

Gone With the Mind

The Stories of My Life

By Terri Camp

www.terricamp.com

terri@terricamp.com

www.tadahmom.com

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TERRI CAMP

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	5
FEAR	8
OF MICE AND CHILDREN.....	9
THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE BRYAN.....	15
I AM CHILD HEAR ME ROAR	21
RUNAWAY MOM.....	24
I'VE BEEN WORKING ON THE COMMODOE.....	28
PRIDE AND JAUNDICE	32
LADY AND THE TRAMP(LING) HORSE	36
SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER OF 105.....	39
WHERE THE RUG BURN SHOWS.....	43
MISSION NEARLY IMPOSSIBLE	46
A SISTER FROM SNOWY IOWA	49
MRS. DOUBTWEWILLEVERGETTHEREONTIME.....	55
DRIVING MOM CRAZY	59
THE TAMING OF THE CREW	62
MORE AND PLEASE	66
I LEFT MY FIFTH IN SAN FRANCISCO	71
SAVING PRIVATE BRYAN	76
POWER.....	81
IT TAKES A CHILD ...TO SAVE A VILLAGE.....	82
ASHLEY OF GREEN STABLES	87
THE PIRATES IN SWEAT PANTS.....	92

SING A SONG OF SIX PANTS.....	97
A MIDWINTER KNIGHT’S SCREAM	102
THE MOMMY AND THE PEA	107
OL’ YELLER	113
TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE.....	118
THE GREAT AWAKENING.....	121
EVERYTHING I NEED TO KNOW, I LEARNED ON A THREE DAY ROAD TRIP WITH MY EIGHT CHILDREN	123
LOVE	128
THE CALL OF THE CHILD.....	129
THE WAY WE WEREN’T	133
THE LADY AND THE CAMP	137
TERRI CAMP AND THE EIGHT DWARFS	141
NOBODY KNOWS THE TROUBLE I’M IN	147
THE MERCHANT OF REPENTANCE.....	152
WITHERING HEARTS	156
SOUND MIND.....	162
THE PRESENTS OF GOD	163
PROLOGUE.....	168

Introduction

Scientifically there is not any concrete evidence to suggest that pregnant women lose brain cells or that their brains actually shrink during pregnancy. I don't really care what science says or doesn't say about this topic. I know that something peculiar happened to my brain when I first became pregnant.

I was about two months pregnant when I decided I needed a new puppy. Some of you may already be shaking your head at the thought of being newly pregnant and getting a new puppy. Of course I didn't think, because I was already embarking on the journey of the lost mind.

Not only did I mistakenly get a puppy; I got a puppy that was going to one-day turn into a dog, a big dog. Another thing I failed to take into account when I chose my puppy was that I lived in a one-bedroom apartment, and I worked during the day. What was I going to do while I was away? I was going to put the puppy out on the deck of course.

This worked quite well until the downstairs neighbors decided they didn't like their patio furniture getting "rained" on during the day. After they complained I locked my new puppy into my bedroom.

Each night I would go through the same ritual. I would walk around the room finding all the "spots" where the puppy missed the paper, and flush them down the toilet. One night the toilet clogged.

I quickly yelled out for Steve to come help, but he was out of town for a few months so he didn't come to my rescue. "Perhaps rather than fixing the problem, I could use the bathroom in the laundry room down the block,"

I pondered in my distress. This is when the brain cell blockage passed momentarily and I realized that wasn't an option.

I was quite a sight plunging the toilet, while simultaneously leaning over the bathroom sink. Remember that I told you I was just a couple of months pregnant. I did get the clog out, but didn't realize that it was from all the "spots" that I flushed down along with the paper towels I used to pick them up. I'm not sure if it took more than a week of this to finally figure out that perhaps I should just take a bag out to the dumpster.

In the meantime my lovely puppy managed to dig a hole under the door of my bedroom, eat Steve's prized squirrel skin, my bed, and the linoleum in the adjoining bathroom.

Each day I would come home to find another part of my apartment or belongings eaten. One day I found the puppy had taken the toilet paper and strewn it all over the room.

People would often shake their heads at me when I would tell them of the exploits of the puppy. The secretary where I worked seriously wondered about my mental health when she asked why I named a female puppy Blake. I told her that I didn't know the puppy was a girl. She asked why I didn't look to see. I simply blushed at the thought.

I thought the lack of brain function would get better with each succeeding child, but it didn't. In fact, I'm afraid it got worse.

A month before Ashley was born; I resigned from the Air Force to become a permanent stay at home mom. I loved being home with my baby and was pretty sure that one day I would once again have all my faculties in use.

I had heard it could take up to six months after being pregnant for the mind to once again function at full capacity. I was looking forward to that time.

Five months after Ashley was born, I became pregnant with Christi. While pregnant with her I wondered if I was going to be allowed to catch up on the brain cells or if I had already caused irreparable damage.

I can't remember all the times I had forgotten to take a diaper bag.

After Christi came along things got even worse for me. Now I had another name that I was supposed to remember and recall at any given moment.

I think George Foreman had a good idea when he named all his sons the same thing. His wife never had to look at someone and not know his name.

I believe I was pregnant with David when I happened upon 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

I took great comfort in this verse for I was certain that moms were not excluded from this blessing. I was positive that one day the Lord would see fit to take away my fear and replace it with power, and love, and the thing I often needed most, a sound mind.

FEAR

Of Mice and Children

As much as I try, there are still a few things that scare the heebie jeebies out of me. One of those things is a mouse. I do not like to awaken in the night to the sound of a little critter in my room.

When I was a lot younger, I was baby-sitting a family in our town. The children were allowed to all sleep on the floor in the living room. They had been watching television all cozied up with their blankets and pillows when they eventually fell into a sound sleep. Of course I couldn't fall asleep. I was in charge. As I sat on the couch watching the TV, I thought I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. I turned and stared, but didn't see anything. A few minutes later, again I thought I spied something in the doorway leading into another room. Squinting to see I stared at the open doorway. Suddenly a mouse ran into the living room, and over one of the children.

There were no rational thoughts penetrating my brain at that moment. I screamed, awakening all the children. The mouse stood up on its hind legs and stared at me. His nose twitched just a bit. Then he scampered under the couch. Yes, the same couch where I was sitting.

I explained to the children that I had seen a mouse. I felt it best not to tell them it crawled on them. They simply said, "oh," As they fell back to sleep.

I, on the other hand, could not do anything. I was nearly paralyzed as I sat there certain the mouse would choose to come out from under the couch and eat me!

Fortunately the children's parents came home soon after and I was able to escape the fear that penetrated me.

I still have a fear of mice. This might explain why I have almost always had an indoor cat. Currently however, we live on acreage. Steve had decided we would not have any indoor cats.

Last year one of our cats produced one of the most adorable fluffy kittens I had ever seen. We named the kitten Bobby and he quickly became a favorite of the whole family. Occasionally we would let Bobby in the house so we could enjoy his company. Every time I would casually mention that it would sure be nice to have our dear Bobby in the house. Steve would so no. I thought having an indoor cat would be best for all of us. But Steve thought otherwise.

Since Bobby had long fur, I really didn't think being outside with all the weeds that can stick to his fur was a good idea for him. But, I knew I had to submit this to Steve.

I prayed, not diligently about it mind you, but I did pray that Steve's heart would be changed and he would want Bobby to live in the house with us.

Since we live in the middle of farm country, critters often will come running from the fields during harvest season. Last year we had some mice appear in our basement. I never did see any, but Steve would often report that he had caught yet another mouse in his trap.

I didn't have any "real" hints that we had mice in our house until about four days after returning from a long trip with the kids. Every time I

went into my bedroom, I thought that Steve must have eaten something that disagreed with him. He has a bad habit of occasionally leaving an odor behind him. For two days I continued to think that was the case.

My suspicions became aroused one day when Steve came into our room and said. “Yuck!” I told him that I thought he was leaving odor trails and that it was his fault our room smelled bad. Together we decided it was something worse than that.

Not being the type who enjoys searching for something dead, I bribed David to go searching for a dead thing. Not long after, he returned without having any success. He couldn’t find a dead creature of any kind in our room. It then dawned on me that I sent a boy who couldn’t find his own math book in his own desk to locate a mysterious critter.

I then asked Erica, who is five, and could find a needle in a haystack, to go find it. I told her I would pay her a quarter if she found it. I had offered David a dollar, but decided Erica was younger, she didn’t need as much of a bribe. She too however, did not meet with any success. I became a bit indignant. Certainly I wasn’t going to look for it! Then I had an idea. I would let one of the dogs loose in our bedroom. Dogs can track down anything.

Quickly I began to fulfill my brilliant plan. I called Rex into the house. Rex is the largest of our three dogs. I thought he was the best choice since he was the youngest. I knew Jake wouldn’t even think of going up the stairs, and Guess wasn’t anywhere to be found.

Rex quickly followed me up the stairs and into my bedroom. If my bedroom had been in good order, I’m sure it would have been a lot easier to find a dead critter, but it was not. Before I left on our trip I had taken all of the winter clothes boxes out of the attic. I think the smell in my room kept

me from actually taking care of the boxes of clothes when I returned home. There was a possibility the smell was coming from one of the boxes. Within a very short time Rex seemed to be hot on the trail of a dead thing. He sniffed his way over to one of the boxes, then in the blink of an eye; he picked his leg up and urinated on the box.

I yelled at him and he ran down the stairs with his tail between his legs. So much for the great dog detective!

Steve finally went to search and found a dead mouse beneath our headboard.

He disposed of the smelly mouse and I washed my hands.

A couple of days passed and that familiar odor returned. This time I decided I was not going to wait. I went on a search and found another dead mouse behind the chair. By this time I am completely grossed out and wanting to take up residence on the couch for a while.

The next morning, Steve stepped out of our bathroom and there right in the middle of the floor was, you guessed it, another dead mouse.

“At least they are dead.” I mused. Apparently they were making their way into the attic, where there was poison that had been placed there by the previous owners.

Throughout the next month Steve would set traps around the house, catching an occasional mouse.

The night before Christmas, the older girls had decided to cook some frozen pizza. They pre-heated the oven. It began to emit a foul odor. Ignoring the odor (I've taught them well) Christi placed the pizza in the oven. Then she saw it, an exploded mouse in the bottom of the oven. She removed the pizza and did what all good teen-age girls would do, she screamed!

Steve cleaned out the oven, but refused to eat the pizza.

I wanted him to buy me a new oven.

We were gone for several days after that. As soon as I walked into the house, I knew the smell that had now become as familiar as the smell of a burning candle in our house. Immediately I went on a search. I'm sure I looked a bit like a bloodhound, nose near the ground sniffing out the foul smell. Sure enough, a dead mouse lay under the refrigerator.

I took the opportunity to mention that perhaps it would be a good idea to have an indoor cat now. A stray cat had come onto our property, bringing with it some disease that killed off almost all of our cats. Bobby was one of the remaining cats, but he was very ill. That, coupled with the mouse problem, Steve finally agreed with me. I wondered if God sent a plague of mice so I could get what I wanted.

Funny thing about getting what you want, sometimes it doesn't turn out the way you think it should. Because Bobby had been very sick, he smelled very bad. I had to give the cat a bath before we could allow him to be on the furniture. Also, he was too sick to chase mice.

Steve caught another mouse in the trap and gave it to him.

Another day passed. Again that smell was present. I quickly went into bloodhound mode this time. I am now feeling like I have overcome the mouse fear. I began searching the cabinet. I had removed almost all of the contents and thought perhaps the offending odor was behind the cabinet. I then nonchalantly pulled out the final item, a Tupperware type juice container. Suddenly I caught sight of four dead baby mice. I screamed and threw the container back into the cabinet, quickly shutting the doors behind it.

So much for overcoming fear!

I went to hide out in the bathroom as I called David, the oldest son, to take care of the mice. He seemed a bit more joyful about the task than I thought he should be, but he is a boy. They might actually enjoy things like that.

I didn't see another mouse in the house after that. Bobby recovered from his sickness. He quickly learned to use the litter box and was on his way to becoming a world-class indoor cat.

