I let go of emotional pain and gained healthier perspectives of my life and drew closer to the Lord. So, although I clung to unhealthy behaviors for far too long, working through the turmoil served me well. Doing so also freed up the energy I needed to begin planning the race and face the remaining issues.

It was time to recognize the lies that had kept me bound to a life of self-destruction. “My doctor may say I’m underweight, but I know that I’m fat. I look disgusting.” It seemed impossible to accept my appearance, although in others’ eyes, there was nothing wrong with how I looked.

Fear was tied in with the lies. “I will lose total control of my eating and my weight if I stop restricting my food intake. Besides, restricting puts me in control.” This was the first lie to go. In fact, anorexia filled me with guilt and shame. It became apparent that I was not controlling it, but that it was controlling me.

After living according to the lies for so long, it took much time and discipline to change my thinking. To continue running on the right track, I wrote down corresponding truths, verses, and inspirational quotes on note cards so the truth was readily accessible to me. Romans 12:2 (NIV) contains a promise of transformation, which is exactly what I wanted, needed, and eventually experienced: *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

Reminders in black and white reinforced the fact that I looked just fine; I could trust God to be in control of my journey, and I did not have to live in fear.

I realized something about the race: it was not a sprint, but a marathon. Though effective, combating the lies was exhausting. Knowing it would take time to finish and feeling weary already, I wondered how I would endure. Yet for the first time in a long time, I knew giving up was not an option. I clung to Philippians 4:13 to help me persevere: *“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.”*



When I felt I could not take another step, I needed only to look to the Lord. Having allowed Him to be in control of my journey, I did not have to run alone. For too long the deep guilt and shame I felt had made me too embarrassed to ask for His help. I was blessed to experience His grace as I learned His help was not dependent on my worthiness, but on His deep love for me. In time, I realized His strength was mine for the asking, and that was a great comfort to me.

As the truth began to sink in, I noticed some slight changes. I was able to eat a bit more without fear, and I was a little less concerned about my appearance. While small, these steps were still significant and something to celebrate. I thought to myself, "I feel so close to the freedom that I want so badly. If I can only hang on a little longer, it will be mine." I knew that if I could run the remaining distance, I would reach the finish line. I was more determined than ever to leave anorexia behind me. During those last months, I did not take even one step back. At times, I questioned whether I had the stamina to keep moving forward, but having quit so many times in the past, I refused to give up. Armed with the truth on my note cards, I continued forward.

When the time came that I accepted my appearance, was comfortable eating appropriate amounts of food each day, and no longer obsessed over food and weight, I knew I was finally free. Once I ran through that ribbon across the finish line, I noticed the turmoil that had once resided in my heart gave way to peace, and previously looming despair was replaced with joy.

Since finishing the race, I possess a new hope as I face challenging circumstances. God showed Himself to me in mighty ways and that built up my faith. Although I did not respect His creation while I was restricting, He did not let that stop Him from helping me. I did not deserve His aid, but He wanted to bless me with freedom and

show Himself to me. He also wanted to lead me into writing and building a website to help others who struggle with eating disorders. As a recipient of this grace, I am assured He will remain at my side. No matter what races lie ahead, I know I will not have to run them alone.



*Columbine Morning*, by Nancy D'Oporto

**Laurie Glass** is the author of *Journey to Freedom from Eating Disorders* and runs the *Freedom from Eating Disorders* website at [www.freedomfromed.com](http://www.freedomfromed.com). She holds a Christian Counseling degree and is involved in online mentoring for adult women with eating disorders. Laurie has had many articles and poems published in both print and online publications.

# Understanding Manna

Sarah Gunning Moser—Bellevue, WA

*“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever”*  
(John 6:57-58 NKJV).

I have struggled on and off with trusting the Lord for His provision during difficult times. While I have read the Biblical accounts of the Israelites’ years of wandering in the wilderness and God’s supply of manna for them to eat every day, I did not understand precisely what that meant to me as a believer. God in His mercy provided a profound lesson in the midst of difficulty.

Recently, while I discussed with a Christian friend the serious financial difficulties my husband and I had, she pointed out how the Lord continually supplied us with work exactly at the point Larry and I needed additional resources. Even more astonishing was that each time the amount supplied was almost exactly what we needed, and sometimes was to the penny of the required amount!

Yet even after she mentioned this, I continued to struggle with strife and worry. Would we be able to pay our debts in this recession? Would we lose our home? Would we have to stand in line at the Food Bank? I wrestled during that time with the task of learning the full meaning of putting trust in Jesus, even with mundane tasks such as paying bills.

I somehow missed that it must be a daily process, a daily renewal of dedication to the Lord, and a daily, deep, unshakeable trust that tells Him: “Lord, I know that You have a much better plan than I do, and I trust that You will provide all that my family and I require.” King David proclaimed: *“In Thee, O LORD, do I put my trust”* (Psalm 71:1).

It is one of those things in the Christian life that is easy to say, easy to intellectualize, but not so easy to do or believe.

After he turned 50, Larry experienced increasing trouble finding work. Much to our mutual horror, we discovered that younger employers look at older workers as somehow unsuitable. Whether due to the perception that these workers cost an employer more per year or the mistaken idea that “seniors” are more likely to demand expensive benefits, we could not discern. Either way, despite years of experience in aerospace, construction, resort management, and even training and performing with dolphins and other sea mammals, Larry suddenly found these former endeavors elusive. While still homeschooling our two children, I suddenly became the primary worker and breadwinner, a role decidedly uncomfortable and unfamiliar.

As our lives progressed and our children grew up, Larry began to look for work in a different way. He realized he did not have to seek a traditional job and few typical types of work were available to older people. God led us again, first into work for my sister, and later branching out from there. Ultimately, it became clear the Lord had directed him to open a handyman business.

On the way home from an appointment one day, the name for it came to me: “A Handy Solution.” Larry liked it, friends liked it, and he pursued it. Even as my husband tackled this new endeavor, the Lord led him carefully and precisely through it.

As we began to discover exactly what God had for us and what we had to learn in a different situation, He continued to help us. We realized that even having the name of the business was part of the provision. By parallel, the networking we



did at professional organizations was part of the provision. An eventual increase in our client base was part of the provision. Those friendships forged in Bible studies and prayer groups were also part of the provision.

Despite the fact that we missed these truths before, we now sought the answers actively. Little by little, one step at a time, God provided. He gave at our exact point of need so we did not become overwhelmed. Perhaps He desired to protect us from grasping too much at one time, for He trained us daily to trust Him more. A “handy solution” indeed!

I realize now that “manna”—the supply of all things needed on a daily basis—takes many forms. *Manna* in Hebrew means “What is this?” It harkens back to God’s miraculous food source for the ancient Israelites as they wandered in the desert for 40 years: manna to eat each day. In modern America, manna is not only the appearance of food, money, jobs, shelter, or companions. It is also the supply inherent in deeper communion with the Lord.

The word *rhéma* in Greek means “a spoken word of the living voice [of God].” In those moments when something a person has sought is found and understood, and the times when the *rhéma* Word of God opens the heart, that which a person has looked for earnestly is found. THAT is the best provision of all, the strongest manna of all.

In John 6:31-35, Jesus admonished His disciples for thinking it was Moses who gave the Israelites the daily manna from Heaven. He explained that it came from their Heavenly Father, the same Father Who sent Jesus to them in the first place! He taught the difference between the bread (manna) we eat each day (food) and the Bread of Life, the Manna existing in Jesus Himself. One lasts but a day, the other for eternity; yet they are intertwined as benefits from God directly to

us, His sinful children who so often forget from whence that provision comes.

Jesus’ disciples kept getting it wrong, just like we do. Their confusion was similar to ours when Jesus explained it during His final Passover Seder (The Last Supper). They did not understand the *how* of the Provision they had right with them. Yet when they finally did, they ached for Him and for His presence on Earth, realizing too late what He had tried to tell them about Manna. By then, Jesus was at the right hand of God and was gone from them.

“A man can no more take in a supply of grace for the future than he can eat enough today to last him for the next six months, nor can he inhale sufficient air into his lungs with one breath to sustain life for a week to come. We are permitted to draw upon God's store of grace from day to day as we need it.” –D. L. Moody

He tried to tell them that He is the Bread of Life, Manna from Heaven incarnate, real, supernatural, omnipresent. What they did not realize, we must realize: that there is no time when He is not working on our behalf, providing precisely what we need, even when He often says “No” or “Not yet” to what we think we want.

During Communion, we eat the Manna from Heaven as a reminder of His unending interaction with us. Our task on this earth is to realize that ALL comes from Christ, ALL is from Him and His Spirit is in us . . . and that the provision of Manna is also continual, given to us daily if we will but receive it. We cannot hope to fulfill The Great Commission until we realize that deep in our souls.

During this season in our lives, I believe the Lord is telling Larry and me to trust Him at a deeper level than ever before, and consistently, one



Above Tree Line, by Nancy D'Oporto

In those moments when something one has sought is found and understood, and the times when the rhéma Word of God opens to one's heart, that which one has looked for earnestly is found. THAT is the best provision of all, the strongest manna of all.

day at a time. He reminds us, too, that each day is precious and a gift to us from Him. He does not sleep; He does not falter; He does not stutter when He speaks nor does He change His mind. We must go about discovering His mind on a daily basis, yet not be greedy about that divine knowledge. We are not to try to grab more than we are meant to have that day, any more than the Hebrews were meant to gather more manna than was given at any one time. On the occasions when they did, they found the manna rotten and inedible, crawling with worms. The metaphor here is unmistakable.

What God does for us today is palatable only if we seek Him and surrender ourselves to its amount. But what God intends for us tomorrow is not for us to know . . . yet. When we attempt to grab it ahead of time, we stagger under its weight and wind up tugged down onto our knees, after which, as the audacious creatures that we are, we proceed to whine and complain about the heavy weight

hurting us. We seldom realize at that juncture it was our own folly that caused our tumble to the ground in the first place.

As I meditated upon all these things, Jesus quietly reminded me of this:

*“Trust me, daughter, for I love you and have plans for you. I will never harm you. I know what is best in all circumstances and you must conform yourself to that knowledge and live it out. Each day I will reveal to you what I want you to do and accomplish on that day only. This knowledge is as much Manna from Heaven as the work I enable you to perform to feed your family, yet it is of different character.*

*I endured the bitter taste of the Cross for you and for all mankind, because that was My Manna on that day. I knew it even as I suffered more than you can imagine. Even as the weight of every man's guilt and wickedness lay upon My shoulders, I took that Manna and ate it because My Father told me to. Learn to accept the Manna of My mind and breath and love as I give it to you.*

*You must give Me your soul each day for Me to shape and mold to My image, but never to your own. I shall give you your portion of Manna exactly when*





*you need it. You are not to worry or fret over this. My provision will not end; it will not wobble; it will not be wrong for you at any time. So learn not to question what I give you: learn instead to question what you try to give to yourself.*

*It is not in Me to ever fail you. Understand that I am your Manna and your Strength and in Me you have all you need, for I am the Sufficiency all humans seek but many never find. So remember, it is your heart you give Me freely which is of the most consequence. It is what allows your Manna to flow!”*

How gracious is our Lord Jesus Christ! During this time of fear and uncertainty for me, God’s gentle whispers in my soul have provided a far more comprehensive answer to my question than I even knew I sought. The Holy Spirit made His answer clear: in my struggle to completely trust God with every aspect of my need, I overlooked key aspects of God’s promise that He will care for my family and me utterly. Even as I wavered and faltered, He patiently continued to instruct me through the difficult changes in our fortunes.

The ancient Hebrews stubbornly grappled with God’s gift of edible manna, which miraculously appeared on the ground before them, and then they grumbled about it. In their anxiety, they did not recognize what was in front of them, which they could already see and touch. Likewise, I created an unnecessary scuffle with the Lord out of my lack of acceptance of the circumstances He gave me.

A deep understanding of His will came only once I recognized that it is Christ Himself who becomes my Manna when I am in need. Even though I allowed my apprehension to blind me, ironically

it was my very struggle with monetary issues that built the road to eventual triumph in Him. Happily, now I perceive my manna more clearly and am grateful for the lesson God gave me to learn.

*“And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD”* (Deuteronomy 8:2-3 NKJV).

Besides writing, **Sarah Gunning Moser** has been married over twenty-six years and has two grown children. She is an Endorsed Spell to Write and Read Trainer and experienced classroom teacher, tutor, homeschooler, adult instructor, speaker, and business owner. Sarah works in Seattle as a professional theatrical dresser and is a former manufacturing engineer in aircraft production.

Through her business, Family Education Services, Sarah works to restore America’s historical literacy level and loves introducing people to the richness and logic of English. Her passion and dream is in her motto: Restoring America’s Literacy, One Family at a Time®. She dedicates her work to Jesus in this hurting world, and hopes by encouraging others she will improve their lives and knowledge of Christ through a deep love of and strong ability in reading.

She is a member of the Northwest Christian Writers’ Association, and her web address is [www.familyedservices.com](http://www.familyedservices.com).

# The Face of Jesus

*Earl Cunningham—Palm Beach Gardens, FL*

He sat on the stoop,  
leaning wearily against the peeling blue door,  
his shoulders slumped,  
his arms wrapped around his knees,  
pulled up tight against his chest  
by rough, browned hands,  
his large gnarly fingers clasped,  
revealing thick dirt-stained nails.

His face was hidden behind  
a cascade of long,  
knotted and matted hair,  
the strands of salt  
mixed with pepper  
hinting at his age.

He was wearing an olive drab  
Vietnam War-era military jacket  
with faded embroidered patches  
on both sleeves.

It was worn thread-bare  
around the collar and the cuffs  
like he'd been wearing it  
since the early 1970s.

His faded and grimy trousers  
were worn and torn  
like they'd been purchased new  
from some 1990s upscale boutique,  
when downscale was chic.

His heavy military boots  
were roughly scuffed  
and the soles were beginning to separate  
from the once-shiny vamp.

The open, empty, dented can  
by his left boot indicated  
he was begging for change,  
but he didn't move as I approached.