As he grew stronger, he began asking in his cat like way to be sent outdoors. Pretty soon, Bobby wasn't coming in the house at all. I wondered if he had gotten to know Bryan on a first-name basis.

The Good, The Bad, and the Bryan

My stomach hurt, I felt nauseous, and I couldn't eat. My head ached and I couldn't think. You could even say my brain hurt. Some of you are grinning right now thinking to yourself, "I bet she's pregnant." No, it wasn't a pregnancy. But I was suffering from a child-induced illness. The illness I'm referring to is "The Battle of the Will!"

Not long ago in our house a battle raged. It was a battle between a three-year old with a desire, and a mom with a desire. Unfortunately the desires were on opposite sides of the spectrum.

The three-year olds desire was to get his way. The Mommy's desire was to not let him get his way. Thus, the battle began!

As with most battles the beginning is not always discernible. Or perhaps my mind was so scrambled at this point I could not think clearly to discover the opening scene of the battle.

What I can remember is that Bryan was being cantankerous. He was sitting on the couch when I told him in a funny sort of way that what he needed was a job. He shouted at me, "I don't WANT a job!" My life went fast forward as I saw him, a 20 year-old man sitting on my couch saying, "I don't WANT a job!" So I did what all fun loving moms do. I said, "And you need a haircut too!"

I think that is when he jumped at me and hit me. "Okay," I thought, "we've gone beyond cantankerous to down right angry!"

It took all of three seconds for me to react to his anger in the same way. My body tensed. And through clenched teeth I said, “Get in the bathroom!” While pointing to the bathroom, just in case he had forgotten where it was.

Once in the bathroom, my struggle began. What do I do? I’m angry. I can’t spank him. But I can’t let him get away with such terrible behavior.

In a flash my mind goes back to seeing his newborn body, lost in a tiny plastic enclosure bound for the children’s hospital.

Quickly I look up toward heaven as I say to myself, “Okay Lord, I know he had to be strong willed to survive his beginnings, but could you take some of the will away now?”

Instead of removing some of Bryan’s will, he gave me a stronger will to prevail. For over twenty minutes I worked on getting Bryan to have a heart change. Finally we both collapsed in exhaustion on the floor of the bathroom. He hugged me tightly and said, “I love you Mom!”

Ah! Sweet Victory!

When I would see disobedient children in stores, I knew instantly that the mom had a serious problem disciplining her children. If she were only consistent, her results would be fruitful. I would tell myself rather smugly as I marched my seven well-behaved children past her. I knew she would look at them and long for me to tell her my secret. She would want children like mine. After all, I had it all figured out.

Then I had my precious Bryan. I call him that often to remind myself that he truly is not the little monster he pretends to be on so many occasions.

When days when the battle of the will ensues, I question if I can even handle the parenting task I’ve been called to handle.

A few days ago Steve was greeted at the door by a wife, with tears flowing swiftly down her cheeks. He gave me one look and said, “Is it Bryan?” I simply nodded my head.

“Where is he?” He inquired.

I managed to sob out that he was in his room, throwing everything around. Steve then asked if I wanted him to take over. I was weak. I could not go on another moment with him. Steve was fresh. I wondered for a moment if it is okay to tag-team wrestle with a three year-old. I decided to definitely go for the “conquer them at all costs” mentality.

Steve went into Bryan’s room. Immediately I heard the throwing of toys stop. Bryan has somehow developed a healthy fear of Steve. Which makes me just a little bit crazy at times. I feel that I am often the one who does most of the disciplining, yet all Steve has to do is peek his head in the door and the bad behavior ceases.

I was so drained from my battle; I asked Steve if I could go take a short nap. After an hour, I came out to find that Bryan, with the aid of his older brothers had completely cleaned their room.

This did not have a positive effect on me. I was happy they had cleaned their room, but I had mentioned it on at least three occasions that afternoon, and they didn’t do anything that remotely resembled cleaning.

My head ached worse than ever as the thought that I was really not a very good parent seeped into my mind. In fact, I had turned into the woman in the grocery store who couldn’t control her children. What was I going to do?

I thought of all the rules of discipline that I knew. I began to wonder if there was a parenting book that I hadn’t read. I have read them all. I

know how to discipline. I know how to be fair. I know how to get children to obey. So why aren't they? My head screamed with frustration.

All these thoughts came to me as I walked down the hall then down the stairs. At the bottom of the stairs, a little boy threw his arms around my legs and said, "I missed you!"

There seem to be just enough of those affections for me that I keep plugging away at parenting Bryan. When I glance into the future, I still fear that he will not have any discipline, won't want to get a job, or a haircut for that matter.

Then I realize that it's quite possible Bryan will grow up with a will so strong and courageous for the Lord, that none dare to question him.

Shortly before Bryan was born, we had sought the Lord regarding what to name him. I can't remember what we had planned to name him, but just a couple of weeks before he was born Steve asked if I would mind if we named him Bryan.

Bryan is a name that belonged to his older brother, who had died of a brain aneurysm at the age of 28. We honored him already by naming one of our daughters, Briana. However, Steve felt compelled to name our newest child, Bryan.

I agreed on one condition. Steve's brother's birthday was February 13th. If our son was born on that day, I didn't want them to have the same name. Our son was not born on the 13th; he was born on the 12th. When Steve had come to tell me we had a son, and that there wasn't a good prognosis for him to live, I once again did not want to name him Bryan.

As I talked on the phone to a friend of mine, she reminded me that Bryan means "Strong." I took great comfort in that.

Even now, I find it to be in keeping with the Lord's sense of humor that the child who brings me to my knees frequently has a name that means, Strong. Not only that, but his middle name is William. If I combine that his name becomes Strong Will I Am. Since William means brave, I can even go one step further and mention that we named our own child Brave Strong Will I Am! Marvelous qualities for someone who will one day live for God! Do I dare complain again when my child is simply living up to his name?

I Am Child Hear Me Roar

At the age of four, Bryan loves to play animal and dinosaur. He will often come find me wherever I am. Even if I'm taking a nap, he will come over to me and "ROAR" as loud as he can. Sometimes I wonder if he is trying to show me his strength. Other times I think he prefers to be around me and wants to find me wherever I may roam. Perhaps there is also the possibility that he thinks I may one day forget him in the crowd so he needs to make his presence known to me in such a dramatic way.

Often when I am working, Bryan will venture into my office and begin talking. If I'm in the middle of something, I may continue typing with my hands, while listening to him with my ears. It is at those moments that Bryan will climb up into my lap. He wants me to be sure to focus on him.

If I'm in the middle of typing a thought or an e-mail though, I will sometimes give him a quick squeeze, then continue typing. This will often suffice for him. But more often than not, it is not the response that he wanted.

This is when he may look at me with those big green eyes and "ROAR" in his loudest voice. Of course this does get my attention. I will look at him and say, "What do you want dear Bryan?"

He often responds with, "I want you to play dinosaur with me." I must admit there are many times I would rather continue what I'm doing than stop to take the time to play dinosaur with him. Dinosaur is probably my least favorite game. Bryan always wants to be the strong "sharp tooth" as he calls it. I always get to be the "long neck." That means I'm the one who always gets killed.

One time I thought I would trick him. I told him that I was going to be the “sharp tooth” this time. And he was going to be the “long neck.” He reluctantly agreed. Let the games begin!

I began growling and walking the way he had instructed me to do. Just when I was ready to bite off his head he said to me, “I’ve changed into a fire breathing dragon, and now I’m going to breathe on you!” He then opened his mouth wide and breathed on me. “There! You’re dead!” He reminded me.

I was secretly glad I ended in a quick death. There were so many things I had to do that day. I thanked him for killing me and began to walk away. After following me into the office, he once again climbed up on my lap.

Even though I’m not a genius, I figured out fairly quickly that my little boy simply wanted some “Mommy time.”

I had decided to devote a few more minutes to him when Ashley walked in and began to talk about something related to horses. I can’t remember the exact conversation, but I’m sure that’s what she was talking about.

I turned to face her and began listening. Bryan took my face in his little hands and turned me to stare right at him. I told him I would talk to him in a few minutes, and turned once again to talk with Ashley. Again he took my face in his hands and turned me to focus on him.

Naturally I had to discipline him for interrupting when I was talking, but I felt a tinge of remorse that he had a need in his life that seemed to be unmet by me.

Often as I study the lives of my children I will notice something that is out of whack with them. When I delve further into the possible cause, I often am forced to look at myself as the reason they are acting a certain way.

It's painful to look at a child who has been yelling a lot and see that perhaps the behavior she is seeing modeled by, yours truly, is not one of sweet disposition, but one of a raised voice.

I know I cannot live an exemplary life. I will fail them and I often do, but what frightens me the most is that one day I will mess up so much, there will be no redemption in their eyes. I fear that the children will walk away from the faith I so desperately want them to walk in, not away from, because of some mistake I may have made.

Runaway Mom

Not long ago I was startled when I witnessed Bryan strike out in anger at my David while they played together with the train set. As soon as Bryan hit David, you could tell on his face that he had made a grave mistake. Almost immediately he went into the bathroom, albeit with much fear and trepidation. After our typical prayer and consultation Bryan said to me, “I wish Jesus would rewind to the time right before I hit David.”

I kind of chuckled and thought to myself that Bryan had been watching too many movies.

Fast-forward 24 hours.... The day was not going as planned for me. As I read to the kids the little ones were louder and more physical than normal. With every passing paragraph I grew more irritated. Finally the children seemed to get quiet and I was able to read about three chapters of the book. I was halfway through the fourth when they once again began fussing with each other. I tossed the book down, just a bit harder than I should have and declared reading time over and sent everyone to their rooms.

For the next forty-five minutes I heard nothing but bickering among the kids. As I tried to get a simple lunch made, I had to stop every few minutes to have a consultation with a child. I’m afraid our house was infected with a virus of unknown origin, but which had the unmistakable symptom of grouchiness. It infected even me.

After taking three times as long to get lunch on the table, I went to settle down at my computer for a bit of writing time while kids finished up lunch then went on with their usual afternoon assignments.

Within a few short minutes I was sick of hearing my own name. I was constantly bombarded with children asking questions, most of which were completely irrelevant to the assignments they had been given.

I tried to calm my nerves, but could do nothing. Just when I would take a deep breath, once again I would hear from another room, “Mooooooooommmmmmm, can you come here?”

I began to count my blessings and thought momentarily that I had too many. Suddenly all the blood rushed to my head and I let out a scream. It didn't relieve me; it only made me feel extremely embarrassed. Then to make matters even worse I told my husband that he was now in charge because I was leaving!

I slammed out the door, got in the car and began to drive. I contemplated the airport, but knew that would not help.

Recently I had been feeling quite depressed and completely without reason. Searching my mind for a way out of the depression I opted for a perm. I drove for forty-five minutes. The alone time with the Lord was extremely helpful. In fact, I thought that perhaps I was okay to just go home. However, I had driven all that way, I may as well get the perm. I reasoned to myself.

As I sat being tortured, I thought to myself that I really deserved this pulling of my hair after the childish way I acted at home. It almost comforted me to know I was getting a smidgen of what I deserved for my behavior.

I don't often find myself in a depressed mode for very long so it had taken me a little by surprise. I was also quite upset that I couldn't seem to just pull myself up by my bootstraps and be happy and content. Even though I had spent a good deal of time alone in the car talking to the Lord, I still didn't think I was quite out of the yucky feelings.

For some reason I was convinced that getting a perm so I would look like Julia Roberts would make me all better. The only problem I had of course was that I am way too short to look like her. And I don't have nearly as many teeth. As the stylist worked on my hair I glanced into the mirror and noticed that I looked a lot like my mom. It wasn't the look I wanted.

When I arrived home nine smiling faces all full of forgiveness greeted me. All the kids loved my hair. Then Steve casually mentioned that I looked like my mom. Tears welled up in my eyes. I ran up the stairs and began to bawl. I don't want to look like my mom! She's twenty years older than I am. I want to look like Julia Roberts!

I finally composed myself and returned to the family who seems to manage to love me in spite of myself. As we sat in the living room I looked at Bryan and said, "Hey Bud, do you think I could rewind today?" He looked me right in the eye and said. "No. Only Jesus can rewind your day."