For some reason, I stopped  
and stared down at him as he slept,  
put down my briefcase and sat beside him  
after brushing the dust from the stoop.  
He didn't move,  
so I touched his arm and asked,  
"Are you all right?"



He looked up,  
brushed the hair away from his face,  
which was thickly furrowed like a walrus,  
as if it had been burned time and time again  
by hot, blistering sun and cutting wind,  
and stared at me  
with gray lifeless eyes.  
I nervously looked away,  
but muttered another “Are you all right?”  
His thick, cracked lips moved,  
but no words were formed.  
“Can I help you?”

Not knowing what to do,  
to stay or leave,  
I opened the latches  
of my leather briefcase,  
filled with depositions,  
and pulled out a Zephyrhills,  
twisted the cap until the seal cracked,  
and handed the opened bottle  
to my stoop partner.

I looked away  
as he guzzled the warm water  
and noticed the incongruity  
of his worn boot  
next to my shiny wingtip.

Suddenly, I felt pressure  
across my shoulders  
and realized  
I was being hugged.

I looked up.  
The man’s face, now close to mine,  
was still deeply creased,  
but it shone with the intense glow  
of molten gold  
and his bright blue eyes were clear  
and filled with compassionate love.

I diverted my eyes from the light,  
but he grasped my chin  
with a powerful grip  
and pulled my head upward  
until our eyes met.  
“Thank you, my brother,”  
he said with a firm voice.

And he vanished.

**Earl Cunningham**’s profile is located on page 113.

# My Mom and Me

Barbara Ali—Athens, GA

*“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you”*  
(Matthew 7:7 KJV).

My mom ran into the bathroom and cried. I ran into the bedroom and cried. My dad tried to talk to her, tried to explain what was happening; then he talked to me.

“Barbara, you need to have patience with her. She doesn’t understand what’s happening to you.” After that he walked away, looking older than usual. The impasse wore on him a lot. It was already difficult for me being 14 years old and dealing with the major changes of adolescence. I tried to make sense of the universe and asked a lot of questions that made my mother uncomfortable. I wasn’t satisfied with the answers. I wanted to know if God was real. One day I talked to the “universe.”

“God, if You are real, would You please show me? I want to know You, as Friend to friend, not just about You.”

Nothing happened for awhile. I was rather awkward and shy at school. I didn’t seem to fit in much anywhere. I had a couple of close friends whom I hung out with, besides a cousin and my sister. As children, we were allowed to visit church with my grandmother from time to time, but with stipulations. “Don’t be gullible enough to believe everything you hear. Just learn about what other people believe, but don’t fall for it. No one can prove God’s existence.”

I didn’t understand. I saw people, at church and at school, older people as well as teenagers, who seemed to have something that I didn’t. I saw a kind of glow about their personalities. I saw something gentler and happier than what most people had, and I wanted it, too. Finally, one day I asked God to forgive my sins and live in my heart.

The aching went away immediately, and a sweet peace replaced it. I knew then something real had happened. I needed to find out more, so I started reading my Bible every day, and I started going to church every Sunday. My mother became quite alarmed.

“Barbara, you are falling for everything hook, line, and sinker. You are so gullible. You believe everything you hear. You cannot go to church anymore.” She said other hurtful things to me and took my Bible and hid it somewhere. She checked all my mail that came through and read everything first. If it was from a Christian friend, I sometimes did not get it.

I was so lonely and so spiritually hungry that I often cried myself to sleep. I had a little transistor radio and discovered I could find the Christian stations on it. I put it under my pillow at night and turned it on low. I could hear it through the pillow and nobody else woke up.

At the school library I discovered the Bible and other books on Christianity that I could read there. I had a couple of teachers who were devoted Christians. One was my music teacher. I joined the chorus and participated in special programs at Easter and Christmas that took place in some local churches. My mom didn’t like it. I had to convince her it was for school and attendance was required for a grade, which it was.

I said very little about religion for a long time, but she had questions: “If you’re saved, what are you being saved from? How do you know God is talking to you? Where is Heaven and Hell? How do you know God is real? No one can prove God’s existence. When you die, that’s just the end of it. People are ready for that when they become old.”



My younger brother had been doing his own seeking around this time, and he also gave his heart to the Lord, finding out for himself that God is real. However, because he saw the difficulties that I was having with our mom, he did not tell her about it. Sometimes we talked together and shared what we learned. Then a major event occurred that shook our whole family: Mom found out that she was going to have triplets.

We were all in shock. I will always remember the look on my dad's face when she came home from a doctor's visit and let him know. He just sat a long time with his head in his hands. We already struggled hand-to-mouth. With four kids, the youngest nine years old, already in our family, he had no earthly idea how he was going to support us, much less take care of the hospital expenses.

In her seventh month Mom was put on complete bed rest. The doctors did not want the babies to come any sooner than absolutely necessary in order to give the babies the best chance of survival possible. My sister and I took over all the housework.

I prayed for the babies to be all right. The night her water broke, she headed for the hospital almost an hour away. Identical triplets, born at two, three, and four pounds respectively, arrived a month early and were too small to come home right away. That night, recovering in her room, thinking about all that happened, she suddenly saw a pair of hands in white sleeves coming toward her in the air. They soon were holding first one small baby, then another. As the hands reached for the third baby, her heart was sinking. She cried out, "NO! Leave one for me!" The hands retreated without the third baby. She understood what had happened and shook her fist saying, "You take care of those babies!"

The next morning she slowly made her way to the nursery. The nurses paced back and forth talking

to each other and looked up, startled to see her. When she questioned them, they told her about losing two babies, surprised that she seemed to already know.

"A strange thing happened," they told her then. "The lungs on the third baby started to collapse but unexplainably filled up again." That was Donnie, the one in the middle. The other two babies had been born with many defects in their organs. Only Donnie was not, but being so tiny, his weak lungs needed more time to develop. He remained in the hospital another four weeks, being fed with an eye dropper until he reached five pounds.

At age 15, I was able to go to a Christian summer camp for teens due to the benevolence of a family friend. At camp, I met other young people like myself who had given their hearts to the Lord. Because I enjoyed everything about the camp, that week I was more relaxed than I had been for several years. When it came time to leave, I did not want to go home. I talked to a counselor about it, but he was not able to help me much. Sadly, I packed everything and said goodbye to my new friends, taking their addresses.

Back home I seemed up and down a lot and wished there was some way I could do right and keep that peace and joy. I withdrew into myself socially. Helping to take care of a new baby, singing him to sleep with hymns and lullabies, gave me a lot of satisfaction. He was a lot of fun. I prayed that he would grow in wisdom and understanding. Four older brothers and sisters did a lot of spoiling, though. He was a quick learner and at three years of age was developing a keen interest in music. He has since shown himself to be very gifted in that area and continues to perform publicly and privately for many special occasions.

*"I will instruct thee in the way thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psalm 32:8 KJV).*

My senior year in high school saw more changes. Feeling frustrated and at the end of myself one day, I walked into the forest near our home. I felt like I was losing God and losing myself, too. Here was a cathedral made by God's own hands. No church on earth has the beauty of the wilderness. The day was balmy. Sunlight poured through the tree branches in slender rays. I knelt there and turned my whole being over to the Lord, asking Him to please take me, all that I am or ever would be, and have His own way in my life. I cried for awhile, surrendering my whole being to Him.

A light came on inside me. I did not even realize it had been dark. Light seemed to shine all around me, giving everything a sparkle and a glow that ordinarily was not there. Even plain buildings and mundane things shone brilliantly while I walked back to my house. There was a freshness everywhere, such as occurs after a mountain rain when the sun comes back out and the raindrops, still precariously sitting on everything, sparkle like little diamonds. It was glorious.

When I went back to school the next day, with amazed looks on their faces, my classmates saw a different me. I knew that I stood straighter, smiled more, and talked with people more freely. It was as though the glass box that I had been living in within my mind shattered into thousands of pieces. I had been released.

That year I also found a boyfriend who was about three years older than me. He took me to the prom at school that year. We saw each other as much as possible. At one point when he was out of a job and a place to live, my parents agreed to let him stay with us a short while. During that time my parents did not like what they saw in his character, but they could not dissuade me from continuing the relationship. They tried to warn me that if we married my life with him would be very difficult.

I began to see and feel it, too, but I did not know how to break it off. I had a dream one night in which I had a baby girl and we lived in a place with very little furniture and almost no food. My

boyfriend (husband in the dream) was sitting at a table with some other guys planning to do something illegal to get money. I had to find a way to get out with the baby safely. When I told my mother the dream, she figured she had to do something, but did not tell me then.

After graduation I left home to stay awhile with my grandmother who lived across town. Everyone was concerned about me when I continued to see my boyfriend, but I wanted to make my own decisions. One day, an invitation came from an aunt and uncle in Oregon asking me to visit with them for a couple of weeks. I was excited. I told my boyfriend, "I really want to go. I have never been on a plane or anywhere outside of Colorado." He said okay, but he definitely did not like it much.

I had a good time with my aunt and uncle sightseeing and meeting their friends. After the two weeks' time, they prepared for their annual six-month trip to Hawaii. They told me that I could stay with friends of theirs if I did not want to go back home. In the meantime I happened across a letter from my mom asking them to help get me out of a bad situation at home. I was angry. It was a long while before I appreciated what she did. So I decided to go to Denver and stay with my other grandmother. By then, my boyfriend had married a woman who had five children.

Over the next three years, I stayed on and off with my grandmother, sometimes moving out to share an apartment with somebody, but eventually moving back with her for short periods. I started searching for a church to attend. I was invited to a megachurch called Calvary Temple. In the class for young single adults, many of whom were in college, I made some life-long friends. Soon I attended a church function about five nights out of seven. Many Saturdays a group of us got together to visit nursing homes or hospitals or just drive through a park to talk to people and pray with them. We witnessed many miracles and the last of my skepticism about God dissolved.



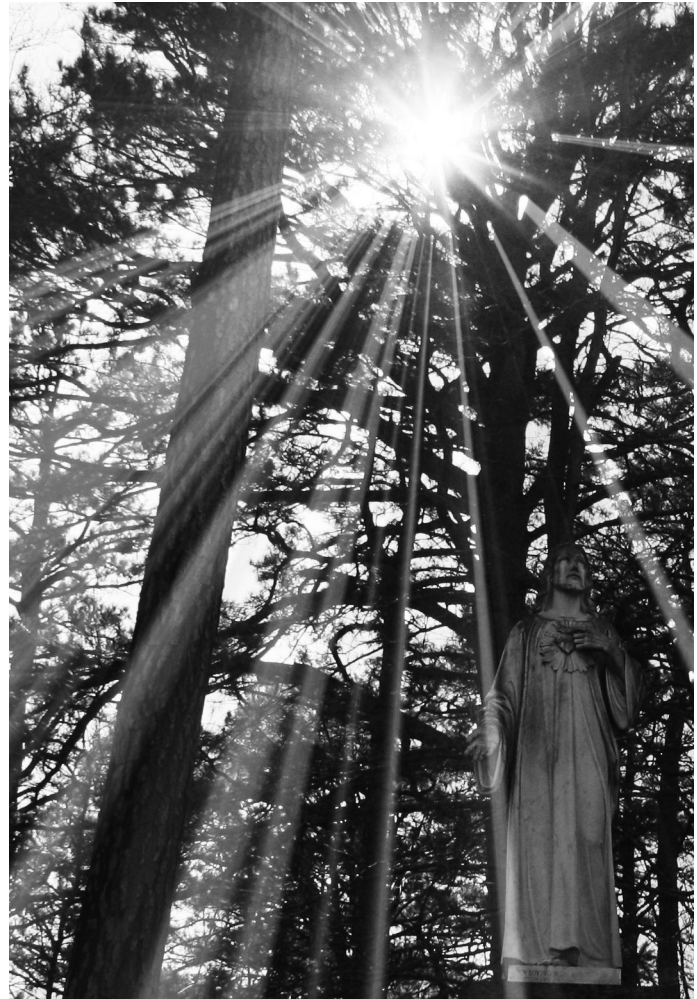
One evening in a prayer circle a friend next to me said that she had seen a vision concerning my family. She said a dark and heavy cloud hung over us. All at once there began to appear a hole in the cloud over the head of each person, letting the light through. She said that my family would start receiving salvation one by one.

My sister started dating a man whose sister had married a minister. Soon they both decided to commit their lives to the Lord. I had wonderful talks with my sister then and was sure that her experience with God was real. Becoming very involved in their church, they started fostering newborns until the babies were permanently placed. They did this for many years, eventually adopting a hard-to-place child themselves.

Then Mom began reading a book by David Wilkerson, called *The Vision*. She said that she found what she had been searching for all her life. While doing the laundry one day and reading the Bible, she broke down in tears and accepted the Lord. Shortly after that, my dad recommitted his life to the Lord. He had grown up in a Christian home during the early days of the Pentecostal movement and received salvation as a teenager, but left the Lord when he joined the army to fight in World War II. He returned home traumatized by the war, most likely questioning God, but he never forgot where he came from.

Over time, my other two brothers also sought the Lord, and Mom was able to lead each one to salvation, thus fulfilling the vision. Each of us came to know for ourselves by experience that there is a God who cares deeply for the people He created. We are each in a different place in our journey, each with our own struggles. My dad and my oldest brother have since passed on. The search for answers is lifelong, but each time I surrender to the Lord, He reveals a little more of Himself to me. I know Him as Friend to friend.

*“What a God! His road stretches straight and smooth.  
Every God-direction is road-tested. Everyone who  
runs toward Him makes it” (Psalm 18:30 Msg).*



*Rays of Hope, by Lynn M. Burgher at Eureka, AR*

**Barbara Ali** lives with her husband in Athens, Georgia. They have three grown children and three grandchildren. Barbara works in a local high school, assisting with special needs children. When she is not doing this, she is playing with her grandchildren or reading and writing. She says, “God let me know a long time ago that He wanted me to give encouragement and hope to others as He has given them to me. My goal is to live in such a way that others may see Him in my life.”