He was right. As much as I wanted to forget how badly I felt and behaved, I was powerless on my own to do anything about it. I needed the redemptive power of Jesus Christ to come to me who at the time was worthless for Him.

Barb Shelton once said this about redemption. "Redeem is to take something of little or no value (me when I'm too frustrated to act rationally)

and turn it in to one who has great wealth and power and in exchange receive something of great value.”

Within moments after praying for Jesus to restore me, I had the great value that I so needed. I had forgiveness, and a clean slate! What a gift! It was much better than a perm and He didn't even use the remote to rewind the day.

Even though I know I'm washed clean, I still occasionally slip up and do or say, sometimes both with tremendous force, the things I know that I should not say or do.

I've Been Working on the Commode

We have a lot of adventures that take place in our bathroom. Shortly after moving into our old country home seven years ago, Steve remodeled a portion of our house to be an additional bathroom.

At the time we had one bathroom in our master bedroom. This bathroom contains the ugliest carpet ever. It is a shag carpet with blues, greens and browns. It is so disgusting, yet somehow has managed to remain all these years. That bathroom contains an industrial size copier that I inherited from my sister's print shop when they decided to get a different one. It also contains the large stain from when I nearly bled to death prior to giving birth to Bryan. Perhaps I don't replace the carpet because it reminds me of a miracle in my life. Or maybe it's because the copier that quit working about three years ago is next to impossible to move? I'm not sure why the disgusting carpet remains. It might be that I have more important things that need to be purchased.

Our other bathroom is the size of a bedroom. I guess someone knew there would be a need for a lot of children lying on the floor during "sick moments" in our house.

We now have a second downstairs bathroom. This is referred to as The Boys Bathroom. The bedroom-sized bathroom is called The Girls Bathroom. Some of the kids refer to them by other names. The girls call the boys' bathroom the "stink room." And the boys call the girls' bathroom the "smelly room." It's all in good fun I assure you.

The Girls Bathroom used to have carpet, but this past Christmas Steve gave me a present of replacing the kitchen and one bathroom with wood

laminated. Oh how I love it! No one in his right mind would put carpet in a bathroom. Unfortunately we didn't replace the carpet until I had completed potty training all of our children.

Potty training children is quite an experience. When I had my first child, I was advised to use the book, *Potty Training in Less Than a Day*. I bought crackers, juice, a potty-chair, and a potty dolly. Ashley loved it and learned quickly to use the potty-chair. She was exactly two years old, which is when all the experts I had read said to train them.

Christi watched Ashley do everything and trained herself at eighteen months. I figured it was my superb parenting. I'll take any praise I can get, even if it does come from myself.

On Cathy's second birthday she wanted no part of this whole idea. By her third birthday I began to get concerned. One day Steve took Ashley and Christi camping with him. That left me with only Cathy and David. We spent the day eating crackers and drinking juice. Finally victory was achieved.

Then came the boys. I had heard boys were more difficult. I heard you would have to be creative with them. I heard they weren't good aimers. Funny thing is, potty training eight children consumed a lot of my thoughts for many years, yet I can barely remember the moments of potty training. What I do remember was spending a lot of time in the bathroom, finally getting tired of waiting, telling the child to get up, only to have them promptly wet the floor.

I also remember doing a lot of schoolwork with kids while I sat in the bathroom waiting for someone to "go."

It's really stressful for a mom knowing all the things she has on her list, yet none of them get crossed off because a child is learning how to "go"

on his own. I spent the bulk of many days, simply sitting on the bathroom floor.

One time I was waiting in the bathroom, because for some reason the bathroom becomes this incredibly scary place when you're sitting on a little plastic potty. Someone in our house decided there was a Great Horned Owl that lived outside the bathroom window, waiting for some unsuspecting child sitting on his potty-chair. This child decided to share the information with the newest child in training. This realization gave me no rest! I had to go in the bathroom every time this child thought she might need to go. It was in this place that Ashley found me to ask a math question.

She sat down beside me and showed me which problem it was. I looked at her quizzically. She said, "I know you've shown me how to do this three times already, but I just don't understand it!"

Again I explained how to do it. She seemed to grasp the concept so I made up another problem for her to figure out. She got it wrong. How could she get it wrong?

Meanwhile the child on the chair finally goes, only he goes up and over the top and onto my foot. I can handle a lot of things, but urine that belongs to someone else on my body upsets me. I cleaned up my foot, the carpet, and the child.

I then went back to Ashley who was waiting patiently for me. She still didn't understand the problem. I explained it again. This time I used a different approach. I first took her pencil and threw it down on the floor with enough force to break it. Then I yelled at her that there was absolutely no reason she could not understand this problem. It was basic stuff!

After my tirade, I looked into her eyes. A small tear slowly made its way down her cheek. Oh how badly I felt at yelling at her and breaking her pencil.

It doesn't take much sometimes to send a mom over the edge and into a banshee. I went over the edge and desperately wanted to change but I was already so upset I didn't know what to do. A fleeting thought passed through my mind, "What if I stay this way? What if I don't become a nice mom again? What if my children only remember this about me?"

I was suddenly consumed with fear that I would forever remain a bad Mommy. Quickly I took Ashley into my arms as I apologized to her for losing my temper. I resisted the urge to tell her all of my reasons for losing my temper. I simply cried with her.

She forgave me, and life went on as usual. However, I still had a gnawing fear that I would never totally give my whole life to the Lord. Complete surrender to the Lord has been my battle cry for a long time.

Pride and Jaundice

I had become convinced when I was pregnant with David that I wanted to give God total control over the design of our family. This meant that I was willing to allow God to decide when and how many children we would have. Because I had made this decision in my heart, this by no means meant that I had completely given my life over to the Lord for His will to be done.

After David was born by a Cesarean section, I once again became fearful as I walked with the Lord. I saw Him taking me to a place that was frightening to me, a place where I would surrender, and He might choose to make a decision different than the one I had thought should be made.

For some reason, I seemed to think that once I surrendered all to Jesus, my life would run smoothly without too many bumps in the road. I even seemed to think that my way was the right way. I could even be known to think in my head, “But Lord you know not the plans I have for me!” I think a time or two; I may have heard him laugh at me.

I figured if I prayed hard enough or long enough, God would change all of His plans to correspond with mine.

When I became pregnant with John, I read everything I could about having a VBAC (vaginal birth after cesarean). I was certain the Lord wouldn't want me to endure three c-sections. I prayed for a natural delivery. Meanwhile I scheduled a c-section for one week before John's due date. I prayed, “Lord, make me go into labor earlier.” Therefore ensuring a natural delivery.

I was so convinced the Lord was going to heed my instructions; Steve and I made several trips to the hospital to have our baby before the scheduled c-section. Each time we would arrive at the hospital, contractions would cease. I would then pray harder. I asked the church to pour an entire bottle of Crisco vegetable oil on my head. I figured if a few drops of oil worked, then the whole gallon would for sure change the mind of God. Our Pastor did not pour the oil on my head as I requested. He simply laughed at me. I wasn't joking. I was willing to do anything to change the mind of God to conform to my way of thinking.

My thinking of course included a smooth delivery, a healthy child, followed by a smooth recovery.

The scheduled day arrived. In my heart I felt that I wasn't fully trusting God, but knew that I did want our baby to be born. I was tired of waiting for him. The house was as clean as it was going to get. The clothes were all set out. I was ready to have the baby.

Fear filled my heart as I was wheeled to the operating room. I was awake for the procedure even though I couldn't feel anything from my neck down. At one point I felt like I was suffocating. The anesthesiologist assured me this was normal. I wanted to shout, "No one told me I was going to feel like I was dying!" But I didn't.

Suddenly a newborn baby emerged from behind the cloth. He was adorable. His face was round. I think he even smiled at me when they brought him close for my inspection.

Shortly after John was born, the doctor said, "We had a little problem with your placenta implanting into your uterus. It's a good thing we did this one cesarean or we could have had a serious bleeding problem on our hands."

I praised the Lord for knowing what I did not know.

My dreams of a natural delivery had been dashed, however, I took comfort in knowing that God is completely in charge and nothing in this world can eclipse His knowledge.

Before I was able to take John from the hospital he had to be under the “lights” for several hours because of jaundice. After spending an extra day in the hospital, we were allowed to go home, but not without the promise to return every other day for more blood tests and heel pricks.

Not only was I trying to recover from surgery, I now had to go out of the house every other day to take my son to the doctor for more tests. I prefer bed rest after having a baby, not continual running back and forth to the doctor. To make matters worse, it was decided that John should be on formula to reduce the jaundice to acceptable levels or he would have to be hospitalized. I relented and gave him formula.

There’s nothing worse for a new mom than to be told she cannot nurse her children, but that they must have a bottle. Somehow I felt like a failure as a mom because I could not perform the most basic of all functions.

I gave John formula for five days. The day after his formula time was up and his jaundice had cleared enough for him to be out of danger, it was discovered that the water in our town’s water supply had been tainted with E. coli bacteria. All the reports that came back said that it was especially dangerous for young children and the elderly.

I was gripped with fear at the thought that I had been giving my newborn son, E. coli tainted water.

Steve was the Associate City Engineer, which meant the water crisis had him working long hours and dealing with many irate people. He would

come home from work drained. I didn't dare tell him of my fears for our own child.

John began to have diarrhea. I took him to the doctor once again. He was all of ten days old and had been to the doctor at least six times.

That night I cried out to God. "Lord!" I said, "You are aware that I am a wimp right?" That was all I said. I had cried out with the only thing I could say. I had to let God know that I was too wimpy to handle having a sick child.

John did test for some E. coli bacteria, but it was within normal range, if there could possibly be such a thing. The doctor assured me he would be fine.

My worst nightmare is to have a child sick or injured. We have been extremely fortunate. Our children all seem to be well coordinated and manage to stay away from high places from which they could fall.

Lady and the Tramp(ling) Horse

When we first allowed Ashley to get a horse, I overheard someone tell her that everyone who owns a horse ends up with at least one broken arm. I pretended not to hear, but knew in my heart that I was not going to allow it to happen.

However, what I seemed to fail to take into account was that we allowed our daughter to buy a horse that was not yet broke to ride. Someone was going to get broken. I was voting for the horse.

After several months of groundwork, it was time for Ashley's first ride. She had written the date on her calendar and talked of nothing except riding Diamond on this particular day. She was excited. I was scared to death!

I reminded her to put on her helmet. She had grown quite fond of Diamond and was quite certain Diamond would obey her every command. She called me out to the round pen to watch the first ride. With excitement and anticipation, followed by gripping fear, I watched Ashley put the blanket on the horse. She then put on the saddle. Now, it was time to mount.

Ashley, being a bit shorter than the horse needed to use a bucket to reach high enough to get on her. As soon as she placed the bucket near the horse, the horse would move about two feet away from the bucket. I watched this comedy routine until I was feeling quite comfortable that Ashley was not actually going to be able to get on the horse. It was in that comfort zone Ashley finally arrived, perched on top of Diamond.

As I watched, my little girl (who was 13 at the time) was taken at a full gallop heading straight for the fencing. I bit my hand as I watched the horse suddenly stop, and Ashley flew into the fence, over the head of the

horse. Slowly she got up, went over and picked up the bucket, putting it beside the horse; she again got in the saddle. I thought to myself that my child had more courage than I did. Here I was scared to death watching from a distance, as she courageously got back on the horse.

I waited for the horse to once again take off running. Instead she stood still. Ashley kicked. Ashley said, “giddy up!” Ashley said, “Go you stupid horse!” Maybe that was me who said that?

Diamond stood still.

Ashley climbed down. Rubbed Diamond’s nose, gave her a carrot, then came over to me with the biggest smile I had ever seen and a bit of a limp.

After a thorough inspection I decided Ashley was all right.

Every day Ashley worked with Diamond, and every day they grew to love one another even more.

One day upon returning home from shopping, I noticed a pained look on Ashley’s face. Not wanting to worry me, she said, “Oh, it’s nothing, I just fell off of Diamond today.”

Christi piped up, “You should have seen it Mom! Ashley was loping in the pasture, when Diamond slipped. Ashley went around under her belly, then when Diamond tried to get up she used Ashley instead of the ground.”

As Christi was relaying her story in a more than colorful way, I became increasingly worried about Ashley. She kept assuring me she was fine. I gave her some Tylenol and told her to rest.

The next day she was still pained, so I asked to look at the injury. If there is one thing that embarrasses thirteen-year-old girls, it’s pulling their shirt up so mom can look at the hoof mark that had embedded itself into her rib cage.

We figured she must have broken a couple of ribs. It was difficult for her to laugh or even for her to breathe out. We had her rest for several days.

When we would talk about her injury all Ashley could say is, “I couldn’t get back on Diamond. I have to get back on her so she knows I’m all right.”

Again I was afraid of Ashley’s courage. I relented and allowed her to go outside and get on the horse. She got on, patted Diamond, told her how much she loved her, then got off the horse, and went in the house to lie down.

My kids’ courage amazes me all the time. It seems like when they are the ones who are sick, I’m the one who gets upset. Their faith is so incredible. Perhaps this is what is meant by, *“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.” Mark 10:15.*

Saturday Night Fever of 105

When illnesses hit, I seem to be the one “of little faith.” It so amazes me how the children are certain when they pray that they will indeed get better, or that a sibling will get well quickly. I wish I could take the credit for such faith, but I cannot. What I can do though is see the faith of my children, and help it to nurture my own faith. It’s kind of a role reversal of sorts. If I am careful to observe the faith of my children, perhaps my own faith will grow in the process.

Normally I am not the fearful type when it comes to illness. I don’t tend toward the squeamish, as evidenced by my willingness to allow the children to decorate their own personal barf buckets. Now that was quite the craft day. We got out old ice cream buckets, paints and markers. There was Ashley sitting at the table, writing the words in creative writing style, “Ashley’s Barf Bucket.”

I was certain if they had their own buckets they would not turn their heads away from the bucket, but rather vomit daintily into the bucket. Perhaps if they decorated the buckets so nicely, they wouldn’t mind holding them in front of their faces for hours. I was tempted once to hang the bucket around Erica’s neck so she could not escape it. For some reason the children seem to look at the buckets as the enemy, rather than what they truly are, a life saving device for Mom.

It seems that every year we experience one bout of the stomach flu in our house. Almost everyone will get sick within the space of a week or two. This makes a lot of extra work for me. But, hey, I’m not really complaining, I would simply like to devise a way to eliminate some of that work.

When I was growing up there were only two of us kids. Whenever we had the stomach flu, Mom would give us a cooking pot and Seven-up. We would then get to lie on the green couch, which folded back into a bed, watching as much TV as we wanted. Mom would wait on us hand and foot. We always were instructed to try to make it into the bathroom though. The pot was to catch whatever there was that didn't make it at breakneck speed up the stairs and down the hall to the bathroom. Mom would come running after us. She would then hold our foreheads as we lost everything that was supposed to have remained in our stomachs, into the toilet.

I haven't been quite so accommodating to my children. When I hear a child yell the familiar, I run to the laundry room to get the bucket and used towels. I would then wash the child's face, clean up their bed, and set them up on the floor in the bathroom. If they really didn't want to sleep in the bathroom, I would lay towels in their beds.

David became notorious in the house for having projectile vomit in the middle of the night that would seem to splatter every surface of his bedroom. I hated those nights! I still hate them.

But worse than vomiting, is a child who is so ill, she cannot seem to function at all. These are the times when I do begin to fear for the safety of my child. I would gladly clean up a horrible mess than have to watch my child pitifully lying around unable to eat, drink, or even move.

Erica had been sick for several days when I was suddenly gripped with fear for her. She had been sleeping the better part of eighteen hours. I sat next to her to cuddle with her, not so much for her comfort, but more for my own. Instead what I felt was a child so hot, the heat penetrated through my own clothing and warmed my skin.

I'm not one who takes the temperature of my children when they are sick. I also try to allow their natural antibodies to fight infection, so I use little medication with them. This time was different however. I used all the methods I knew to lower her temperature. Still it hovered around 105 degrees.

After a brief discussion with Steve, we decided she had to go to the emergency room.

As we waited for the sitter to come, the children quickly reminded us that we needed to pray for her. Ashley led a simple prayer, "Dear Jesus, please make Erica better real soon."

I love the simple prayers of children. They remind me so much of where I should be putting my faith. The previous hours my mind whirled with how I could lower her fever. Not once did I think to stop and pray for her. I was putting my faith in my own ability, rather than in the healing power of our savior.

Erica was loaded into the van. Her limp body barely seemed to notice she was heading off to a new location.

The hospital is a forty-minute drive from our house. After twenty minutes, Erica began to perk up. She began to act like her normal adorable self.

Once at the hospital, I almost felt silly that I brought this little girl in to see the doctors. She seemed to have made a miraculous recovery.

Because she hadn't managed to get any liquid down her in a couple of days, she was quite dehydrated. Even though it had been several hours since her last visit to the bathroom, she could not manage even one drop.

They concluded she had a urinary tract infection and put her on antibiotics.

I wondered why I hadn't seen the healing as a true healing, and marched her out of the hospital? Why did I spend all that time, and money? Why do I put my faith and trust in doctors and medicine? Why can't I be more like a little child, knowing that Jesus will answer our pleas and cries? And why am I always so scared when things happen to my children?

Where the Rug Burn Shows

My kids love to play a racing game down the stairs. They start at the top, count to three, yell “GO!” then they slide down the stairs on their stomachs as fast as they can. Often this game will go on quite awhile before they all tire of it. Inevitably someone will come to me about thirty minutes post game and mention that their stomach hurts. Upon further investigation it will be revealed the child has managed to get a large rug burn on his stomach. I will rub some lotion on it, and the child will continue to go about the rest of the evening, feeling a bit like he is out of sorts.

For some reason this child forgets in a matter of a couple of days that he caused himself a great deal of pain playing the race down the stairs game. I will hear from the other room the familiar, “GO!” About an hour later again one of the children will come to me saying their skin hurts on their tummy.

I once tried playing the race down the stairs game, but I didn’t find it fun whatsoever, besides I was a lot slower than the children were. Consequently they won every race. And all I had to show for it was a rug burn on my tummy.

I wonder often if God sometimes gets a kick out of how stupid his creation sometimes can be. I have done a lot of stupid things in my life. Some have caused me tremendous embarrassment; other things I am certain were done to allow those around me to laugh at me.

My first indication of my ability to do stupid things was when I was about six years old. I was standing next to the brick school building where I attended elementary school. It was recess time. Some friends and I were playing tag. I was taking a break for a minute as I stood there. Suddenly, around the corner came someone on the opposing team. I took off like a cheetah. The next thing I knew I was staring up at a bunch of people surrounding me staring down at me with quizzical looks on their faces. The fog began to lift and I could hear the voice of my teacher asking me if I was okay. I tried to struggle to my feet, but again, fell back to the pavement. My head ached. The front of my head was bloody, and the back of my head felt like it had hit the pavement with a thud. After several minutes the teacher, stifling her laugh I’m sure, told me I had turned and run full force directly into the brick school building. My head hit the building, followed quickly by my body being forced to the pavement. I can almost feel the ache in my head as I recall trying to impress my friend with my ability to run so fast. It also makes me laugh to think what a sight I was. I hope there wasn’t anyone who knew I was trying to impress someone.

Most of the stupid things I've done have been in an effort to impress a friend, or a <gasp> boy.

One year in order to impress Mark, my best friends' brother, who hadn't yet figured out that I was the one for him to spend the rest of his life with; I dressed in my nicest dress to go Trick or Treating.

Wearing dresses was not my favorite thing to wear. In fact, I hated dresses. You couldn't climb trees, you couldn't twirl on the monkey bars, and you couldn't even run as fast if you were wearing a dress. Also the boys didn't respect you enough to let you play kick ball on the playground if you wore a dress. My mom would force me to wear a dress to church, but that was it!

So there I was Trick or Treating wearing a dress. Several old people would ask me, "and what are you young lady?" I would beam a big smile and say, "I'm a girl!"

My best friend would quickly pipe up saying, "She doesn't wear dresses and is trying to impress my brother here."

Don't you love friends who tell it like it is? I was tempted to sever the relationship at that point. It didn't seem worth the embarrassment to have someone who would not only help me look stupid, but she would make me the sole responsibility of my own stupidity.

Another way to impress people around me was to practice doing dumb things when no one was around. If I removed my bedroom window, I would end up on the roof of our garage. I would practice jumping off the roof, then rolling like a stunt man. I watched too much Starsky and Hutch as a kid I guess.

After I would tire of jumping off the roof, I would get on my bike and ride as fast as I could, then jump as if jumping from a burning car.

I wonder to this day if I was trying to be a stunt man the day I crashed into our driveway.

As hard as I try, I can't remember anything from that day. I can't even remember using my sister's bike. I do know that it was a bigger bike than mine was; therefore the danger (stupidity) of riding it was more impressive. I impressed everyone with my ability to smash my face into the pavement, then walking into the house while blood poured out of my face, proclaiming to my mom, "I got hurt!"

For the rest of my life I had to pay for this. My front teeth were chipped and quite unsightly, in spite of the dentist replacing them into my mouth with several wires. After this time, I was embarrassed to smile. I would hide my face with my hand whenever I would happen to break out in laughter. I assumed everyone was staring at my horrible front teeth. It was

emotionally painful to have my picture taken. I didn't want to smile. It's difficult to find a picture of me after the age of six with my mouth open.

My desire to impress did not leave me at a young age. It stayed with me for many years. I was in the Air Force, when I found myself diving off the top bunk of my bed, trying to make it across the room and into the bathroom in one leap. Instead of making it across the room into the bathroom, my foot caught on my blanket, causing me to fall on my knees then sliding across the floor. There I was trying to impress my roommate with my ability to land on my knees causing myself incredible pain. She wasn't impressed. This was followed by a trip to the doctor. My legs weren't broken but I had some serious rug burns on my knees.

I was on crutches from this incident when I met Steve. I think I was cured from trying to impress people, momentarily anyway.

I've even tried to impress God with my great spirituality. I can tell you, it doesn't impress God for us to stand up in a room full of people and tell them how great we are.

Mission Nearly Impossible

My stunt man (woman) adventures came to an end when I received my mission from God. Shortly after becoming a Christian I was distressed to find how difficult it was to find Christians who didn't seem to be perfect. All the Christians I knew appeared to have it all together. I couldn't understand how all these people could be so wonderful and not have any struggles in their lives.

One day while praying to God about how messed up my life seemed compared to all those people at church; I received my mission from God. My mission, should I choose to accept it, was to allow people around me to see my failings. The point of this mission was to humble myself in the sight of God and those around me. I must use God's strength, to enable me to be transparent.

I wasn't sure I wanted to accept this mission. I desired to impress people, not let them see what a poor miserable wretched sinner that I am.

Not long after my mission was made clear to me, I was able to put it into practice.

I was at a prayer meeting with our new church. These were people I barely knew. The desire to impress them became much greater than my desire to be transparent with them.

As we prayed, the pastor's wife continued to say, "I have a sense there is someone who needs prayer."

In my heart I knew I needed prayer, but I didn't want to share my need with anyone. After several pleas from the Pastor's wife, it appeared we weren't going to adjourn until someone fessed up. I decided it had to be me.

I casually mentioned that I wanted to quit smoking. What I didn't mention was that I was terrified to tell this group of holy people that I was a wretched sinner and smoked cigarettes. It wasn't until two years later when the revelation of the ministry of being transparent can mean.

I was sitting in the living room in the home of one of those church members, when our pastor approached me, asking me to go to one of the back rooms; there was someone who needed prayer.

There sat one of the "holy people" crying. She said to me, "Terri when you prayed for God to deliver you of smoking, I saw you as such a brave person. I was too weak to ever ask the people at the church to pray for me. And now here I sit, several years later, still dealing with this addiction. Your ability to let others see you vulnerable had a profound impact on me, as well as a healing effect on you."

That prayer was the catalyst to me overcoming the habit of smoking. I've learned the more willing I am to be transparent, the more God seems to bless my ministry.