# Duck's Conversion

*Glen Davenport—Crossville, TN*



On a cold, snowy day in January in 1996, a man came out of nowhere and wandered onto the jobsite where I was mixing mortar for my masonry crew. As God would have it, and without any apparent reason, he meandered his way around to me. I see him

now. His clothes were baggy. His hair was long and matted, and his beard was fuzzy and unkempt. I imagined he was homeless; he certainly had the appearance of a poor man. He was pitiful as he came waddling closer and closer, sheepishly looking one way, then another, as if he were wondering what he was going to say when he got to me.

“Good morning. How are you today?” I asked him.

He mumbled, saying: “Aah, all right, I guess.”

“What can I do for you?”

Hesitating, he answered, “I’m broke and looking for a job.”

“What’s your name?” I inquired.

“My name is James but most people call me Duck.”

“‘Duck’ it is. What kind of job are you looking for?”

“I’m a block layer.”

“Have you ever worked on a job like this?” He nodded his head yes.

“Do you have any tools?” Another nod, yes. “I don’t see any,” I added. I noticed that he followed every answer with a chuckle, “Hee hee.” Then he pulled a great big trowel out of his coat side pocket and showed me he was ready to go to work. I almost responded with my own hee hee, but I didn’t. He was a funny little man with a cigarette half as long as he was tall. I can’t say for sure what there was about this man that intrigued me, but I liked him. He appeared to be a simple man “down on his luck.”

I pointed him toward my brother, the boss and decision maker, and suggested to my brother that we give the man a chance. He hired him for the day just to see if he would work and what he could do. Duck proved to be everything he said he was, and a whole lot more.

I worked with Duck for most of ten years and came to know him as one of the most honest men I ever met. He was a hard worker, dependable as a clock. He worked long hours every day, weekends and holidays, rain or shine. My brother and I saw him as a man with special needs, so we helped him acquire an almost-new, mobile home where he could have inside plumbing, electricity, central heat, a refrigerator, and a comfortable bed. We shared our Christian testimony with him as often as the opportunity came available and came to love him much like a brother. Eventually, we met his wife, Tiny, his son and siblings.

When my brother closed his business and retired, Duck went on to some other company. We heard that a couple of his family members died with





cancer, others suffered with heart disease, and Duck had a serious stomach problem himself. After surgery, he got better.

As members of his family died one by one, he began to think more seriously about his own spiritual welfare. Being the kind of man he was, he felt inferior to practically everybody and enjoyed a very limited social life. Through the years that we worked together, he attended only two or three services in the church where I was pastor. He often said he would like to go to church but he didn't go because "My clothes ain't good enough."

His marriage was not stable in any sense of the word. He once told me, "I've married and divorced the same woman so many times I don't know if I'm married or not—*hee hee*." They lived together now and then, but most of the time she lived in another county some 50 miles away. She suffered with a heart problem that was worsened by diabetes.

One day Duck called and told me that his son's wife had given birth to premature twins. One had died, so he called to see if I would preach the baby's funeral. The child who survived continues to do well. A year or so later another child was born into his son's family, giving Duck two grandchildren.

On another snowy January day in 2010, Duck called. "My wife died of a heart attack. Would you preach her funeral?"

"I'm sorry to hear about your wife," I said. "But yes, Duck, I will count it an honor to help you, my friend." Later, as I reminisced over things I had learned about her and about him through the years, I prayed, "Lord, give me words suitable for the occasion. Let my message be a blessing for Duck and his family."

I could tell his heart was broken. The occasion was sad, but I spoke of bright spots in their marriage, embellishing them as much as I could. Then, after most of the guests had passed by the coffin, saying their goodbyes, Duck was deeply troubled. He looked at his deceased wife and turned to leave, only to return again to the coffin to touch her hand.

Finally, he said to me, "I can't hardly stand the thought of going home without her." After several attempts to leave, he said his last good-bye, and we took our slow ride out to the cemetery where the burial took place. As I left Duck at the gravesite that day, I wondered what would become of him.

One day last fall, I was involved in a church service not far from where Duck lives. He showed up at the meeting. I was happy to see him, and after the service when the crowd had dispersed, we had some time to talk. He began by saying, "I don't know if you have heard what happened to me or not, but I want you to know I got saved!" He went on to share his story.

"Preacher, I have had two dreams about Tiny since she died," he said. "I have seen her in Heaven wearing a beautiful white dress, sumpin' I could never afford, with her reddish blonde hair laying softly over her shoulders—so pretty. I have never seen my wife looking so good, not even on our first wedding day. She was beautiful and everything around her was so nice.

"Then I got this haunting desire to go and be with her . . . just to talk to her . . . just to touch her. I couldn't do anything but stare. Then I started thinking about suicide. I couldn't help it. I wanted to see her so bad, but questions kept poppin' into my mind: questions about those precious little grandbabies. And questions about my soul. I can't hardly stand this separation sometimes . . . but, Preacher, so far the children have won."

Those dreams caused Duck to remember conversations we had about God's plan of salvation and what it could mean for him to be saved. When the time came for his decision, he didn't call me, but I am glad he called someone who could help him. He wound up at the local city mission and found two men who shared the gospel and led him to the Lord. He has become a contented man with hope and peace in his heart.

As we parted that day, my mind drifted back to the day Duck walked onto my jobsite. What a difference in that man! Friendship, meaningful work, and the love of Christ have transformed his life. I am reminded of this passage of Scripture, suitable for any man who is down on his luck. *"But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul"* (Deuteronomy 4:29 KJV).

"Grace then is God's kindness bestowed upon the undeserving; benevolence handed down to those who have no merit; a hand reaching down to those who have fallen into the pit." –Selwyn Hughes

**Glen Davenport's** profile is located on page 59.



# Faith to Know He Will

Christine M. Miller-Ramey—Hilliard, FL

*“For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25 NIV).*

Faith is realizing that God will do all that He says He will do! I know this to be true as I experienced it in my life just a few years ago. Sometimes, it is hard to sit back and wait, but it is something I had to learn to do.

I had trusted Christ as a senior in high school and from that point on, had faith in Him through anything and everything. As I waited for one doctor after another, I learned how to keep my faith in Christ and know He really could do miracles.

Nervous and anxious, I waited in a new physician’s office. We had seen four doctors, but I hoped this one was the right one. I was afraid not knowing what my future would hold. I had been told that I could die. There was nothing left for any of my doctors to do.

My pulmonary valve had been removed when I was only two-and-a-half-years-old. In the past months, I had developed shortness of breath and severe chest pains from time to time, but I didn’t know why. When I did consult my physicians, I learned that my heart had a great deal of leakage. As time went on, the outcome didn’t look good.

It was then that my faith seemed to deepen and my heart learned to trust in God’s Word. Daily I prayed and hoped for an answer. I longed for new

hope. I waited as I listened to His instructions. I watched as I moved from one doctor to the next, each leading me to some place new and different. It was in those places that I began to see His hand working in my life.

I had a condition called *Tetralogy of Fallot*, a congenital heart defect where the heart is pushing the blood much faster than normal. As I grew older, the valve grew weak, causing leakage. This made it difficult for me to do simple things around the house. Because I live on a large piece of land in a two-story home, I struggled getting around, and I had difficulty walking up and down the stairs. It became increasingly hard to go to the mailbox and back every day.

It was hard for me to believe that anything could be done about my situation, but I never gave up faith. It wasn’t easy going back and forth from doctor to doctor, but I had to find a way to have hope once more. I had almost given up when I received a phone call from a new doctor who had an opening available. I didn’t hesitate to make an appointment. I didn’t care about the driving distance either. I was just relieved to hear that this doctor might be the physician to give me the hope I had been longing to hear.

My parents had taken time off from work to go to the appointment with me because I was not well. As my mother and I sat in the waiting room, I watched the children roam from play table to play table. One by one, the nurses called their names and escorted them back to the holding rooms. Gradually, the room grew quieter as each child left. Each time the door swung open, I became anxious to hear my name.



*Silhouette*, by Christine M. Miller-Ramey at Hilliard, FL

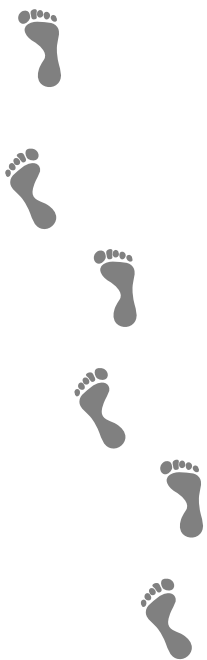
“Christine Ramey,” the nurse called as she stood waiting in the doorway. I rose to my feet, took a deep breath, and exhaled with a sigh of relief. The nurse directed us to an examining room where she began asking us questions. My mother and I answered each one as best we could. The nurse was shocked by all that we had been through and thanked us for sharing as she walked out of the room to get the doctor.

Our fingers were crossed in hope that our prayers had been answered. We believed that God really was in the middle of our situation. Moments later, a knock came and the door opened. A kind lady entered and sat on the examining table beside me to talk. “I’m Dr. Saidi,” she said, shaking my hand. “I am head of the pediatric department. My nurse, Kim, has been filling me in on the details of your case. It sounds like you guys have been through an awful lot! But there is good news! I think we can help your case.”

She then slid onto the swivel stool beside me and put the manila file folder on the table next to her. It was as if nothing else seemed to matter

in that moment but us. This was something I was not used to dealing with; usually my doctors had been too busy shuffling papers and writing prescriptions to have time for a simple and personal conversation, but not this doctor. So I felt very at ease with her. Before long, we all began laughing and talking as if we had known each other for years.

Then, the word “HOPE” rang in my ears as she explained a surgery that I would qualify for just because of all that I had been through. “There is a surgery that I’d like you to consider. It can be risky, but it will give you a much better quality of life.” In that moment, I knew God had heard our prayers. I began to listen more intently. Dr. Saidi continued, “I’d like to talk to my colleagues first, but I think they will agree that you would qualify for this particular surgery. I have no doubt in my mind that this would be the case. We have a website where we send our patients so they can meet others who have the same condition as you do. Some have had this surgery. I encourage you to do this. That way, you can ask questions and gather information. It would do you a world of good.”



She said she would schedule an appointment in a few weeks from that office visit. “At that time you will meet with my physician’s assistant (PA) and one of the surgeons who will do this operation. You can ask questions and understand completely what we are encouraging you to do. In the meantime, I will give you my cell phone number, and if you have any problems at all, give me a call. This is the kind of case you have to take day-by-day and step-by-step. But in everything, know that we are here for you.” She left to schedule the appointment. I was eager to learn more about this surgery.

Basically, the surgeons would insert a cow’s pulmonary valve as an artificial replacement of the pulmonary valve which had been removed when I was a child. This would allow my heart to work again properly.

In the weeks to come, I met with Peter, Dr. Saidi’s PA, and with Dr. Sunil, the cardiac surgeon. During that appointment, the surgery was scheduled for February 23, 2009. For the first time in months, I began to feel like a real human being again, with a sense of dignity, and a sense of hope which left me feeling whole again.

The months that lay ahead were filled with several appointments and procedures that needed to take place before the operation could occur. Before long my surgery day had arrived, and I was nervous. Yet, I never doubted that I would be all right because my faith kept me strong. Dr. Saidi and Peter visited with me and kept a constant check on me as I awaited the surgeon.

I wasn’t sure of how things were going to go or what my outcome would be, but I always knew that God was walking with me. I knew that He held my hands and heard my prayers. But the defining test of faith came as they wheeled me into the operating room. As I was moved from the gurney onto the operating table, I felt God’s

arms wrapped around me and His presence curled beneath me. As the surgeon put a mask over my face, it was clear that God was with me and all would be okay.

Later on that night, back in my room, I had pain and was medicated, but all in all, I was doing just fine. The shortness of breath that I had once experienced was no more. Thankfully, all had gone as planned.

Within a week’s time I was released to go home. The doctors were amazed by my progress and how well I had done. It was hard to believe that I was on the road to recovery. My doctor told me I would have three appointments within a three-month period. Then, I would do a six-month appointment three times before being released to a once-a-year appointment. Today, I am one visit away from doing a yearly checkup.

Life is a journey, and as I put one foot in front of the other, I am amazed to see how God has been with me all along, teaching me what it means to have faith.

**Christine M. Miller-Ramey** is a Christian freelance writer, who enjoys her days writing romance fiction, devotions, and poetry. When she is not writing, she has a passion for animals and enjoys her time with two pets, Betty (Dachshund) and Punkin (cat). She is currently working on her first romance novel. She has been published at [www.ChristianDevotions.us](http://www.ChristianDevotions.us) and was published in *Extreme Woman* magazine which is no longer available online. She has also been seen in [www.sara-ministry.com](http://www.sara-ministry.com). She hosts her blog at [www.mytraveledpaths.com](http://www.mytraveledpaths.com), a combination of her stories, devotions, and poetry. She is currently enrolled at Florida State College of Jacksonville, Florida, working toward an BA in Creative Writing. She lives in Hilliard, Florida, with her family.

# The Power of God's Whisper

Linda Snook—Salem, OR

My life is less about me on a quest to find God and more about God showing me who He is and bringing me to Himself. He took real-life experiences to direct my path and transform my life so He could use me for His purposes.

God created me with physical and spiritual gifts, talents, temperament, and personality. He also placed me into a family and environment where those aspects could be developed and used for His purposes. I've always believed in God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, but was it always the Jesus of the Bible? I don't think so.

I was born in Brigham City, Utah, the oldest daughter of five children. My ancestors were Mormon settlers. My mother still lives on a parcel of the original homestead. Some difficult experiences in my dad's childhood caused him to reject church attendance and teachings, but he couldn't bring himself to reject membership because he feared he would go to hell and take his family with him. He taught us that we were no better or worse than others, no matter what their financial status was. So I didn't feel better or worse than others, but I always felt different. It didn't seem like I received or processed "spiritual" information like my Mormon friends; I had too many unanswered questions. During childhood, I couldn't explain why I felt unconnected in my environment. I didn't even feel I belonged in my own family because I didn't process the world around me as they did.