One area that I am a bit more transparent than some would like is when I speak at home school conventions. The typical "outside" view of the home school family makes them appear perfect. They are perfectly groomed, perfectly intelligent and perfectly obedient. Going to a home school convention can often leave the average home school mother feeling less than encouraged. She often comes away feeling like a complete failure.

My effort to combat this came with I began to look at myself and decided to present that to my audience. In one of my talks I begin with the typical home school mom look, hair up in a bun, denim jumper, and stories of perfect little children. I then begin to remove the myth by removing my jumper, revealing a pair of sweats. Then I remove those to reveal a pair of

my pajamas. In the process my hair manages to get messed up, and I tell a few stories of my less than perfect children and their equally less than perfect Mom. The moms who come to my talks leave feeling encouraged, because they see that they don't need to look to me, but they need to look to the Lord.

I've gone from a girl who wanted to impress everyone to a mom speaking to large groups of people, desiring to impress no one. It was a mission I thought would be nearly impossible, but with God's help, I'm able to really mess up a lot and live to tell about it!

A Sister from Snowy Iowa

It wasn't long ago when Ashley confronted me in the van with the question, "Mom, what was the best advice your parents ever gave you?"

Instantly my brain thought, "this is an opportunity to share wisdom at the request of a teenage daughter. Don't mess up now!" I thought for a moment and decided to share the wisdom I remember my father telling me at a very early age.

He would say, "The only time you can really call a mistake a mistake, is when you don't take the opportunity to learn from it."

This prompted me throughout my life to always try to find something to learn from every mistake I made. It even encouraged me to learn from the mistakes of others, like my older, nearly perfect sister.

I'm wondering though, if my sister made a mistake, and I learned from it, does that make her even more perfect?

As you have probably guessed by now, my sister was an older sister. She was also the favorite child. When there are two children in the family, only one can be the favorite. And she was it. I know it was because of her excellent grades, ability to stand up and be counted, and her towering five foot three inch frame. Hey, when you're only five one, five three is towering.

There was a time early in my life when I began to have hope that my sister was not as perfect as I originally thought. At dinner my dad casually mentioned he had received a phone call from Shileen's first grade teacher.

Immediately my ears perked up. I thought for sure it was going to be bad news, and I was going to enjoy it.

Dad then said that the teacher was perplexed by my sister's sudden inability to get a spelling word correct. You see, the week before, my sister had missed one word on her spelling test. I believe it was the first time for her. She was crushed to say the least. My dad encouraged her by saying something about learning from your mistakes. "It is through mistakes that we learn the most." He said.

My sister (did I mention she is also the brilliant one in the family?) took his advice to heart. She figured if one mistake made her smarter, then if she missed every word the next week, she would be twenty times smarter (perhaps logical thinking wasn't her strong suit).

I thought for sure she was really going to get it for missing every word on her spelling test, but instead Dad seemed proud of her for desiring to be smarter. He then told her it doesn't quite work the way she figured it did. He expected her to retake the test, finishing up with another of his favorite bits of advice, "always try your hardest to do your best!"

She took that advice to heart as well. I wonder to this day if she ever missed a question on a test.

I thought his advice to her should have been something similar to a commandment, perhaps I would have phrased it, "Thou shalt never cause your family to fear for your life, or your safety."

There were a few times she concerned us about her safety.

When she was in high school, she became a foreign exchange student to Finland. One day we received a letter that basically said, "Dear Mom, I'm sorry I haven't written lately, I've been in the hospital with Pneumonia. The hospitals here are nothing like the ones back home. I had to share the room with twenty other sick people. It was so difficult to sleep with all those people coughing and throwing up.

The worst part was when they would come and give everyone shots of Penicillin. (She is highly allergic to Penicillin.) They would walk down the row and give everyone a shot, using the same needle. It was horrible. After several weeks, I've been able to get miraculously better. They told me I was near death at one point. Signed, your loving daughter. P.S. April Fools!

Mom was so upset reading the letter; she had to put it down to cry. She didn't even finish reading it to know about the P.S. It wasn't until I picked up the letter I told her that it was a joke. Mom did not think it was funny. I thought at the moment that my mom was a bit too emotional. Obviously that was before I became a mom and worried about my own children.

After returning safely from Finland, Shileen had a few other moments that caused us to worry about her. Once while driving the car during icy conditions, she managed to slide into oncoming traffic, hitting another car head-on, resulting in her totaling our car.

She escaped from that accident without a scratch. I began to wonder how she managed to do that. She told me that God had been protecting her. I thought she was perhaps going a bit overboard with the God thing lately. But hey, if she was safe, that was all that mattered to me.

After graduating Valedictorian from high school, she journeyed to Bryn Mawr, a prestigious women's college in Pennsylvania. One night we received a phone call from the dean of the college. Apparently Shileen was last seen leaving for work. She didn't show up at her Pizza Hut job, and no one had seen her.

Hours slowly ticked by as we waited in Iowa for word of her whereabouts. Every time the phone rang, I would leap with anticipation, but the calls were always to tell us there was nothing to report.

At one point in the night my dad told me to say a prayer for her. I'm not sure if it was the desperation in his voice, or the look on his face, but I quickly prayed as tears fell down my cheeks, while asking a god I didn't know to protect my sister from something I also didn't know.

Morning finally arrived. With it came news that my sister arrived back at her room. She apparently had gotten in a cab, not thinking anyone would really notice, and had the cab driver take her to a run down motel in New Jersey. There she sat crying, and praying to the God she did know. And he heard her cry and answered her prayer.

Dad flew out to Pennsylvania and brought her back home for a time of renewal.

Her faith in Jesus was unshakable. She witnessed to me many times through her life and her ministry. It also helped that she had some Christian friends who seemed equally in love with Jesus.

One night Dad had given her permission to have a party at our house. As the house began to fill with people, we began to wonder where the hostess was. She had left several hours before to pick up some friends in a town about an hour away. The weather had begun to get bad out, and there was no sign of Shileen, or her friends.

As Dad began making phone calls to see if he could figure out where she could be, we realized that she was likely caught in a blizzard.

Again the clock began to tick slowly as we awaited news of her. I was tempted to check the batteries.

One of the friends who had gathered for the party said to everyone in the room, "Let's pray!"

We all gathered in a circle and began what became the first prayer of power I had ever heard in my life. I had not heard someone pray with such

conviction. I could see the loving arms of Jesus take a hold of her and hold her close. I seemed to feel that she would be all right.

The circumstances of the night as it wore on would indicate anything but her being all right.

At one point after Dad got off the phone he came to me with tears in his eyes as he said, “we need to be prepared for her to not be alive when they find her.”

He had been talking to the sheriff’s department who informed him the wind chill factor was over sixty degrees below zero. The roads were impassable and there was no way anyone was going to be able to even look for them until the storm ended.

Out of sheer exhaustion I fell asleep.

In the morning my dad exclaimed some people on snowmobiles had found the car. He was unsure of the condition of my sister and the others but was told they were alive.

My heart rejoiced as I thought back to the prayer full of power that I had heard spoken the night before.

After a brief visit to the hospital, she came home to share the story with us.

Shortly after picking up her friends they began their journey home. The weather quickly changed, as it often does in Iowa. The car got stuck in a drift. The blizzard was already so bad, they couldn’t see. Some of the things they had learned in Driver’s Education had kept them alive.

Apparently the car stopped running shortly after getting stuck. They huddled together in the back seat, keeping each other awake through the night while rubbing parts of their bodies that began to go numb.

What should have been sure death for them ended with miraculous intervention by the Lord! After a full examination, only a couple of girls had suffered minor frostbite.

Mrs. Doubtwewillevergetthereontime

I often find humor in the way different people relate to one another. I love that God was so creative and managed to make all these people with different traits. Some traits I enjoy, some I don't.

Growing up, everyone knew that my dad was notoriously late for everything. If he had to be bowling at 9:00, he would leave the house at 9:00. I'm not quite sure why he didn't plan for driving time. He's a lot better now that he has a wife to keep him on track.

I didn't really think I inherited his inability to be on time until one day I realized the church was almost always full when we would arrive. Then someone once casually mentioned, I think it may have been the pastor standing at the pulpit, "The Camps have arrived. We can now begin."

But it wasn't until my sweet daughter once yelled, "Why do we always have to be late for everything? Why can't we be on time for once?" I glanced at the clock in the van as we approached the church parking lot and realized we were actually early! It was 9:58 and church didn't begin until 10:00. Although by the time all the kids got out of the van and headed in the door, the opening hymn had already begun. Poor Ashley gave me that pitiful look of, "we did it again." She then whispered, "If we're always going to be late, could we at least not sit in the front row?"

To which I responded, "It's a Lutheran church, the front rows are the only ones left."

Over the years I have tried desperately to be on time for everything. When I realized how much stress it caused Ashley to be late, I decided, as her mom, it was my responsibility to help alleviate some of her stress. I began telling everyone we had to be someplace fifteen minutes before we

actually needed to be there. I don't even think the kids had a clue that most normal events do not start at 45 minutes past the hour. They didn't question that book club began at 12:45. Still I somehow seemed to be perpetually late.

I think we've all figured out by now that I am not an organized person by nature, which means I have to come up with ways to combat my natural tendencies.

What I discovered was that even if I can combat one area, like shoes, I still have ten areas left to be conquered.

I love using containers. I have owned countless baskets, rubber tubs, and drawers on wheels. I once read a marvelous book called, If I Could Just Get Organized! Home Management Hope for Pilers and Filers, by Karen Jogerst. It was a book that helped you deal with your life in a way that was natural for you. If you were a piler, it taught how to pile neatly. If you were a filer, it helped you work within that tendency. After reading this book, I bought countless containers. I should have bought stock in Rubber Maid! I would be rich today, on my own need for containers.

One of the areas that needed to be worked on was shoes, coats, hats, gloves, etc. With eight children, the amount of the previous items is astronomical. One day I decided to set up a "leaving the house" station on our front porch. I put three shelves wall to wall in the closet, just the right size for milk crate containers. I then made a long board with ten hooks on it. After putting all the milk crates on the shelves, and hanging up the coats, I took the kids into the front porch.

"This!" I announced, "Is the way this room is supposed to look. Every crate has a name on it. Within each crate are the shoes belonging to that name. What could be easier? Below the crates are two large containers

full of matched socks. All you have to do to leave the house is get a pair of socks, reach in your crate for your shoes, grab your coat off your corresponding hook, and we're off, and on time!"

I thought it would be fun to try this new system so I decided to take the children on a short outing. I brought out the timer and said, "GO!" I watched my perfect system be destroyed in seventy-eight seconds. The kids all ran out to the van in record time. They somehow managed to pull several socks out of their neat rolls in search of just the right pair for their feet. They dumped most of the containers upside-down trying to get the shoe that had fallen to the bottom of the crate. And the coats on the hooks? Well, only half of the children had bothered to grab his coat in the sub-zero temperature.

One of my favorite books, with a corresponding movie is, *Cheaper by the Dozen*. In that book, the father times his children's activities to make them more efficient. In the movie when the father did the secret whistle, all the children would come down the stairs in about seventeen seconds, ready to greet any guest that awaited them. The children are all neatly dressed, to their shoes. The little girls all have cute bows in their neatly combed hair. They are ready for anything at a moment's notice.

Perhaps I need to remind myself of my humble Air Force beginnings and start running the house like a barracks? Perhaps if I bounced quarters off the kids' beds, then let them keep the quarter, they would have nice hospital corners and tight blankets. Perhaps if I made them spit shine their shoes each evening, they would want to put them on their feet in the morning. Perhaps if I did inspections on a routine basis, the children would all tend toward neatness. Perhaps if I ordered their lives inside our house in such a way as it would be portrayed outside our home, manifesting itself in

promptness, then perhaps my life would not be quite so hectic. But alas, I don't believe I can run my home like a drill sergeant. But that doesn't mean I'm not going to give it the old Airman try.

Driving Mom Crazy

When I enlisted in the Air Force, I really had no idea what life as an Airman would be like. Likewise, when I enlisted in the role of motherhood I wasn't quite sure what I was in for with that either. I pictured myself strolling along with a cute little baby in a cute little carriage. The part of the picture I failed to see was me with my bulging tummy lounging on the couch unable to get up because I was a few weeks past my due date.

It seems almost everything in my life begins innocently enough. This particular instance was no exception. The arrival of our third child was not going according to plan. Steve was supposed to begin a new job seven hours away from where we currently lived. The baby was supposed to arrive a month before the new job. I would have plenty of time to pack up the house and settle matters before the big move. But my plans are not always the way life journeys.

Roughly nineteen days, four hours, and fourteen minutes after I was SUPPOSED to have my baby I decided I wasn't going to wait any more. I found a list of ways to naturally induce labor. Therefore, you see, it began innocently enough, I wanted to have my baby! I needed to have my baby! There were a few items on the list that I just was not willing to try. The doctor had tried stripping my membranes at an earlier visit. Instead of a slight spotting, I gushed blood in her office. After being sent to the hospital to monitor my progress, I was sent home to rest. How much rest can one get when they know they will be moving soon and the baby has not yet made her arrival?

Castor Oil was on the list. I thought about trying that, briefly. I'm real picky about what I put in my mouth, so I didn't really want to

purposefully drink something that tasted like phlegm. I had also heard that it doesn't really begin labor, it just makes you think labor would be better than what you are currently experiencing with vomiting and diarrhea.

We all know a couple of the other items on the list. Now tell me, who really wants to have a romp in bed when they are nine months, nineteen days, four hours and fourteen minutes pregnant? Sex was not an option! I finally settled on the idea of a bumpy ride in the car. It didn't take long for Steve to find some bumpy roads to take me on. We lived in the desert at the time. There are a lot of bumpy roads. The more he drove the less I wanted to have a baby. My stomach hurt, my head hurt, and the rest of my body was trying to not fly off the seat. The two little kids in the back seat were laughing hysterically.

Suddenly I remembered the verse that says, "Nevertheless, she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." I seemed to forget the latter half of the verse and concentrated on "she will be saved in childbearing."

"Oh Lord, I cried out, please save me! This ride is way too bumpy!" Then I felt a contraction. Wow! What a quick answer to prayer! But it was just one of those practice contractions. I was always real good at practicing, but never real good at the real thing.

The bumpy ride didn't save me.

I ended up having a c-section the following Monday.

A c-section was not in my plans. In fact, when I found out I was going to be cut open to get out the baby, I felt like going on a bumpy ride again. Or was I feeling like I was already on a bumpy ride?

Sometimes when I get on the bumpy ride road, all I can do is hang on with all my strength to God.

Cathy ended up coming out without too much trouble, except I was quite certain I was going to have a boy. Therefore when I awoke in recovery, I was extremely surprised to hear the nurses tell me I had a little girl. I already had two girls. What was I going to do with another one?

At the time, Cathy became the love of my life. I was able to sit and nurse her while people all around me packed up my house and moved me seven hours away from my friends. At a mere six days old, my little treasure smiled at me for the first time.

It's amazing to me how God turns what we think is a bumpy road, into a street paved with gold.

The Taming of the Crew

One of my bumpiest roads has been that of disciplining my children. I think the reason the road seems bumpy is because I gauge my success based on the behavior of my kids. If the kids misbehave, that is a direct reflection on me. Heaven forbid my children would not be perfect, reflecting a mom who is also not perfect.

In my parenting years, I've gone from not having a clue how to discipline children in the beginning, to disciplining for every little infraction, to where I am now someplace in between. The road has been tough! In the beginning, the difficult part was in not knowing if the children would obey me, or if they would decide to go their own way.

When Ashley was three and Christi was two, I began to learn about disciplining children. Naptime would often be a huge battle, mostly because I so desperately needed a nap after having been up several times in the night with Cathy, who was a few weeks old, therefore I would make poor choices in the discipline of the girls. I would rant and rave that they must obey me, OR ELSE! I didn't have an "or else" but I remembered the phrase being used by my own mom.

I'm not sure if I responded to my mom or not, but I do know the girls did not respond to me. After being quite harried, Steve took me to visit with our pastor. The pastor informed me I was a bad parent and needed to learn some discipline tools, like spanking. He encouraged me to not put the girls in the same room for their naps. That sounded like a workable solution to the battle each day.

I chose the master bedroom for Ashley's nap, with Christi being in the girl's room. The initial nap went smoothly. I lay down Cathy, and I went to

rest on the couch. All was quiet. I felt that I had struck gold. After awakening from my own nap, I went to check on the girls. First I peeked in on Christi who was still sound asleep. Then I went to see my sleeping Ashley. I was certain she was sleeping, because she was my compliant child who always did as she was told, unless Christi was influencing her to do otherwise.

Imagine my surprise to find Ashley sitting in the middle of my bed. My senses were overwhelmed by a heavy smell. As I looked closer, I realized Ashley had painted her entire body with a bottle of nail polish. Since I was well rested I did not scream at her. I was also trying to be a calm Mommy.

The smell was so strong I was a bit worried that she may have poisoned her system. I called the poison control center. They informed me that I must get the polish off of her as quickly as possible. Using nail polish remover was out of the question as it would be quite toxic in large doses. I had to resort to soaking her in a tub and scrubbing the polish off using a kitchen scrubber. It was horrible. As I sat scrubbing her, I realized this was a natural consequence to her behavior and no further discipline would be forthcoming.

Christi awakened from her nap, upset that she had missed all the fun of playing with nail polish. She came into the bathroom and began playing around. Finding something to do, she jumped up onto the towel rack, and promptly pulled it out of the wall. Within a moment Cathy awakened. Exasperated I retrieved Cathy, leaving the towel rack on the floor, but drying off Ashley, still somewhat pink from the polish, or the scrubbing.

As I sat nursing Cathy, Steve arrived home. Shortly after heading toward the bedroom he glanced into the bathroom. He yelled, “What happened in here?”

I didn’t have an answer that would make me look good or keep Christi from getting into trouble with Daddy, so I simply said, “The towel rack fell off the wall.”

Steve seemed to accept that answer, although I’m sure he was skeptical. Then he went into our bedroom. I was so busy trying to get Ashley cleaned up, I hadn’t had any time to clean up the bedroom. His yell caused me to go running into the bedroom. There in the middle of the bed was a huge stain on our new comforter. She had also managed to paint our headboard and Steve’s dresser drawers.

She had left her permanent mark on our lives!

I believe each child has left her mark. Shortly after Christi learned to write her name, she would write it everywhere. I would find her name written with pen on the table. I would find it scribbled in books. One time I remember finding she had used crayon to write her name in the carpet. When I confronted her she said to me, “But how did you know it was me?”

“You wrote your name!” I replied with a bit of exasperation.

“Oh.” was all she could say in response.

Naturally she was disciplined for “writing on the wall...or carpet.”

Even though Christi had a tendency towards doing destructive things, her heart was such that she desired to please us. It was difficult for her to find out something she did was wrong. Was that enough for me? No. For some reason I felt there must be punishment for anything that was out of line.

Then I learned there was a difference between the words punishment and discipline. Discipline would occur to help change a child; punishment was simply an act to almost repay a child for making Mom or Dad angry.

When I learned that I stopped calling it punishment, preferring the word, discipline. The act was the same, the name was different.

It was about this time that I learned about having a plan for discipline, rather than reacting with my children. Every infraction had a series of steps that had to be followed.

The offending child was requested to go into the bathroom. Here she would be told to lie down on the floor. We would then talk about what she did. She would change her heart. We would pray together for God to use the sting to help remind her to not disobey. After a sting from the rod, she would get up. We would both often have tears in our eyes. Then we would sing. The song chosen was as individual as the child was. Christi would sing, The Trees of the Field. Briana would sing, Jesus Love Me. Cathy would sing, Silent Night. It was a special time with each child.

I think one of the reasons it was so great was because I was reaching their hearts. It isn't often we can reach our children's hearts, especially when we are disciplining them with selfish motives.

I've had to learn so much about discipline over the years. One thing I did learn was that my children would never be perfect. But for the most part I wasn't ashamed to take them out in public.

More and Please

We've always felt it was important for our children to have good manners and be well behaved, particularly in public. After all, this could be a witness to the Lord, could it not?

Naturally this was also for our own prideful reasons we wanted this from them. I wanted people to look at my lovely family and say to themselves or out loud, "I wonder what their secret is?" Or "Wow, she must be a great mom!"

When I see children who are well behaved, I say the same thing. Likewise when I see children who are unruly, or exhibiting poor manners naturally I presume it is the fault of the parent.

Therefore, since my children are a direct reflection of myself, they must be perfect, to reflect, well, a perfect parent, as I am not, but would like the world to believe.

I love taking my kids out to dinner at nice locations. I once heard about a family who was blessed by a restaurant patron who paid for their meal because the family was so nice to watch while they ate their meal. I have similarly hoped for someone to pay for our meal. Have you ever calculated taking a family of ten out for dinner to a nice restaurant? Those kids better behave or we might have to pay for the meal ourselves! I guess I should clarify what I count as a nice meal.

If Steve and I are dining alone together in honor of a special event, such as an anniversary, we might take in a nice steak or seafood restaurant. Although I think it was an anniversary two years ago in which we first stopped at our usual date location, Wal Mart. I had been longing for a nice sit-down dinner together for weeks. Unbeknownst to me, Steve had other

ideas. It became apparent as we pulled up to the drive-thru that my romantic dinner plans were going to be curtailed by the fish floating in bags in the backseat who needed to get home and placed in our aquarium post haste.

When we don't have newly purchased fish in our backseat, I like to take the kids to a restaurant in our neck of the woods called Fazoli's. For a fraction more than a kid's meal at a fast food restaurant, we can all sit down for pasta, pizza, or lasagna and all the bread sticks you can eat. That would be Christi's favorite part of the trip. She dreams to one day be the bread stick eating queen of the restaurant.

One particular night we were a bit short on cash, so we took the brood to Fazoli's hoping to run in to one of those philanthropist type folks who love to see big families enjoying one another's company with wonderful manners, great smiles, and polite conversation.

The meal was progressing as planned. Several patrons had been smiling in our direction. I didn't want to let on to the children what I was really after so prior to going into the restaurant, I reminded them that they were representatives of Christ. I don't believe I've ever told them I see them as a direct reflection of myself and if they even think of messing up, they are going to be in for big trouble!

Well, my great reflections were doing quite well, capturing the attention of many in the restaurant. As dinner neared completion it was time to clean up the table, wash hands, and head out. Briana quietly mentioned to me that she needed to use the restroom. She was our newest child "in training" so I was delighted to see her ready to go off with her big sister. I gave her the instructions I always give children. "Quietly walk to the restroom, don't look under the doors if someone is in the stall, and wash your hands when you are finished." Ashley accompanied her to the

bathroom. Just as an older gentleman was reaching into his wallet, I'm sure it was to pay for our dinner, Christi managed to tip her entire drink onto the table. She had just refilled it for the trip home so it was quite full. Suddenly all the children became quite loud. "Hurry!" They shouted. "Clean it up! Quick!"

Another mother whom I was certain was just beginning to walk over to ask me how I "do it all" turned and went the other direction. Briana emerged from the bathroom on the other end of the restaurant with a triumphant, "Mom, I did go PEE!"

"Yippee!" I thought to myself, now I really look bad!

John also returned from washing his hands. As he came to me to inspect his hands and wipe the face he missed, he bumped into a family with one child. Forgetting to say, "excuse me please." I reminded him of his required manners by saying in as sweet of a voice as I could muster, "Honey, you need to say excuse me."

"Why?" He inquired, then added loud enough for most of the restaurant patrons to hear, "I didn't fart." (sorry if that offended anyone, I'm just telling it like it is)

My reflection wasn't looking so great at the moment. In fact, I was feeling ready to break the mirror.

Have you ever wondered why the superstition that if you break a mirror you will receive seven years of bad luck? Well, if you are unlike me and don't sit around pondering such inconsequential perplexities, I am going to share with you my theory on that.