I prayed all the time for God to help me do whatever I needed to fit in. My early prayers were usually pretty one-sided, more asking and less listening to God. I believe He used this time of disconnect to softly speak His truths to me.

*"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14 KJV).*

Mormon emphasis is on performance and obedience, which equals salvation. It was unsettling never knowing if I had done enough, well enough, long enough to reach the "highest heaven." We could not question church teachings because to do so was "the first step Satan uses to draw you away into damnation and hell." We were taught that "if others challenge and persecute you for your faith, it is a sign and proof that the Mormon faith is accurate."

I had lots of doubts and questions and some issues. There were no Christians in my life, who spoke God's truths to me. As a child, I read my King James Bible, highlighting passages that we studied. In retrospect, I understand it was God's Holy Word training my spirit to recognize false teaching.

When I was three years old, my Primary Sunday school class started visiting nursing homes, caring for and loving the elderly. Looking back, this was a perfect fit for my gifting and great training for my call into hospice ministry many years later.

When I was eight, I was old enough to be baptized for the dead, which brought up more questions. If people rejected the Mormon Church when alive, what right did we have to do it for them now? Aren't we each to make our own decision? My spirit didn't feel right about this and it didn't match with my understanding of baptisms in the Bible.

My family didn't judge others because of their situations; we just felt compelled to share our blessings. When my friend Terry and her family of twelve desperately needed food and clothing,



I asked the church leaders to help feed my friends, but they wouldn't because their parents didn't attend church and didn't pay tithing. I was devastated that the church that preached about caring for others didn't care that children had no coats for winter, no heat, and no food.

My "jack-Mormon" (non-practicing) parents who cared about my friends and supported me in my quest helped gather a truckload of food, clothing, bedding, and money to buy necessities and Christmas presents. I lost respect for Mormonism and gained respect for my parents. I was only 14, but I was disillusioned. "Where do I belong?" I prayed. I broke ties with the church and began to search for Truth.

*"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5 KJV).

God watched over me in all areas of my life. On September 26, 1970, God brought Dave into my life. I was 16, and Dave was 19. We married the following year. I am so grateful God gave me the perfect someone to share my life and spiritual journey.

We moved to Arizona in 1972 and lived there until 1974. During that time our two children were born. The Mormons found us and started pressuring me to attend church and convert my non-Mormon husband. I signed some papers to be excommunicated so they would leave us alone. I threw away everything I owned that connected me to Mormonism: The Book of Mormon, the Bible, and my certificate of baptism.

In 1974, we moved back to Utah because of job opportunity. The word of my excommunication preceded our return, and my childhood friends disowned me. It was difficult to find jobs or a place to rent. We struggled three years in Utah

trying to make a living. In 1977, we packed up and moved to Oregon.

After a few years working hard 24/7, 365 days a year, there were many times when I questioned, "How could this be my destiny?" There must be more I could contribute than working myself to the bone. My world was raising children and building our business. I felt I wasn't living up to my potential of serving others. I sought direction through prayer. God whispered again. Within days I was mentoring young mothers in childcare and development. Kate, a woman who was mentally disabled, was repeatedly impregnated by a man who wanted to live off her welfare. She had the mentality of an eight-year-old. I spent an exhausting month working with her, and on that last day, I made a decision. I had to go to MY home to care for MY family.

*"If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him"* (James 1:5 KJV).

As I was on the phone telling my husband that I was going straight home, God changed the words in my mouth, and I heard myself saying, "I'll just stop for a minute to see Kate on my way home." When I arrived at her apartment, I found the six-week-old infant on the floor, blue, cold, and not moving. I had no training for a situation like this, but God empowered me instantly with wisdom. With no time to wait for an ambulance, I put the baby inside my coat and drove him quickly to the hospital. Emergency personnel grabbed him, put tubes in his body, pumped in warm liquids, and covered him with warm blankets. He was within minutes of death from hypothermia. Indisputably, more than a whisper!

That day I had a glimpse of God's purpose and meaning for me. However, I only partially understood about surrendering total control of my life to God.

Twenty-three years ago, God gave us a home we really shouldn't have been able to afford, next to neighbors who lived "all out" for the Lord. Alice and Dan loved me as a daughter. Alice taught me the difference between religion and a relationship with Jesus. I got involved in Bible studies and a Christian church, and within a year, I made a personal commitment to give God all of me.

I asked Him for wisdom, guidance, understanding and forgiveness, mercy and grace. My daily prayer became "May people see less of me and more of You, Oh Lord, in my life." The gradual process of relinquishing control began. One year later, my husband also made a personal commitment to Jesus.

One Easter morning, a couple years after my conversion, Alice and Dan both became terminally ill and were hospitalized, down the hall from each other. Alice told me, "We are having a race to see who will get to Heaven first." My love for Dan and Alice compelled me to take a huge leap of faith. I advised my boss that I needed a leave of absence or I would quit my job. Financially, this would ruin us. But God moved, and a job-share position was created, which allowed me to be present with Dan and Alice during their final days.

Alice told me, "You're an answer to my prayers, Linda. I asked God to give me a neighbor I could love to the Lord. And then you moved in!" Working half-days allowed me the privilege to be at Alice's side, holding her hand, seeing her joy as she went into the arms of Jesus. Of course, I miss her every day. I cherish her Christ-like example and I pray that I can be like her to others.

Everyday Dan and Alice spent time in God's Word. After Dan's stroke and Alice's death, I read the Bible to Dan. One evening I said goodbye and turned to walk out the door. "Goodbye," he said clearly. It startled me to hear him speak again. I

saw in his eyes that this wasn't "Goodbye for now," it was "See you in Heaven." I hugged him hard and told him how much I had loved them both. Dan died that night. I imagine Dan and Alice in Heaven with Jesus, laughing and joking about their race.

We found out many years after the fact that the real estate lady who sold us the home next to Dan and Alice had also been a Christian. She had been compelled to encourage the sellers to reduce their price, to buy down points and to pay all closing costs. She also took a reduced fee. God worked this all out, just for us to be in the right place to fulfill His plan for us and our neighbors.

A few years after Dan and Alice died, the experience I gained caring for them prepared me for a call into Hospice Ministry. One of my patients was a self-professed atheist. He asked many questions about my faith. Each day, I prayed for God to guide me, give me words to explain God's plan of salvation and His love for mankind. As my patient's condition worsened, he became too weak to speak.

On his last day, I got ready to see him, putting on a T-shirt that I had bought when I took him to the State Fair a few weeks earlier. There was one word printed on the shirt front: "JESUS." As I sat next to him, holding his hand, his son called. He asked me how I was able to do this kind of work. I answered, "This is God's work and I am called to do it." I realized this was the opportunity God provided to speak Truth to my patient and his son. I shared my faith in Jesus and talked about repentance, God's saving grace, love and forgiveness, and Heaven and Hell. "Your father's Savior is waiting, but he has to make a choice to believe in Jesus."

When I hung up, my patient tried hard to speak, but I couldn't understand him. He slowly stretched out one finger, pointing at the word on my shirt. "Jesus?" I asked. He nodded. "You want to ask Jesus into your life?" He nodded again and closed his eyes while we prayed; he died a few hours later. I know and trust that he's in the presence of Jesus.





I am constantly amazed that God chooses me to participate, as He miraculously rescues and loves his creation.

At the time God called me into the Hospice ministry, He also revealed how He had prepared me for “such a time as this.” Remember when I threw all my Mormon influences away, including my King James Bible? As I was cleaning out a room, I came across my discarded Bible. In all our moves, neither Dave nor I had seen it. I believe God brought it back into my life on that particular day, as evidence that His Word is not wasted. The Scriptures I’ve cited in my story are from the highlighted portions in my childhood Bible.

When my dad was very ill, God led me back to Utah. I witnessed my mother accept Christ on Mother’s Day, 1999. Her changed life compelled my dad to renounce his church membership, and although he didn’t make a profession of faith to me directly, there was evidence that his spirit was changing. Dad died in 2000. God’s Word doesn’t return void, so I have hope.

A couple of years ago in Israel, as I walked on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, praising and worshipping God, thanking Him for carrying me through difficult times, He set a stone at my feet in the shape of an ancient sandal. He whispered, “I’m walking here with you.”

I kept walking on and thanking Jesus for taking the nails for me. He set another stone at my feet, in the shape of a nail. I believe God acknowledged my personal worship with these stones. He gave physical illustrations of His presence in my life.

I didn’t come to Jesus because someone quoted scripture. I came because God called, and Alice



God’s Illustrations,  
by Linda Snook

“Have you ever thought that in every action of grace in your heart you have the whole omnipotence of God engaged to bless you?” –Andrew Murray

and Dan loved. They knew the Lord personally through His Holy Word, and they shared His heart for the lost. They loved me enough to speak the truth. Their love and honesty came straight from God and ministered to my broken spirit. *“He will fulfill the desire of them that fear him; He also will hear their cry and will save them”* (Psalm 145:19 NASB).

**Linda Snook** currently lives in Salem, Oregon. Happily married to Dave for nearly 40 years, she has two married children and four grandchildren living nearby. She works 20 hours a week, leaving time to volunteer. Her passion to serve others has provided many opportunities to share the love of God to those she assists. She worships at Emmanuel Bible Church and is actively involved in many of the ministry opportunities and Bible Study groups. She and Dave also use their business, Snook’s Saw Service, as ministry outreach, by providing Christian resources to the public. She knows prayer works and refers to non-believers as “Pre-Christians,” praying Titus 2:11.



*My Backyard, by Pam Geniac at Kalamazoo, MI*

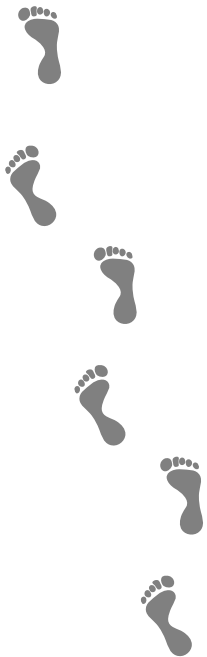
## Wild Places

*Pam Geniac—Kalamazoo, MI*

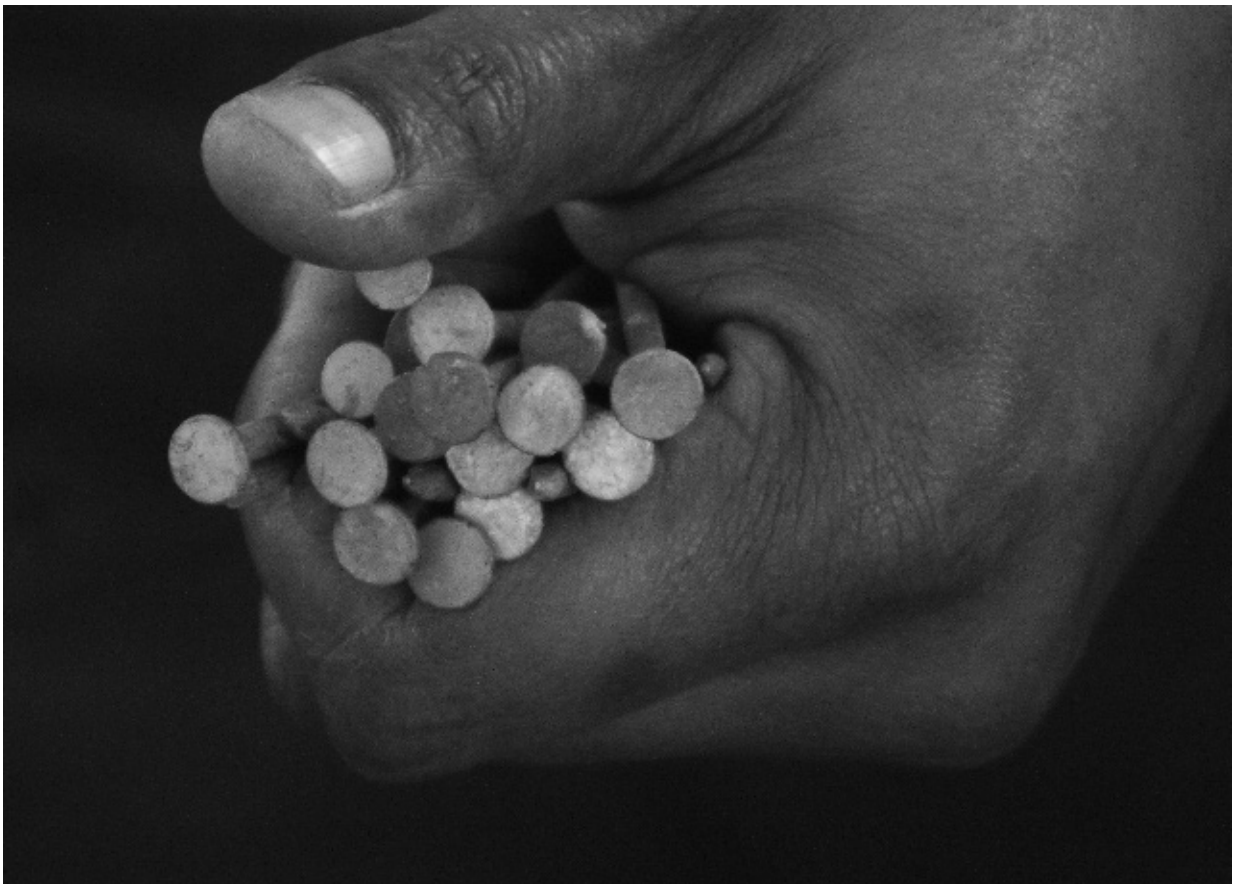
I am most truly content when I'm in the great outdoors.  
It's where I commune best with my Creator.  
I am convinced that the meadows are His antechamber  
and the forest His temple.  
The wilderness? His cathedral.  
In it, He has created for me a soothing sanctuary,  
a calm hiding place, a wondrous playground.  
I hear His voice most clearly in these untamed places.  
Calling me.  
Speaking my name from the woodland, He draws me  
out.  
I follow His voice, seeking Him. Never has He hidden.  
Always I find Him. Here.  
I see His craftsmanship at every turn.  
The sky is His canvas.  
The heavens and earth His artistry.  
He adorns the field with bird, butterfly and berry.  
He washes my eyes with colors, blue, green, gold.  
Shades so familiar yet unnameable, even though I try.  
His palette defies replication, the tone and hue known  
only to Him.  
His fragrance, the air itself, a sweet scent on the wind.  
His incense is the pine forest,

the honeyed aroma of the wildflower.  
His spice, the shaded glen.  
In winter He speaks to me in the hushed  
tones of snow on pine.  
The woods are tranquil and sleepy. I hear  
Him whisper . . . peace . . . rest.