I have two thoughts, both of them profoundly spiritual. One thought is that you will receive seven years of bad luck because you aren't a very good packer. When you pack up your belongings to move them, you simply

toss all the stuff into a box. Therefore, the mirror breaks, requiring you to spend extra money that you didn't have in order to replace the mirror, which caused you to use your credit card, which you shouldn't have done because now you're going to have to pay the cost for the mirror plus about 50 percent over time. Then, you will be unable to pay for your mirror because you had not properly planned and now your credit rating is bad, and it will take at least seven years for it to get cleared up. Moral of that story...pack well, and you'll stay out of debt.

Spiritual reason number two goes like this. When you have been looking into the mirror, what you are seeing is your flesh, or the flesh of those who you think are a direct reflection of yourself. Rather than seeing Briana as a little girl triumphant in her new life of being diaper free, I saw a reflection of me, whether right or wrong, of a mother who clearly instructs her children to shout about bodily functions in a restaurant. Even though this is quite far from the truth, I have looked into the mirror and have seen a lie.

It is the lies we believe about ourselves that cause us to break the mirror in frustration. We think if that mirror just didn't reflect us, perhaps life would be better.

I remember once seeing on the news a woman who was caught on tape slapping her child, pulling her hair, and spewing profanities at her child after leaving a store in which the child had acted up while the mom was trying to steal something in the store. This is a gross injustice to the child, and I am not in any way seeking to justify or even to understand a parent who would do something such as that to a child. However, it caused me to think about the parent's motive for such an act. I came to the conclusion it

was because the woman did not like what she saw in the mirror in the form of a child acting up in public. So, she set out to break the mirror.

Even though I cannot even begin to imagine myself doing what this woman did, I must admit there are times that I lash out with my tongue at a child to “break the mirror” of the reflection I see. How many times have I spanked a child a little quicker and without the required prayer because my own pride had been hurt by the actions of the child?

Often I tell the children they are a reflection of Jesus when we embark on a trip away from home, but you know, if I always acted as a reflection of Jesus when I was at home myself, I don’t think I would have to remind my children when they are away from home.

In addition, if they were a true reflection of Jesus, they would never be lost.

I Left my Fifth in San Francisco

One of the greatest fears for any parent is losing a child. One family story that has been handed down in the Camp household was one that happened to my husband when he was about four years of age. His family was on a camping trip in the mountains of California. On the way to the campsite, they stopped for some provisions, gas, and a bathroom break. You guessed it; little Stevie was left in the bathroom.

No one noticed that Steve didn't get back in the car and ride to the campground, which I have heard, was about an hour away.

Steve had just come out to see the car pull away. He stood outside the gas station in the rain hoping they would notice quickly that he wasn't in the car.

Meanwhile, back at the campsite, Mom begins preparing lunch, the other boys go off exploring in the woods. Pretty soon Mom notices she hasn't seen Steve for awhile. She sends a search party to the outhouse. No Steve. She begins the inquisition of the other three boys. They remembered Steve being in the car. I guess they were thinking about before the gas station stop.

After a few hours passed, Steve's dad pulled up to discover him standing in the rain.

That event left a mark on Steve in relation to our own children. The more children we've had the more important it has become to make sure we have them all when we get ready to leave a restaurant, gas station, or even a church building.

We do a procedure we call, "Countdown." Perhaps it came from our military background, or just that it's so much fun, I'm not sure which. Many

times a day our family is heard counting down. We begin with Daddy, then on down the list. Each person states his name. Sometimes we make it fun by counting down funny, or with a strange noise, or animal sound. It's a great time that all of our children will remember fondly as they grow into their own adult families.

This procedure has kept many a child from being left behind someplace. Once we were leaving church, everyone in the van. Steve said, "Is everyone here?"

Of course there was a chorus of, "yeah, we're all here."

Steve thought for a minute then shouted, "Countdown!"

When it came time for little Briana to say, "me" there was no sound from her mouth. I ran back into the church in search of the fourteen-month-old. I couldn't find her anywhere! I began to panic as the time began to tick away. There were only a handful of people left in the building and no one had seen her. She wasn't playing in the nursery; she wasn't in the sanctuary. My pulse began to race as my blood pressure skyrocketed.

My rational mind told me that she was probably just in a location I hadn't looked yet. It also reasoned that we attended church in the middle of the country, its not like some abductor would come out to our church! Oh but the irrational mind of a mommy with a lost child took over. I enlisted the aid of everyone left at the church to search for our little girl. Finally a little voice cried out, "me," from behind a locked classroom door. Oh was I glad to hear my sweet little me. We located the keys and released Briana into my waiting arms. She apparently didn't even know she was lost.

I haven't quite figured out how to keep track of everyone in a store. Usually we use the buddy system, where an older child is in charge of looking after a younger child. Mom and Dad are usually in charge of one of

the little ones. I'm certain on this particular occasion Dad was in charge of John.

We were in one of those huge super stores with all the children. I needed to purchase a gift for one of the kids so I left Steve with all the children. When I returned I noticed instantly that they weren't all there. "Where's John?" I inquired of my in-charge husband.

He shrugged and said, "I don't know. He's been here all along."

Again, my mind flips into animal instinct mode. I try to sniff out my child, but to no avail. I begin running around the store, searching every aisle. I tried to remember what he was wearing, but I couldn't remember. My brain wasn't working! Steve continued to shop, as my panic grew worse. Then, I became angry with Steve. "How could he lose one of my children!?" And, "Why doesn't he panic like me!"

Within a few minutes I hear over the loud speaker, "Would the negligent parents of a four-year old boy wearing a camouflage shirt please meet your son." Okay, maybe that's not what they said. I took note though that he was indeed wearing a camouflage tee shirt and perhaps that was the reason Steve couldn't see him.

We were quickly reunited. Up walks John carrying a balloon and a large cup of pop with the biggest smile on his face. "I got lost!" He said.

And all the other kids spying the balloon and the large cup of pop wished they had been the one who had gotten lost. I'm not quite sure I agree with the philosophy of treating a lost child in a store. Perhaps they should simply tell them things like, "I'm sure you have great parents! You know, it's very difficult to shop with many young children. It wasn't their fault that you got lost."

Perhaps if they did that, then I wouldn't feel so badly when I lose one of my children.

I once lost Cathy when she was six months old. Now that was scary! I had placed her on the living room floor when the phone rang. The other two girls were playing outside in the back yard. I talked on the phone for about ten minutes. When I returned, Cathy was gone! Again I went running around, looking in places she could not possibly be, like the garbage can. It wasn't like she could even crawl! Where can a child who can't crawl possibly disappear? I inspected each room, then went outside. Nope, she wasn't there either. My irrational mind began playing a scene in my head of some abductor who came into my home knowing I was on the phone for the express purpose of stealing my daughter. I began to tremble at the thoughts my mind was playing over and over.

Just then, I heard a tiny squeal of delight come from one of the back bedrooms. Finally I found Cathy in the back corner underneath Ashley's bed.

I had no idea how she had arrived at that location. It was all the way down the hall and into the bedroom. It wasn't until about a week later I had placed Cathy once again in the middle of the living room when I saw her arch her back and roll over. Then she did it again, and again. I followed her as she rolled down the hall. I stopped her just as she was preparing to play with the dust bunnies under the bed.

It amazes me how we can be with our children so many hours of the day, but they pick that very moment we turn our backs to do something monumental. Or they choose a night that we're out on a date with our husbands to lose their first tooth.

It used to bother me when they did a “first” and I wasn’t there to see it. And I guess it still does bother me a bit, but honestly, how many times do you really need to see a child lose their first tooth? Okay, I admit, I do enjoy that!

There was one thing though that I did not want to miss. I did not want to miss the moment when my child grasped that she was a sinner who needed a savior in her life. I wanted to be there when my child asked the Lord Jesus into her life for the very first time.

Saving Private Bryan

One would think being a stay at home mom who educates her children that I would not miss very many “moments” in my children’s lives. In the early years I spent nearly every waking moment with my kids. We did everything together. If I needed to go to the store, I carted them along with me. I realized fairly early on though that I could not hover over my children protecting them from all situations. It simply wasn’t good for them, or for me to “hover” over them. I knew I wanted my children to have some freedoms without me, within reason of course, like in the backyard with the dog watching over their every move.

One day as the dog watched and I sat in my living room reading a book, Ashley got saved. I didn’t know at the time that she got saved, I didn’t see the bolt of lightening come down and strike near her or anything which would make me think something extraordinary happened to her. I was watching a friend’s child at the time, and he sat on the back step and shared the gospel with Ashley. She bowed her head and prayed with Michael, asking Jesus into her heart.

She didn’t even come running in to tell me. She simply began playing with him once again. I didn’t find out until days later when I was telling her once again about Jesus. She said, “Oh yes, Michael told me all about it, so I prayed with him and asked Jesus into my heart.”

What? How could she do such a thing? Didn’t she know that I was the one who was supposed to pray with my first-born daughter? Didn’t she know this was the most important decision of her life and I wasn’t even aware of it? How could she!

Needing to appease myself, I said, “Well, maybe we should do it again, just to make sure it took?”

“Oh no, Mommy.” Ashley said. “Michael told me that you only need to ask Jesus into your heart one time. You don’t think he left my heart do you Mommy?”

Of course I didn’t think that. I just wanted to be there when she asked Jesus into her heart. Even if he was already there! I resigned myself to be certain to get to the other children before someone else did.

Since Ashley was only four at the time, it meant that the other children weren’t quite old enough to understand. I decided to put into practice Deut 6:7, “*You shall talk with them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.*”

We would talk of the Lord often in our home. Naturally, the next child who gets saved will be by MY leading and by my direction.

A couple of years later Ashley and Christi came walking into the room where I was nursing a baby and exclaimed, “Christi just got saved!”

My smile faded. “What do you mean she just got saved?” Who authorized salvation by anyone other than Mom? Apparently Ashley had talked Christi through the salvation plan, offered to pray with Christi, and the rest as they say, is history. I couldn’t believe it. Two children saved by someone other than me! I should have noticed the evangelical tendencies Ashley was exhibiting. But my own desires got in my way. Rather than being proud of Ashley, I was disappointed with myself.

I hoped Ashley hadn’t noticed my disappointment. But I wanted to be the one who saved my children!

I’m sure you’ve noticed a bit of selfishness on my part by now. And I’m sure it would look that way to an outside observer. But what you don’t

understand is that I am a stay at home mom! And one of the joys of being a stay at home mom is that I get to watch my children get saved! It goes with the territory! It is my reward! And I was missing my reward.

I wasn't missing getting my reward; I just wasn't seeing where God had placed it, in the heart of my child. There is sat disappointed that my six-year-old daughter had shared the gospel. My goodness, I should have been shouting from the rooftops! But I wasn't.

After quite some time had passed, I came to grips with the fact that my second born was now born again, even if it was without my help, and I was able to rejoice. Besides, there were still more children yet to be saved, more fish in the sea, to say it with a cliché. If I just became more diligent, surely I would get to witness the rest of them come to know the Lord.

Rather than sharing all their stories with you, although I do believe the story of their salvation is one of their greatest stories, I will mention that there were a couple of my children who I was able to lead to the Lord, but the remarkable thing about it was, that most of the time, it was because of a prompting that came from one of the older children, sharing the love of Christ with their younger siblings. Oh how my heart had grown to love watching my children witness to each other. The Lord fixed my selfish heart. Unfortunately He did not work in me a complete patience.

One day Bryan, who was all of four years old at the time, came running in from jumping on the trampoline. Out of breath he came to me saying, "Why didn't he get down?"

Not being privy to the conversation he had been having with his own thoughts I asked him what on earth he was talking about. He began to explain, "Well, you say that Jesus is all powerful. And I believe that He is all powerful, but I want to know why didn't he just get down?"

I still wasn't quite sure where this conversation was going to go, but I began to get excited at the thought of me being alone with Bryan as our last child turned his heart over to the Lord. I pushed for more dialogue from him. "Why didn't he get down from where Bryan?" I asked.

"Why didn't he get down from the cross?" I could tell he was getting a bit annoyed with me for not knowing exactly what his brain was thinking.

I put him up on my lap and began to explain that Jesus HAD to die on the cross. He was the perfect blood sacrifice to atone for our sins because we are all sinners. "You're a sinner aren't you Bryan?" I said, baiting the hook.