**Pam Geniac** is an amazed daughter of the King. He's the reason for her hope. She is married to Bobby G, her knight in faded Carhartts. She is an empty nest mom of four intelligent, handsome, and unruly grown sons, Nonnie to the delightfully horse-crazy Miss Ella, and nosy mother-in-law to three beautiful and talented young women. She is a pack leader to a couple of extremely odd canines and a delighted owner and breeder of the Andalusian, the horses that dreams are made of. She lives and breathes in Kalamazoo, Michigan.



“I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me. He freed me from all my fears. Those who look to Him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces. In my desperation I prayed, and the Lord listened; He saved me from all my troubles”  
(Psalm 34:4-6 NLT).



*He Builds for Eternity*, by Adam Lilly

# Saved for a Purpose

*Prodigal Daughter—USA*

On Saturday May 8, 1993, all the “Goodbye” party decorations were set out on the table along with the paper plates, salads, and desserts. Long-time friends were leaving for a new home and a new job in Alaska. The coals were hot on the barbecue and the meat was marinating, ready to cook.

Guests were beginning to arrive when the phone rang. My husband, Walt, answered. In a moment, he asked, “Who’s calling—what?” “Marie’s been KIDNAPPED!” our daughter, Shirley, screamed.

I was standing next to him and sank to the floor. *God, NO!* He gave me the phone. I listened as Shirley retold the story of Connie, Marie’s five-year-old sister, half pushing, half riding Marie’s bike home. They had been playing at the school just a block from their home in Clarimore, a neighboring community. Connie told her mom that a man got out of his car and held a knife to Marie’s throat and told her not to scream. She got into his car. Connie described the car as dark red.

We found out later that he threatened Marie, “If you scream, I’ll kill you and your whole family!” He didn’t know it, but Connie was hiding behind the electric box not ten feet away. Marie could not scream and jeopardize Connie’s life.

We left our friends to look for Marie. The Sheriff’s officers were on their way. We drove to the hospital, thinking she might be there. As we talked to the intake clerk in the Emergency Room, we heard the APB on the radio. Then we knew it wasn’t a mistake. We were living a nightmare. We drove out to Clarimore. We looked at every red car, wondering if the

kidnapper was driving with Marie inside, too little for us to see.

When we got to the outskirts of Clarimore, we saw cars and trucks driving every which way all with baseball bats and guns sticking out the doors or hanging in the windows. The intent suspicious looks on everyone’s faces told us they were with us, looking for the man who had kidnapped our beautiful blond granddaughter.

As we crossed the railroad tracks going to Shirley’s house, we prayed out loud for Marie’s safe return. We nearly had a head-on with an old blue Chevy sedan full of people. They made us stop. They had Marie!

We started praising the Lord as we got out of our jeep and ran toward the car. Marie couldn’t wait for the door to be opened; she jumped out the window into Walt’s arms and buried her head in his neck. He held her very tight. When he gave her to me I put my hand under her bottom to support her weight and felt the wetness. I looked at my hand. BLOOD!

The family in the blue Chevy also had Connie with them. But in my anxiety, I didn’t see Connie or I would have taken her with us. I believe she felt abandoned at that moment and that hurt has stayed with her. By that time, several trucks and cars had pulled up and the men talked to Walt, learning that we had Marie safe with us. But adrenalin was high and they were determined to continue looking for the kidnapper.

We drove Marie, and the other family brought Connie to the house. Somehow my son, William, Shirley, and the Bear County Sheriff’s deputies arrived there in close succession.



The questioning began. Connie had been very observant. She described the man using characteristics from those men standing around her. Her Uncle William was near in size and coloring. She described the red car. The Lieutenant kept insisting that Connie give him some idea of the license plate. She told him there was none. He wouldn't listen. She told him there was a piece of paper in the window. Then she described the new car sticker and even gave some of the numbers.

By this time Marie needed some clean clothes and a trip to the hospital. We went into the house to change her and put all of her soiled clothes into an evidence bag without letting them touch the floor. Then we took her to the hospital.

Shirley's husband, Larry, had been more than an hour away, on a business trip. He came to the hospital as soon as he could. He was very angry and vengeful. I prayed with him and talked to him about how much Marie would need him to see her through this, now and in the future. A couple of times I had to get help restraining him. Walt and a friend of ours went to their house and with Shirley's permission took all of Larry's guns to a safe place until he had himself more in control.

There ensued a night of evidence gathering, then three hours of reconstructive surgery to put Marie's female and anal parts back together. Our new pastor came to the hospital to sit with us and pray. The social worker on our case was a personal friend from church. She stayed with us most of the night. Her experience and faith helped me through those first few dark hours. We talked about the 23rd Psalm and I kept reciting it to myself. Then she sat and held me during church the next day when all I could do was cry.

Larry and Shirley stayed at the hospital around the clock, going home alternately only for showers. There was a stream of visitors. For several hours, Marie was open for questions but clammed up later. There were still bits of information that the deputies needed. A friend, who was a police officer in Westmont and had a good rapport with Marie, came up and brought



*Sent by God, by Lynn M. Burgher*

some board games to play with her. During the course of the games he was able to get the balance of the information they needed to put their case together.

The next morning when Marie's kidnapping was announced in the Clarimore Mormon Church, a man by the name of Johnson got up and ran out. He had seen the man with the little blond girl huddled in the corner of the passenger seat of his car, because he had pulled the car out of the ditch on his farm, at the entrance to the gun club. He immediately went home and called the Bear County Sheriff's office.

Later, we found out that the Lord had spoken to him and told him to lock the gate to the gun club the night before. Usually in the Spring, the gate remains open for weeks. Closing the gate prevented the kidnapper's entrance and foiled his actual goal of killing Marie.

One of the deputies thought he had found the perpetrator, but the Lieutenant was so busy he did not hear the information at the hospital. Fortunately, the deputy was dedicated and continued to watch the man he suspected, even on his off-duty hours. When the suspect took a bucket of soapy water out to his car, the deputy moved in and arrested him. He was the man.

I love the Lord with all my heart and continue to seek to serve Him daily. My guiding Bible verse has been Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many." Christ spent His life in service, so how could I do any less?

The first few days were a blur. We were in shock as a family. Our oldest daughter and her boyfriend came to be with us at the hospital. My son and his wife arrived and stayed to help. We kept Connie with us as much as possible so she didn't feel left out.

Marie and her family received a lot of attention from the town and the media. Someone mowed their lawn, put out the trash, brought food. Someone was always driving by. After Marie came home from the hospital, the town rented Barney and he came and made a party at Marie's house for all the children in Clarimore. Marie went back to school for a few days before summer break started and everyone was allowed to bring a pillow to sit on, just like Marie.

Shirley worked at a day care center, so she took both girls to work with her every day. She and Larry talked long into the night every night, trying

to cope because Marie could not be left alone, or she wouldn't go to sleep.

Shirley had always believed and still does that *"No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; He'll never let you be pushed past your limit; He'll always be there to help you come through it"* (I Corinthians 10:13 Msg).

The pressure of the preliminary hearing, the trial, the sentencing phase, and the appeal phase caused a great deal of stress for the entire family. Because I had worked in the court system for many years, another judge had to be brought in to hear the preliminary hearing and the trial had to be moved to another jurisdiction. Several attorneys in the Public Defender's office would not take the case because of their long-time friendship with me. Shirley did not want Marie or Connie to have to testify, so that had to be worked out through the Victim Advocates office in Aspsville. The trial and sentencing hearing were held in Westmont Second District Court.

Shirley and Larry worked together very well at the beginning, but he was pressuring her to have another child, a son. However, her health was poor and the stress of everything was making it worse. Her doctor prescribed a medication called Lupron, which entirely destroyed Shirley's female hormone system with only two doses. Lupron adversely affects her to this day. The medicine was to stay the endometriosis so she could get pregnant, but it gave her severe migraines daily and debilitating hot flashes every twenty minutes. She was not able to function. She was not able to work or keep up with the housework. They sold their house in Clarimore and moved to a little rental house in our town to get Marie away from some of the memories. They hoped to build a new house and a new life.

During the trial phase, Larry became very distant and verbally abusive. It appeared to us that he blamed Shirley for the kidnapping. And he did not seek the Lord for guidance, comfort, or



forgiveness. He had been raised Mormon and joined the Presbyterian Church with a profession of faith, but did not seek the Lord by reading the Bible or going to church.

The daily trips to Westmont during the trial were hard on all of us. Shirley encouraged us to talk about the kidnapping. She felt that if we adults couldn't talk about it and handle it, how could we expect a six-year-old child to deal with it? Shirley began counseling for herself and the girls as soon as possible. Larry refused to go. Connie did well with the counselor until she thought she would have to testify in the preliminary hearing; then she started putting her hands on her ears and refused to talk to the counselor.

The perpetrator was convicted and sent to prison for four 15-year consecutive sentences on the four first degree felonies. However, his attorney appealed the sentence and it was sent back to the District Court to be re-sentenced. He was then sentenced to four concurrent sentences. He had been molested as a child by his stepfather. When he was 12 years old, he molested his three-year-old sister who sent a written affidavit to the court that was read during the penalty phase. Testimony showed there have been innumerable victims since then.

Walt and I talked, cried, and prayed. It was the first time in our married lives that we had spent time in the Word together. I didn't realize at that time how much pain I was in. I have spent a great deal of life living through and in spite of pain, I was basically ignoring it until I could handle it. But this wouldn't go away. I was angry with God. I never stopped believing. I knew He was there with Marie, I knew that Jesus instructed Johnson to close the gate, and ultimately I knew that God had a purpose for Marie since He preserved her life so carefully. But it still hurt.

I met with some Christian friends weekly, who listened to me and encouraged me and called me on my "pity party" days. I also began to see a Christian counselor. He helped me deal with my anger towards my father, my first husband, and God. I perceived God to be male, so my problem seemed to be with maleness in general.

I love the Lord with all my heart and continue to seek to serve Him daily. My guiding Bible verse has been Mark 10:45: "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" Christ spent His life in service, so how could I do any less?

### Epilogue

The perpetrator came up for his first parole hearing in 2009. The whole family was there. Marie testified. He lied to the Hearing Officer, so she recommended that he be denied parole or any more parole hearings. He will spend his life in prison.

Marie is grown and the mother of a beautiful, smart little girl. She has faith in God but doesn't realize what a witnessing opportunity she has in her own story. She has a great personality, is caring, kind, and outgoing. God continues to call her. She works as Head CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) at an assisted living facility, takes excellent care of her daughter, and attends college to be a Registered Nurse.

Connie has had a fight with life. When she put her hands over her ears at five years old, they stayed there. She made choices not to deal with her feelings. After her parents' divorce, Connie got into trouble with drugs. Then she met another addict who took her to the pits. He is now serving prison time for his abuse of drugs, her, and their child. Then she came back to God. She has finally taken her hands off her ears. She has changed her

attitudes and has taken responsibility for her own life. She is a great mother and doing very well.

Shirley got into trouble with prescription pain pills. She became addicted from the pain of the Lupron, the endometriosis, the hysterectomy, the constant migraines due to the hormone imbalance, and the emotional pain of verbal abuse. She ended up in jail and treatment, so Larry got the children at the time of their divorce. However, the extreme emotional pain she endured at the loss of her children put her back on the path with the Lord.

For most people, this would have destroyed them. It almost destroyed me watching her learn day-by-day how to love herself and help her children. No matter how badly the children treated her, she persevered, loved and cared for them. She is now in a very happy relationship and plans to be re-married soon.

“Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. This I declare about the Lord: He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; He is my God, and I trust Him”  
(Psalm 91:1-2 NLT).

My husband was deeply affected by the kidnapping and still can't talk about it without tears. As for me, the Lord has faithfully walked by my side. He has sent people into my life who were willing to teach me of His love, to help me understand forgiveness, and who loved me in spite of my anger and moodiness. I am a slow learner, but finally have learned some of the lessons of forgiveness that God has been teaching me. My anger has dissipated.

I am now retired from the courts and work at the Pregnancy Care Center, doing what I love: talking about Jesus and His love. I pray constantly that each member of my family will accept the Lord and His sovereignty over their lives.

**Prodigal Daughter's** life journey has led her to service at the Pregnancy Care Center and to the people of the MVan Parish in Yaounde, Cameroon, Africa. She serves as liaison to the Presbyterian Mission Committee and helps raise funds and initiates projects to benefit the people of the church, in particular the children. She retired after 32 years in the court system in June of 2005. She has three children, two step-children, 15 grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. The joys of her life are serving the Lord, her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.





# Evening Prayer of Trust in God

Sarah Yates—Brigham City, UT

*“Listen to my prayer, O God, and hide not Yourself from my supplication! Attend to me and answer me; I am restless and distraught in my complaint and must moan” (Psalm 55:1-2 Amp).*

O Lord, my God, since childhood I have known of Your presence and influence in our lives, but sometimes I wonder whether You are too far away today.

There is so much anger, so much inequity, so much strife, so much poverty and disease, even natural disasters that I wonder why You do not intervene. Perhaps You do, and I do not recognize it, but I am one of those crying out for You to hear and act.

Yet I know that You are here and have been throughout history, and that people cried out to You and were saved. Why do You seem so far away today?

It was a gentler time when I grew up, perhaps because we had more time. Our grandparents and parents were sure life would be better for their children and grandchildren.

Today, Lord, I’m not sure. In our reach for things, we have fouled the air, water and land, and we have let the chasm between rich and poor grow in our own land, as well as others.

And we seem to have left love out of the equation. Technology gives us the opportunity to keep in touch—but we actually touch another less than we did in the past.

Lastly, Lord, there is me. This child of God is no longer a child. I groan after gardening even though I love it.

I feel joy for older couples strolling hand-in-hand, but it emphasizes my aloneness.

With all that in my lament, I must put my trust in You, O God. You brought me through childhood, guided me in marriage and raising children, and into new joy of being a couple again.

You were with me in my husband’s illness and are with me in my own, so I must put my trust in You. Be with me as I continue in this path. Help me to greet each day with joy and anticipation and to live it well. Help me to be kind and considerate to others and to remember that all I do should reflect Your love.

I say my praises quietly as I sink into bed after devotions. And I raise my petitions, asking what I can do to alleviate some of the injustices of this country and the world, asking for healing of any who are hurting, for I know that they are also Your children and You love them. Help me to love them, too.

Let me praise You more loudly, let me proclaim You more clearly in my words and actions, that You are God Almighty, Ruler of the Universe.

**Sarah Yates** lives alone, except for her kitties. She quit her employment as managing editor of the *Box Elder News Journal* in 1999 when her husband was very ill. Since his death in 2002, she has been called upon for various writing and historical research projects, and is a volunteer in a broad spectrum that includes her church, Acts Six Soup Kitchen, Meals on Wheels, Fine Arts Center, garden club, and several organizations.

# From Cult to New Age to New Creation

*Wendy Grant—Barre, VT*

I have loved God since before I can remember. I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness, and although I was taught false doctrine, I loved Him with my whole heart. When I was 14 years old, I was baptized. The night before my baptism, I prayed that God would teach me His truth so I could teach others. After my baptism, I felt guilty as I started to doubt the things I was being taught. I thought I was under attack by the enemy, and I kept trying to rebuke it. Little did I know that God was working in my heart and mind to reveal Himself as He really is.

*Little did I know that God was working in my heart and mind to reveal Himself as He really is.*

As Jehovah's Witnesses, we were taught that we did not have the gift of the Holy Spirit—only those who worked at the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society had this gift. If we wanted to understand the Bible, we needed to read the Watchtower publications and not just the Bible alone. I rebelled against this idea and asked the Holy Spirit into my life through prayer, apologizing to God if it was out of line for me to ask for this gift, but still desiring to draw closer to Him.

The Holy Spirit was faithful, and I began to see His Word with open eyes. I left the Jehovah's Witnesses when I turned 18. I did, however, feel so guilty about leaving that I married an unbeliever and lived a life without God. I still prayed and still read the Bible once in a while, but always felt that because I had left the Jehovah's Witnesses, I had also left Him and that He no longer loved me. This was a lie that I had been taught.

When my marriage ended in divorce, I moved to Florida, and after a time of living for self, I started my spiritual search again. My roommate at the time was into the New Age movement and convinced me it was a wonderful way of life. She kept telling me things like, "It doesn't matter how you serve god, just be a good person . . . Don't you think god wants you to be happy?" I fought it for a while because I did know the Bible. Even though I wasn't taught true doctrine, I knew enough to know she was wrong. Unfortunately, it didn't take long to fall into the trap.

I began to read horoscopes and books on reincarnation. I purchased a "wisdom deck," a form of Tarot cards. We had friends who were fortune tellers, and I began to feel comfortable in this life—until one night. While reading a book on reincarnation, I heard a voice so clearly that I responded. As I did, I realized not only was there no one there, but whatever it was, it was not something good.

The hair on the back of my head stood up, and I threw the book across the room, got down on my knees, and began to beg God to get me out of the mess I had gotten myself into.

I immediately found a Christian radio station and began to play Christian music day and night. I found every book, Tarot card, crystal, and whatever else I knew was an abomination to the Lord and burned each and every one of them. One book would not burn. It just squealed. When it did get to the point where I thought no one could read it, I threw it in the trash. I found my old Bible from the Jehovah's Witnesses and began reading it morning and night.



A few weeks earlier, my mother had received Christ as Savior by watching Christian television and was telling me that I should purchase cable in order to watch it. Although I did have a basic cable package that came with my apartment, I was not much of a TV watcher at that time, so I didn't pursue her suggestion. I thought if I could just listen to the Christian radio stations and find a good church, I'd be fine. But my mother kept after me, saying, "You need to get Christian television." I know she was praying for me, asking that I would listen to her pleas to purchase additional cable channels. I still didn't think it was something I needed.

However, one evening as I turned on the news and switched to one of the few channels I had, I noticed a channel I had never seen before. "Somehow" I had received a full package of channels. The next day I called the apartment complex office to see if something had changed in our basic cable package. They replied, "No, we didn't purchase a larger package. You may want to call the cable company so you aren't charged extra." I then called the cable company, who after checking into the matter, informed me that I did not have a larger package and they did not know why I was receiving more channels than I should have been. I was a little surprised when the representative said, "Enjoy them." I never had to pay extra.

For the next three months, I enjoyed watching Christian television every spare moment I got. However, I still had strong feelings about how I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness. One night I watched a program which was discussing different cults, including Jehovah's Witnesses. I started listening very intently but eventually became very angry. I tried calling in to ask questions, but all I got was a busy signal. I finally slammed the phone down and turned the TV off. It didn't take long—about 15 minutes—before I turned the TV on again. Although I didn't like what I was hearing,

I knew I needed to hear what they were saying. It took about three months of watching Christian television every night before I gave my life to Christ.

"What God claims, I yield;  
what I yield, He accepts;  
what He accepts, He fills;  
what He fills, He uses;  
what He uses, He blesses."  
—Walter B. Knight

One night, as I was watching, a program host gave an invitation to receive Christ as Savior. I was compelled to fall on my knees and pray with him and was suddenly overcome by joy, contentment, and wholeness. I had never felt this before in all my other spiritual pursuits. I cried and laughed and praised God.

The very next day I started looking for a good Bible-teaching church in the Fort Lauderdale area. That weekend I attended church, went to a Bible class, and then returned for the evening service. My heart was starving for what only God could provide. I just could not get enough!

Monday I went to work praising God. That evening when I returned home and turned on the TV . . . my cable was gone!

Beyond a shadow of a doubt, I believe that God answered my dear mother's prayer that I would get Christian television and be saved. He then took it away when I found a solid Bible-teaching church in which He knew I would grow.

I studied the Bible, attended church regularly, and attended classes at the local Bible College. Eventually, I was blessed with a job on the staff of a large church in Fort Lauderdale. In that position,

God used all that I had gone through in my life to share Christ's love with others. I served in women's ministry, counseling ministry, administered both the volunteer and women's discipleship ministries, taught at women's and single's retreats, and also became the assistant to the senior pastor of a church of over 18,000 members.

In my quiet times with the Lord, He let me know that Ft. Lauderdale was His place for me to learn and grow, but that eventually He would bring me back out into the world to share all He had taught me there. I held on to and cherished every moment of that season.

After six years on staff, God called me back to Vermont, where I am blessed by the love and friendships I have with the women here and am humbly grateful to Jesus for bringing me home. With bated breath, I daily look forward to what He will unfold next in my life as I continue to serve Him.

**Wendy Grant** is the Director of Women's Ministry where she attends church in Barre, Vermont. Although raised in Vermont, she moved to Southern Florida and lived there for 16 years before moving back to Vermont six years ago. She loves teaching women the Word of God and bringing scripture to life. She has a special place in her heart for the women that God brings into her life and cherishes each one of them. Wendy has a desire to write. She has one children's book, yet to be published, and is working on many short devotions and hopes to put those together for a women's devotional. She is the mother of two grown sons, and grandmother of a precious granddaughter, with another on the way. She enjoys cooking, baking, and gardening, and she especially loves spending time with her family.



*On the Way*, by Lynn M. Burgher





*Reaching Up*, by Sue Brooks

## My New Psalm

*Kathy Love—Brigham City, UT*

Lord, I lift up my hands to reach for You,  
Then I feel that Your arms are already  
around me.

The measure of Your love  
is overwhelming,  
for I still sin and  
You still love,

How unworthy I am

How incredible You are.

Oh, Lord, I lift up my hands to reach for You.

**Kathy Love** lives in Brigham City, Utah, with her husband and soul mate, Jay. She is the mother of three. Her husband, children, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren light up her life and keep it hopping. She has worked for Centennial Title Company the last 24 years as an escrow officer. The goal and hope of her life is to take full advantage of all the opportunities God puts in her life to show His glory and love.

# Give Me a Hearing Heart

Diane Kulkarni—Perry, UT

*“Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don’t try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God’s voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; He’s the One Who will keep you on track”*  
(Proverbs 3:5-6 Msg).

Larnell Harris sings a beautiful song that reaches down into my soul, disturbing my complacency. The chorus goes like this:

*I miss My time with you  
those moments together  
I need to be with you each day  
and it hurts Me when you say  
you’re too busy  
busy trying to serve Me  
but how can you serve Me  
when your spirit’s empty?*

It’s true. I too often trade God’s quiet moments with me for accomplishing my daily tasks, and hence never experience a full and joyful spirit. Once making the decision to listen to myself rather than God, I yield to my many distractions and miss out totally on what He wants to say to me. I know what I ought to do—seek Him early, but instead I slip into my self-sufficiency mode and judge by what I see and feel. From that position of presumption, it’s easy to “jump to conclusions” about myself and others, ending up head-first in the pit of humiliation.

Last summer, several friends and I met in the park for a summer Bible study on the Beatitudes. When we came to the discussion of *“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth”* (Matthew 5:5), I discovered the key to listening to God. It is meekness: the ability to surrender one’s life to Him for heart change so that instead of rebelling, one becomes humble, teachable, and willing to follow.

In the lesson, we were asked to contrast meekness with rebellion: Exodus 33:7-18 with passages

in Isaiah 30. In my reading, I discovered that in approximately 1500 B.C., Moses, described as *“very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”* (Numbers 12:3), demonstrated how to please God. But the Israelites—800 years later—had clearly refused to follow Moses’ example.

God said, *“In repentance and rest you will be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength.”* But you were *unwilling*” (Isaiah 30:15). He had invited them into peace, but the people refused Him. Why is that?

In order to understand what rebellion is from God’s point of view, I made a list from this passage. He says they:

1. *Executed* a plan, but not Mine
2. *Proceeded* down to Egypt without consulting Me
3. *Took refuge* in the safety of Pharaoh
4. *Refused to listen* to the instruction of the LORD
5. *Rejected God*: Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel
6. *Rejected His Word* and put their trust in oppression and guile

With this picture emerging in my mind, I wanted to see what Moses had done that was different. In Exodus 33:7-18:

1. I watched Moses set up the Tent of Meeting so he could go inside and converse with God. Moses needed clarification, so he went where he knew God would meet him and speak to him *“face-to-face, just as a man speaks with his friend.”*

- **The meek choose to meet God to receive His wisdom and then listen to obey.**

2. I watched Moses remind God of what He’d told him:



- > “You said, ‘Bring up this people.’”
- > “You have not let me know whom You will send with me.”
- > “You said, ‘I have known you by name and you have found favor in My sight.’”

- **The meek remember their history with God, ask questions, and rehearse what He has promised.**

3. I watched Moses articulate his true desire: “If I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee” (verse 13).

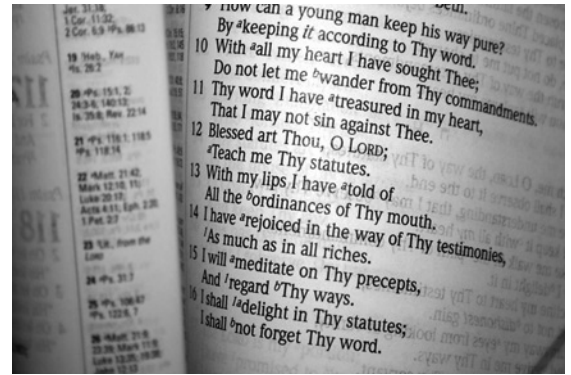
- **The meek wholeheartedly desire to know God and His ways because they want to go deeper with Him. [Diane, is this sinking in?]**

What a contrast with Israel several centuries later when the people didn’t want to hear from or about God! They refused to listen to His instruction, replacing the liberty of being safe in Him with the bondage of trusting in political oppression and deceit. In contrast, Moses sought God out and wanted to know His ways. Moses made God his refuge, but Pharaoh became the refuge of the Israelites.

In Exodus 33, God answers Moses and confirms His promises. He graciously says, “My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest” (verse 14). Moses demonstrates that when God speaks and we listen, the natural outcome is joyful worship. Moses’ spirit is full, overflowing with desire: “I pray Thee, show me Thy glory” (verse 18).

What is God’s response to this sudden outburst of love? He gives a fresh revelation of Himself. He wants to be known. “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious on whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion” (verses 18-19).

My meditation on these two passages over several days has barely touched the surface, but I have learned that the meek listen and when they listen, they hear wonderful things the rebellious never will. When they seek God, making time to speak to and hear from Him, when they rejoice in their history with Him and fervently desire to be transformed by His presence, God gives them the vision of His glory and much more. The meek are at peace and empowered to live a graced and blessed life in every circumstance.



God’s Treasure, by Sue Brooks

“It is written. Proof enough.  
It is finished. Provision enough.  
It is I. Presence enough.”

—Unknown

Tomorrow morning, when God calls me into solitude to listen to Him, I know with certainty that I will find rest, quiet, and trust in His strength. My spirit will be enthralled as He fills it up. And my worship will be surprising, especially to me.

“. . . the LORD was not in the wind, not in the earthquake, not in the fire, but after the fire, a still small voice” (I Kings 19:11-12).

**Diane Kulkarni’s** profile is located on page 77.

“I lie awake thinking of You, meditating on You through the night. Because You are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of Your wings. I cling to You; Your strong right hand holds me securely” (Psalm 63:6-8 NLT).

# I Will Rise

Kati Germer—New York City, NY

*“Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me” (Micah 7:8 NASB).*

I will never forget March 15th, 2003. In fact, that particular day is indelibly etched in my mind and heart, play by play. It was a cold, grey morning when I left the home of my brother and sister-in-law enroute to the Huntsman Cancer Institute in Salt Lake City, Utah. My father was recovering from an invasive surgery removing a large portion of his colon filled with cancer. The surgery seemed to be a remarkable success, and we were looking forward to taking Dad back home to Sun Valley, Idaho, in hopes of a full recovery.

After I entered the hospital room, my mother slipped out to give my father and me some time alone. That time to ourselves has proved to be most precious, a never-to-be-forgotten treasure. In obvious discomfort and limited mobility, my humble and proud dad asked me to put his socks on his cold feet. As I carefully positioned the socks on each foot, we talked about my job, my new boyfriend, Dad’s hopes of being on the ski mountain by next year, and my niece’s one-year birthday party that was to be held later that afternoon. We shared a sense of overwhelming gladness because it appeared that Dad’s surgery was a triumph and that he might have overcome another bout of cancer. This was his third go-round: first was prostate, second was melanoma, and now, colon. The family was undeniably relieved and elated to finally be going “Home.”

As my father and I were talking, his doctor came in and hesitantly asked if he would like to go home. Before the doctor finished, my dad was on the phone with one of his closest friends who owned a plane and had offered to fly my mother and father back to Sun Valley, to avoid the five-hour drive. My father’s friend immediately agreed



Ilene and Buzz Germer, 2002, by restaurant photographer

that he would pick them up at the Salt Lake City private airport in a matter of hours.

The doctor implored my dad to reconsider because he thought it was still too soon to check out of the hospital, but after my father simply insisted, the oncologist affectionately agreed to discharge. As we made preparations to leave the hospital, my mom called a friend to share the good news and closed her conversation with this encouragement from the Lord: *“Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall I will rise; Though I dwell in darkness, the LORD is a light for me” (Micah 7:8 NASB).* At that moment, she was thinking of cancer as the enemy. Little did she or we realize that greater enemies were before us.

Within the hour, we were off to the airport with my father fully reclined in the front passenger seat. After arriving at the airport, Mom and I took Dad to the plane in a wheelchair. I hugged them both goodbye and drove off to their granddaughter’s first birthday party.





While candles were being blown out and cake was being eaten, celebration charged the house—not only for our precious little girl’s first birthday, but also for answered prayers regarding Dad’s successful surgery.

An hour or so after the delivery of my parents to the Salt Lake City Airport, my sister, Kim, who was to pick up my parents at the Sun Valley airport, called my brother’s house. She informed us that the plane had not yet landed; the flight was estimated to be 45 minutes long. Since an ugly mixture of snow and rain was falling that day, our first thought was that the flight had been weather delayed. However, when two more hours passed and still no sign of a plane, we began to worry.

Meanwhile, a woman who worked at the Sun Valley airport asked to speak with Kim outside in her car. My sister was alone. After the woman informed her that the plane had been lost off the radar, Kim immediately called us again, delivering the terrorizing news. We panicked. We longed to be with my sister in Idaho, and we wanted to be close to my parents’ home for any news that might come our way. Immediately, we experienced support from family: plane tickets were booked and paid for my brother, Kyle, and his wife, Jenn, and me. We were petrified but remained hopeful.

Our 40-minute plane ride was bursting with turbulence. I found myself praying harder than I ever had in my life. We said a prayer as an entire family; we were saying prayers individually; we paired apart saying prayers. It seemed to be the only act that would bring comfort, even if only for a few minutes. When we landed, we were told a search and rescue unit had been called out to begin the exploration; however, it had been called off due to the severe weather building up in the mountains.

To this day, I don’t know if I will ever feel as helpless and powerless as I did then. The thought that the two people I loved deepest could be in pain, hurt, need my help, and I could do nothing—there is no sensation to match.

We were told to go home and come back to the sheriff’s office in the morning to begin another search effort. Following an unbearably restless night, we were off to meet the sheriff in the early morning hours. By then, word had spread, and a huge number of supporters had already gathered at the office at 6 o’clock on that cold, snowy morning. However, immediately following the feeling of encouragement, my heart plunged when I saw the beloved face of the pilot’s wife, also a very dear friend of the family. We looked at her and knew the news was not good.

The mind/body is a funny system. Even after the pilot’s wife had informed us that the plane was last seen on radar spiraling down at an enormous speed, we still clung to hope. We piled in the car and drove to the site where search and rescue had set up camp. It wasn’t long before the sheriff walked toward us and delivered the deplorable news: no survivors. Not only were there no survivors, but because it was an incredibly violent accident, there was nothing left of the wreckage. Except one thing: The Holy Bible.



*The Surviving Word*, by Kim Germer Prew

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said a member of the search and rescue team, obviously shaken to the core. “It was an oil fire, yet this paper-thin, leather-bound Bible is the only thing we have to give the children of those who have perished.”

One month after the accident, we received a copy of the monthly devotional booklet *Our Daily Bread* in the mail (my mother was a subscriber). On the cover was a picture of a Bible lying in long, green prairie grass with the caption, “*The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever*” (Isaiah 40:8 NASB). Coincidence? I think not.

After seeing the cover of that edition of *Our Daily Bread*, my siblings and I had a concrete Bible with that verse inscribed made as a memorial, which we placed at the crash site. Having an ultimate faith in the Lord is a comfort beyond words. The calmness that faith brought to me and our family during the darkest days conceivable was, and continues to be, simply indescribable. This is not to say I never encountered days that brought such sadness that it took me to my knees, but I am confident that my God does not—and will not—ever give me more than I can handle. As cliché as that may seem, that profound truth is the only thing that provided me strength through the death of my parents.

My mother provided me with an everlasting gift upon my graduation from high school. Of course at the time, I did not understand the complexity or the magnitude of the words she presented to me, but she had prayed for a substantial amount of time for a verse that she could declare for me as “mine.” The verse is a constant in my everyday life: “*For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

What a magnificent gift my mother presented me with these words from my God! They have guided and aided me in my life more than she ever knew they would. My sister, Kim, does a Bible study with the Bible that my mother used for as long as



I can remember. The old, well-used volume has more highlighted words than it has white on the pages. My sister shares with me regularly about what a blessing it is to read my mother’s notes written in the Word she now uses.

We keep the Bible that “survived” in my parents’ former home, which now belongs to my sister and her husband. We look at it regularly in awe and often wonder if my mother, my father, or both were holding the Bible for comfort as they knew their plane was fatefully descending. We will never know, and that is tolerable only because of the faith embodied in our lives.

My mother taught her children the Word and the faith she practiced throughout her lifetime. Her last email to us is typical of her love and devotion to Christ and her children.

*I found this to be very interesting and wanted to share it with the Germettes. I also prayed the prayer at the end for all of us to get us through this next battle with a very familiar foe.*

*“May Father God bless \_\_\_\_\_ in whatever it is that He knows he/she may be needing this day! And may \_\_\_\_\_ life be full of Your peace, prosperity and power as he/she seeks to have a closer relationship with You. Amen.”*

*“Faith doesn’t get you around trouble, it gets you through it.” –Robert Campbell*



I am thankful my mother and father raised me to know Jesus as my Savior. I long for the day to be with them again, but the gift of my nieces and nephews and seeing my mother and father in their faces makes life a little more delightful. I often wonder if Mom and Dad can see us from up above, and I relish the idea that they can.

**Kati Germer** lives in New York City, NY, working as a licensed clinical social worker at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx. Kati also volunteers for many agencies, such as Big Brother Big Sister of New York City, New York Cares, The Boys and Girls Club of New York City, and Habitat for Humanity (Africa). In her spare time she loves to travel, snow ski, hike, play tennis, go to the movies, and spend time with her family and friends.



*Memorial Marker at the Crash Site, by Jennifer Rudge Germer*

# Thoughts from a Fishing Boat

Dorothy Catlin—Brigham City, UT

My boat rests on the beach, empty nets heaped in the bottom.  
Jesus, stepping in, asks me to push out again.  
This is what boats are made for, and I have nothing better to do, so I row him out.  
His voice rings off the water, and the people hear.  
When he says “Put in your net for a catch,” I grimace.  
*Who does this guy think he is? I’ve been out here all night and haven’t caught a thing!*  
In reality, I’ve been fishing all my life. It’s all I know. I think it’s what I was made for.  
Even as I grumble, the net sags. *Where did all these fish come from?*  
The boat dips, almost going over as I grapple with the load.  
Suddenly my partner is alongside tugging.  
We haul more fish than we’ve ever seen in a single pull.  
Beach gravel grinds into my knees. Fraying nets bulge with wriggling life.  
*Lord, don’t come any closer! I didn’t believe you—I’m so full of myself!*

My boat comes in handy. Jesus likes to use it, so I take him where he wants to go.  
He sleeps as I row against the rising wind. *How can he sleep through this gale?*  
Frantically I bail against the impossible; waves wash over my head.  
*Lord, wake up! We need all hands!*  
His voice rings off the water, and the wind hears.  
Cold droplets run down my scalp into my ears, and suddenly all is still. *Am I deaf?*  
*Lord, who are you? What kind of a man can do this?*

My boat waits on the beach. Jesus says he’s staying for awhile.  
Ready to go home, we push off without him.  
Darkness falls with the breaking storm. No point in bailing this time.  
Unraveling with fear, we cling to the timbers for life.  
Then I see Jesus walking, moving over the waves. Reality bends.  
*Has this storm stolen my senses? Lord, is it really you? If you call me, I’ll come.*  
His voice rings across the water, and my feet are over the side of the boat.  
Rain stings my face. Slobbering waves drag, and my steps falter. *Lord, help!*  
Jesus reaches for me.  
His voice rings off the water and I hear. Again all is still, but this time I see.  
*Surely you are the Son of God!*

My boat rocks on the water. I am fishing, because I don’t know what else to do.  
*Who is that on the beach? Straining, my eyes trace a familiar form.*  
He calls, “No fish? Throw the net on the other side!”  
His voice rings across the water, and I know.  
Out of the boat for good this time, I flail to shore.  
*Lord Jesus! All I want is you!*

When they bring in the boat, I help haul the groaning net.  
But it’s not really my boat after all. Maybe it never was.  
It’s not really about the boat anyway, is it? And I didn’t even catch these fish.  
I am with Jesus, and that’s all that matters.  
Reality unveils, and breakfast on the beach never tasted so good.

Dorothy Catlin’s profile is located on page 57.





*Waiting*, original artwork by Anne E. Williamson



“We write not to be understood, but to understand.” –Cecil Day-Lewis

Although writing has become amazingly therapeutic for me, initially I balked when the Lord called me to the craft about 25 years ago. The care of my quadriplegic husband had me overwhelmed physically and mentally. Yet, when I finally obeyed and began journaling about the ways God ministered to me daily, I found myself focusing more on His blessings than on my trials. After John passed away, the Lord called me beyond simple journaling to become a published writer. Once again, I balked, begging for a “real job,” something less risky. Now, six years later, it’s obvious that writing has served to heal my mourning, strengthen my trust in God, and give me something positive to pursue. It’s also given me an added means by which to encourage others, and spread the Good News, since I’ve now had dozens of stories published. But, best of all, I come away from each project with a deeper understanding of God’s marvelous work in my life. –Laura Bradford

Not by accident but through the providence of God, I responded to an e-mail address that proved to be a blessing to me. I found a couple of editors who took interest in my stories and edited them to perfection. *A New Song* is a book that will balance tears with laughter as readers get caught up in its true-to-life stories and testimonies of God’s goodness. –Glen Davenport

I’ve been extremely privileged to write for *A New Song*, and the idea of sharing my story has thrilled me completely. –Christine Miller-Ramey

Several days after sending my story to *A New Song* and deciding to use my real name, I had one of my “screaming” dreams. When I have these dreams, I usually wake my husband up because I am trying to make shouting noises to scare away an attacker. This time there was the usual attacker, but I was able to yell loudly in my dream and scare him away. I realized that for the first time in decades I had found my voice. Praise God! –Shelley Kancitis

Although I had taught composition for many years and urged my students to submit their writing to contests, my writing was done for my own personal discovery or for the encouragement of others in their grace journey. That limited audience changed in 1993 when Diane Kulkarni prodded me just as she’s prodded others in this collection to make their voices known in a public way. My story came out of a speaking engagement in which I mentioned not knowing my biological father’s name. When the final draft emerged, I knew God had used the writing process to affirm His Truth in my life. I join Diane in urging believers to write their God-stories. He longs for us to be His voice, to edify others and give Him glory! –Georgia Herod

As I wrote my story and began recalling many painful and hurtful memories, God came and sat by my side. My prayer is that He will come and sit by your side as you read these stories. After all, He is the only reason my story could have been written. To God goes all the glory. Be blessed.  
–Pam Apodaca

During my husband’s battle with cancer and for the year after he passed, I kept a journal, really more like a “travelogue” through the valley of the shadow of death. I titled it *Treasures of Darkness* from Isaiah 45:3:



*“I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden wealth of secret places, so that you may know that it is I, The LORD, the GOD of Israel, who calls you by your name.”* When GOD called me to write my story, I had to enter that valley again—to stand in the darkness and bear witness to The Light of His Holy Spirit so others could find the way through. I asked for prayer support, and knew I was on the path when tears blinded my eyes and a familiar deep ache entered my heart. –Connie Mace

My blessing revealed itself after being asked to rework the conclusion. I realized that next to the great gift of salvation, life’s trials are also a gift. In calling me to work through hardships and grow up, God always gives me beauty for ashes.

–Kathleen Barrett

The best bit of advice given to me was to “write it all down”—your thoughts, your feelings, fears, likes and dislikes. I was told to “talk to God on paper like you talk to your best friend.” This resulted in my early journal writing, which has been an enormous help to me over the years, but it wasn’t the same as “writing your story.” Where do I start? How much do I write? What do I leave out? Where does it all fit? It was like my story was a 2,000 piece jigsaw puzzle tipped out onto the table. I turned over the pieces one by one, reflecting the hurts and the bitterness, then handed it all to God. “You put it together, Lord!” And He did. With God as my writer, I scribbled it all down, bringing it all into its right perspective. There were areas completely unknown to me until I stood back and saw the whole picture. This brought complete healing spiritually, mentally, and physically. There was not one piece of that puzzle that did not have the love of God in it for me. I feel incredibly humble. I have become stronger as a person and in my faith I depend entirely on God. He is my mentor, and without Him I know I could not have come to that place of peace and contentment, whatever the circumstances I find myself in. –Sue Underhill

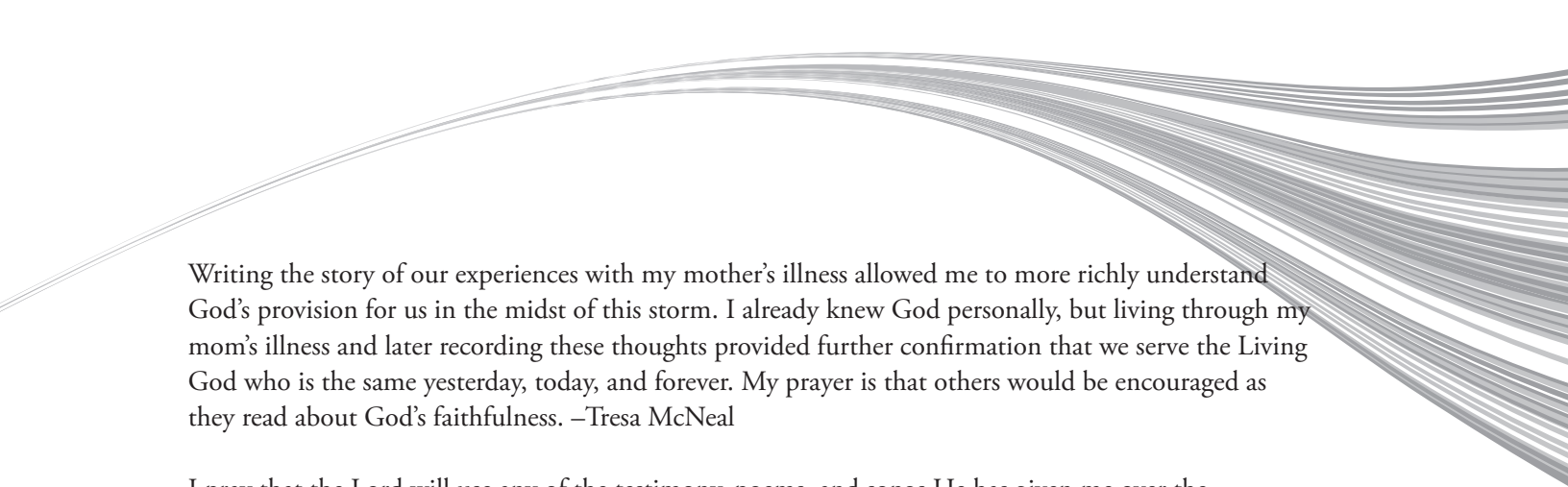
I’ve always thought of myself as a writer. All my jobs since college involved writing. I worked in large corporations for 26 years doing marketing and economic research. The responsibilities included creating reports, sometimes in excess of 50 pages, on the findings. After that, I went into a second career in university teaching, which required a different type of research publishing, not to mention the 300+ page Ph.D. dissertation. I’m currently transitioning from the academic career into retirement. At this stage of my life, I’d like to continue writing but on topics that have much more eternal significance than what I was doing before. However, breaking into this new field has been a lot harder than I expected. The story I wrote for *A New Song* is my first accepted publication in this category, so I’m pretty excited. –Ralph David Westfall

I was thinking about how writing for *A New Song* has impacted me, and realized that it has impacted my family as well. As I shared with them what I was doing, they were all eager to contribute some of their own stories. I think it has opened up some understanding for each other. The worst thing people can do in any relationship is to take each other for granted, but it is easy to slip into that from time to time. It was good for us to renew an appreciation of each others’ experiences and of each others’ differences. We are individuals in God’s kingdom, but also one in His grace.

–Barbara Ali

The story I wrote for *A New Song* was my first experience writing about my God-encounters. At first, I was afraid to share my past. To fully express the magnitude of the lesson I learned required that I relate my history. Frankly, revealing my own willful defiance against the God I have learned to love so much was difficult. However, as I allowed myself to be transparent, He took the broken pieces of my heart and used writing as an instrument to encourage others, and let me know all things are used for His glory. These processes have ignited a deeper passion and hope that, through writing, I may give back to a loving God who lavishes so much of Himself on me. –Natalie Rodriguez

Condensing my long, complex marriage into a short article was almost too difficult, but an “inner urging” to share with others the “prize” would not let me give up. I had to meet the challenge and express the joy of keeping love alive for five decades and counting. To make it through tough times, you have to seek the right guidance. The Word of God is the most powerful guide book on earth. I’m thrilled that *A New Song* gives me the opportunity to share my story with others: the same simple yet amazing truths are there to enrich the life of every single person on earth, no matter what the circumstance. –J. E. Lemmé




Writing the story of our experiences with my mother's illness allowed me to more richly understand God's provision for us in the midst of this storm. I already knew God personally, but living through my mom's illness and later recording these thoughts provided further confirmation that we serve the Living God who is the same yesterday, today, and forever. My prayer is that others would be encouraged as they read about God's faithfulness. –Tresa McNeal






I pray that the Lord will use any of the testimony, poems, and songs He has given me over the years for His glory according to His will. Much of this material is slowly being populated on [www.SharingGospelSongs.com](http://www.SharingGospelSongs.com). –Tom Blakely

My story began as a twenty minute writing exercise: I did not intend to make it an article, but apparently the Lord thought otherwise. Concerned with our financial situation, I sought the Lord's guidance and peace. Well-known Scriptures from both Testaments came to mind as I wrote, and these birthed an article. The Holy Spirit had a lesson for me, and I pray it helps someone else in similar circumstances. The impact on me was profound as both spiritual and temporal things fell into place and I ceased my initial struggle. It was a double blessing: publication in a devotional, a personal goal, and the quieting of my soul. –Sarah Gunning Moser

I often think of this scripture as I prepare to write: *“But these things I plan won't happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, do not despair, for these things will surely come to pass. Just be patient! They will not be overdue a single day!”* (Habakkuk 2:3 TLB). As I am preparing to write, I apply this scripture using my creative imagination for inspiration. Imagination is a powerful entity. It can cause the hair on the back of our neck to stand up, our spirit to soar, or our face to blush. Imagination is the power that holds our beliefs together; we believe with our imagination. Imagination is the wellspring of faith and hope. Our biggest and best dreams for ourselves and others rise from the imagination. As I apply this to writing, I visualize myself calm, peaceful, a child of the King, filled with the Prince of Peace Himself, guiding me, directing me, and directing my writing from the inside out. –Beth Willis Miller



Writing our story has opened my eyes once again to the faithfulness of our Lord. He has continually remained present in all our lives. It has given me a new perspective as well as allowed our story to be discussed and retold in our family to bring more healing. God defines our lives now, not the story. –The Prodigal Daughter



My writing came about on a day that I had the wind knocked out of my sails. I was down. That day God guided me and showed me through the Bible the life's lesson that He wanted me to know. It was an amazing time and I knew I was not alone. I could actually visualize Jesus picking me up off the ground and slinging me like a child up around His neck. All the while He kept walking strongly on the path of Life. I could feel the palm of His hand placed ever so gently against the back of my head as He drew me into Himself for comfort. Never did He miss a beat as He scooped up His beloved into His



arms. He lifted me and my spirits in the early dawn of the day. Jesus gives me everything that I need. I am no longer down. The Holy Spirit is within me and dries my tears. I thank You, God, for picking me up yet again from the floor and draping me across Your shoulders. –Sandy Holly

Neither of my contributions were written specifically for inclusion in *A New Song*. But having them accepted has been a great source of encouragement for the other members of the Writing Group at Christ Fellowship in Palm Beach Gardens, FL, especially the group's leader, who has encouraged me and whose wonderful narrative is also included in this volume. Hopefully, my work will continue to mature so that what I'll be writing six months to a year from now will reveal more insight and grace than what I'm writing now. –Earl Cunningham

After my husband passed away on February 27, 2009, it seemed I lost my joy of writing, although I have continued to write an inspirational article for our Texas Inspirational Writers Alive! group's newsletter, "Inspiration News," each month. When the opportunity came up and I decided at the last minute to enter my story for *A New Song*, it lifted my spirits and caused me to believe I am still a writer. I thank you for the opportunity to find again my love of writing for the Lord.

–Wanda Shadle

Telling my story is another opportunity for God to open up doors and hearts for an intimate, personal relationship with Himself. In a million years, I would never have dreamed that my story would be written in a book or told around the world. I praise the Lord for all of this and I ask all of you to look toward Jesus in your trials and tribulations. I know life is not easy sometimes, but when we put our eyes on Jesus, we can know He's there in the darkest of nights. He holds us in the palm of His hands. He will always lift you up when you're down. He's closer than a brother. Remember, Jesus is always there for you and He will always love you. I pray His blessings over you with God's everlasting love (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:1).

–Diane Rose

I have been writing since I can remember. Not just journals, but stories, newsletters, group sites, blogs, regular letters, poems, songs, any forum of writing I could use to express my thoughts and feelings. God has used that. It seemed like it has been a long time since I was able to write due to issues with moving, my computer, and my self-esteem. When I was approached to write for this book, my first reaction was "NO WAY! I am not good enough, it has been too long, etc." But God pushed me; He told me it was time to get back into writing. That's what I am called to do, so I did. In doing so, it has opened my heart once more, and as soon as I was finished, a huge weight lifted off my shoulders, my writer's block was gone, my passion stronger than ever to spread God's blessings to others . . . And in doing so, I am blessed in new and different ways from before. I pray this book blesses you like it has me. –Amy Jane Sandberg

When I was asked to write a chapter of my life story for this book, the task of reliving those events proved to be more difficult than I had anticipated. But I suppose there never is an "end" or a *final* forgetting to what I have experienced. Memories still linger no matter how much time has passed. Like a Magic Slate, the top sheet can be erased but underneath, traces of what was are still evident. Those traces are the words that you will be reading about the amazing gift of God's forgiveness. After my son Brent's death, a couple of years passed, years wherein I harbored anger and hatred towards Gabriel, my son's killer. But during that dark time when Gabriel was on trial, Someone was beckoning me to leave those destructive feelings and instead begin to embrace God's gift of forgiveness and extend it to the young man who took my son's life. How could I choose not to forgive, knowing that God had forgiven me? May the readers be blessed by reading this and more importantly, moved to forgive those who have brought pain upon them. –Deborah Parnham

# Invitation to Write Reflectively

Dearly Beloved Fellow Traveler,

As I've read through this travelogue, I've found myself humming or singing a couple of lines from "A Servant Song": *"We are pilgrims on a journey; we are travelers on the road; we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load."* Those lyrics may speak to your heart as well. You've read stories, essays, and poems concerning sickness, selfishness, sordidness; discouragement, defeat, despair; lostness, lies, limitations; anger, abuse, and afflictions—all Satan's attempts to destroy us. BUT GOD chose to intervene—to woo errant hearts, to heal diseases, to destroy strongholds, to forgive sins, and to give victory for the journey. Each writer has sung *"a new song . . . a hymn of praise to . . . God"* in hopes that everyone who reads will *"see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD"* (Psalm 40:3 HCSB).

As you've read, you've been reflecting and you've made connections. Perhaps you realized that you've never begun your journey with Christ, much less put your trust in the Lord. Perhaps you paused or parked after reading a selection because the Holy Spirit whispered to your pounding heart—*"This is your life. I want to do for you what I've done for this writer."* Perhaps as you read, you realized that you've taken a detour and that you have wandered far, far away from God the Father. Perhaps you're stuck in a pit of despair, facing financial crisis, critical illness, a rebellious child, or a broken marriage. Or perhaps you're in a rut of routine, no longer expecting God to be involved in your life.

No matter the situation, God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit cry out, *"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you shall find rest for your souls"* (Matthew 11:28-29 NASB).

Perhaps you found yourself saying, "I could have written that!" Perhaps you've just turned the last page and because your perception of God has been enlarged, your heart is bursting with your own "new song." No matter what the situation, you are ready to add your own entry in the "Grace Journey" travelogue.

We invite you to do that now. Sit quietly for a few minutes before the Lord in reflection. Then pick up a pen and begin writing what is in your heart on the pages that follow. Don't worry about spelling or punctuation. Simply present back to God the "new song" and "hymn of praise" He has put in your heart. As you present your life to Him for the first time or as you recall how He has worked in your life, may you gain new strength and courage for the rest of your pilgrimage—and may others *"see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD."*

Georgia Herod



Explosions of Light, by Sue Brooks



# A Story of God's Grace in the Life of

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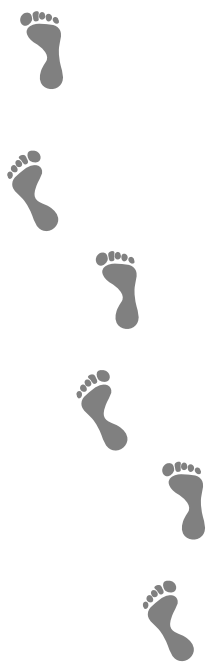
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*The Throne of God* at Huemoz, Switzerland, by Michael Barrett

“Grace is the central invitation to life and the final word. It’s the beckoning nudge and the overwhelming, undeserved mercy that urges us to change and grow, and then gives us the power to pull it off.” –Tim Hansel



“My goal is God Himself, not joy, nor peace, nor  
even blessing, but Himself, my God.” –Roy Hession,  
*We Would See Jesus*

"I waited patiently for the LORD,  
and He turned to me and heard  
my cry for help.

He brought me up from a desolate pit,  
out of the muddy clay,  
and set my feet on a rock,  
making my steps secure.

He put a new song in my mouth,  
a hymn of praise to our God.  
Many will see and fear,  
and put their trust in the LORD."

Psalm 40:1-3