"Yes, Mommy, I do naughty things sometimes. And sometimes I don't obey you."

"That's right Bryan. And sometimes Mommy does things she isn't supposed to do. And Mommy needs a savior too. That's why Mommy asked Jesus into her heart, to walk with me and show me the path that I am supposed to walk on."

Bryan was soaking it up. He was processing all the information into his fully functional brain. He sighed.

I took that as my moment to strike! "Bryan," I said, "Would you like to ask Jesus into your heart?"

He looked me in the eye, then said, "No, not yet."

What? Not yet! "How about if I let you pick out of the good kids box? Then will you ask Jesus into your heart?" I didn't really say that, but I so wanted to. I was at the moment that I had been waiting for. He was the only child left who hadn't asked Jesus into his heart. And quite frankly, he really needed Jesus. Everything in my mind was telling me to fight for this kid. Fight for his heart! Make him pray! Be a bully! Bribe him! Do

whatever it takes! But then my heart took over. And I knew that I could not bribe my child into salvation. I couldn't lead him into salvation because of my own pride. Jesus was going to have to reveal the truth into Bryan's own heart. And I knew that He was doing that. I knew that I had to step out of God's way so He could reach my little boy's precious heart.

Even though he didn't say the prayer with me that afternoon, I gave him a treat from the good kid's box anyway.

One day after sending him to Vacation Bible School, which was a first for me to even send my kids to VBS, he announced at the kitchen table that he had asked Jesus into his heart. And I rejoiced, even though I wasn't there to witness his prayer.

Erica then piped in, "I prayed too."

"But Erica," I said, "You had already asked Jesus into your heart."

She said, "I know, but I just want to make sure. I've asked him into my heart about ten times!"

And we rejoiced with Erica too.

POWER

It Takes a Child ...To Save a Village

As I mentioned in the last chapter we had not sent our children to Vacation Bible School before. For one thing, we feel that as parents we are mandated to instruct our children in not only the intellectual things, but even more importantly, the spiritual things. So often parents neglect these duties at their homes because the children are getting it in the “church.”

I’ve done a small amount of research in the area of Sunday Schools, but am by no means an expert. I also feel that just because our family came to a certain conclusion does not mean that God calls others to that same conclusion.

What God revealed to us though was that for us as parents who educate our children at home to send our children to Sunday School was a violation of why we educate our children in the first place. Deut 6 is clear that parents are to talk with them when they sit down, when they rise up, when they lie down and when they walk by the way. I have not seen in scripture any place where it is common for young children to be sent from their parents to be instructed by the church.

That also doesn’t mean that there isn’t a lot of good that can come from Sunday School, or that we will never change our minds. For one thing our children are getting older now.

Just as it was easy for me to usurp my husband’s leadership role in the home, it is just as easy for the church to usurp the role on Sundays. How easy it would be for us to leave all spiritual matters to the church. It sounds ludicrous, but many parents do that very thing. Many home educators will not even think of sending their children to the so called “education experts”

but we willingly submit our children to the “spiritual experts” who are often people who are filling a slot that needs to be filled.

I guess I’ve always been a bit of a rebel in society. When the book by Hillary Clinton came out called, *It Takes a Village to Save a Child*, I wanted to shout, “No it doesn’t! It takes loving parents!” In fact, I think I did shout that a time or two.

The Lord recently used one of my children to perform a bit of a shift in my thinking. Oh, I still believe firmly that it takes loving parents to raise a child, but what I saw, was that sometimes, *It Takes a Child to Save a Village*.

Erica is our dramatic child. We have a couple of them, but she is the one who has a flair for drama. After attending Vacation Bible School for a week, she had learned a great deal about a man named Jonah from a vegetable named Bob. Pretty fluffy stuff if you were to ask me. But you aren’t, so I’ll keep my opinions to myself.

Okay, it’s time to fess up. Guilt is overcoming me. I sent my five youngest children to Vacation Bible School because I needed some time to get some things done. There, now I feel better. My motives were purely selfish and I was even willing to toss all my convictions about fluffy Christianity out the window so I could get some rooms cleaned and vacuumed. I know, go ahead, throw tomatoes, I deserve it. Just don’t name the tomatoes before you throw them.

Now that my guilty conscience has been relieved, I can get on with the story of Jonah, and the little girl. My family had gone down to central Missouri to help my mom move onto her acreage. The acreage just happened to be right next door to her husband, Wally’s children. Wally’s

children, who are grown adults, prepared dinner for us on both of the evenings that we were there helping with the moving and unpacking.

As we sat on the deck enjoying sitting, Erica excitedly said, “I have a story! Can I tell my story?”

Everyone said it would be great to hear a story.

She began playing her part of storyteller quite well, using expressions, gestures, and pauses, quite effectively. At the ripe old age of six, she has the art of drama instilled in her. “Well,” she began, “This story is from The BIBLE!” She paused for effect, then continued on; “It’s the story of a man named Jonah. He was a prophet! Do you know what a prophet is?” She asked.

Ignoring them, she continued, “Well, Jonah was told by God to go to Ninevah. And he didn’t want to go, so he went the other way. Can you believe that? He disobeyed GOD!”

I’m sure you all know the story well. However, many of the people sitting on the deck that clear fall evening, had probably not heard the story since they were very young children, if they had even heard it at all. As I watched the eyes of the adults I saw the effect of my little girls words. They seemed to be penetrating into their hearts. You could almost see a pained expression as they thought about disobeying God. Perhaps they didn’t even know who God is.

Erica continued on with the story. No one stopped her. When she finished, she said, “And that’s why it’s important to have Jesus in your heart, so you don’t disobey God!”

I saw a change in the people sitting on the deck that night. I saw a softness replace the harshness. I saw peace replace fear. I saw the Love of

God pour out of the heart of a child and land smack dab in the middle of their hearts.

Sometimes I wonder if we have it all backwards. The word talks about adults needing the faith of a child. Maybe it is the children who should be teaching Sunday School?

There has been a trickle down effect since Erica shared her rendition of Jonah to an extended family that I had never even met until that day. I noticed that one of the moms started watching my children a little closer. She seemed puzzled by them. I wasn't quite sure what it was. I still have difficulty reading some people's minds.

I was given a glimpse though as we were getting ready to head off for home. She came over and hugged me. Then she said, "I don't know how you do it. I wish I knew your secret."

I'm not quite sure why, and I could have kicked myself later, but I didn't tell her my secret at the time. I guess I'm so used to Jesus being such a part of my life, I often forgot that he's a secret to some people.

It was my children who reminded me. After we began driving away I shared the brief conversation that I had just had. I asked the children, "Why do you think she saw something different in you?"

One of them said, "It's because we homeschool."

I told them, "well, that does make us different, that's for sure!"

Another child said, "It's because we have the greatest mom ever!" I personally liked that answer a lot. But had to tell them that I am not the reason she saw something different in our family.

Not wanting Daddy to feel left out one of the kids said, "Is it Dad?"

I giggled as I told them I didn't even think it was Dad.

Then a child in the far back said, “It’s because they can see Jesus when they look at us.”

Before you start throwing those tomatoes at me again, I don’t believe that our family is better than anyone else’s family. But when we live a life that is pleasing to the Lord, when we love others with the Love of Christ, and when we are willing to give our lives up for those we love, people can’t help but see the light that permeates through our entire being.

And maybe, just maybe, all it takes is a little child, with the light of Christ, to save a village.

Ashley of Green Stables

I've often wondered why God gave me eight children. I was kind of hoping that Him allowing us to naturally have only eight children perhaps was like Him telling me I had reached my level of attained patience. Okay, maybe not.

Being privileged to spend most of my time with my children, they have taught me a great deal about God, and about myself. Sometimes it's been a frightening revelation, and other times, I wonder how on earth my children could possibly be turning out so great with such a flawed parent in charge of them.

Since Ashley is our oldest, we lovingly refer to her as our guinea pig. We've never actually had a guinea pig in our house, but we have had several creatures.

Ashley developed a particular fondness for horses at an early age. Before she turned twelve, she had taken over my bread making business in order to make enough money to buy herself a horse. From the moment her first horse arrived on our "farm" she has done nothing but live and breathe horses.

When she gets internet time, she researches the pedigree of horses that she has seen, or that are for sale. One night she stumbled upon a farm that was selling off most of its horses due to an accident in the family. The horses were being sold for far less than their worth. After seeing pictures and doing further research, she decided to petition her dad for a loan to buy yet another horse.

She was pretty certain he would say no. Many sleepless nights she spent trying to figure out a way to make him want to get a horse that he didn't want. She is becoming quite adept at leading the horse to water, and making him think he's thirsty.

One night when I was gone, she told Steve all about the horse she had her eye on for the past month. I was a bit surprised to find out the next morning that Steve told Ashley she could buy the horse.

After making all the final arrangements for transportation, vet checks, etc, the horse arrived at our house on a cold winter night. As soon as she was led off the ramp, we all held our breath. She was beautiful, the most beautiful horse I had ever seen. We knew something great was going to happen with this horse who was named Cheri.

Over the course of the next couple of months, Ashley discovered a great deal about her "bargain." She was able to contact previous owners. One in particular has become a dear friend to Ashley. She told Ashley that Cheri had been traded for a horse worth 100,000 dollars. Ashley's draw dropped at hearing the news.

Through many doors flying open, Ashley was able to purchase a breeding to a top stallion for a fraction of his normal breeding fee. We knew that God had big plans for Ashley with Cheri. It was one of those things you simply know.

I took all the children on a road trip to drop Cheri off to Georgia to be bred. With tears in our eyes we said goodbye to the horse, leaving her in the care of experienced trainers.

All Ashley could think about was that God had opened many doors so she could begin her career as an Arabian horse breeder. She talked of nothing else most of the time. She dreamed out loud about the offspring,

even sharing her ideas for the next generation of horse that she would produce.

It was during one of these conversations while driving along in the van that our cell phone rang. On the other end was Christi telling Ashley that Cheri had been put out to pasture in the morning, and two hours later was discovered lying on the ground, writhing in pain. She was being transported to a state equine hospital.

With tears in her eyes, Ashley told me that she could not afford to pay for surgery, and the horse would have to be put down.

Steve and I decided to go ahead and have the horse taken into surgery anyway. Ashley loved Cheri. We didn't care any longer if she would not be breed able. We wanted to do anything we could within our power to spare Ashley the pain of losing a beloved horse.

Unfortunately, all the money in the world was not going to be able to save her Cheri. She died on the operating table. Our family gathered together, praying, and crying.

When I looked at my daughter's tear stained eyes I desperately wanted to take away the pain. But it was God who was doing a work in her life, through the death of Cheri. I knew for sure that God was working in her life when she turned to me through tears and said, "God has a bigger plan for my life. I just don't know what it is yet."

We also did not know God's plan. We were unsure why he opened the doors, then closed them so quickly, and with such finality. Or so it seemed at the time.

Shortly after Cheri's death, Ashley began using the scripture "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.*" Prov 3:5-6

As Ashley's mom, I often want to keep her from pain in her life. I want to be able to fix everything so she doesn't have to struggle or go through trials. But God was teaching me something too. He was also imprinting the same passage of scripture on my own heart.

Through Ashley and the death of her dreams, God was showing himself faithful to me. My desire was to try to run ahead and see what was beyond the gate. But he was holding me back, teaching me to trust in Him, and in His will for my life, as well as that of my entire family.

A few months passed when Ashley received a phone call from the previous owner of Cheri, who had become her friend. The woman informed Ashley that there was a man who wanted to possibly sell Ashley a horse that was out of the stallion Cheri had been sent to. Disappointment fell on Ashley as she knew there wasn't any money left to purchase another horse. Feeling a push from the Lord, she phoned the man anyway.

He gave her an offer she could not refuse. He offered her his horse for three years. There would be no cost involved, we simply had to keep her insured and healthy.

It was then we saw a glimpse of God's "bigger plan" in Ashley's life. She was learning to walk a close walk with Him leading the way. And He led her on a path that was far ahead of the path she had been walking.

Sometimes I think about the perfect will of God. My own walk has been marred with many times that I've stepped off the path, times that I've questioned God's authority in my life, and even times when I didn't like where I was going, so I turned to run from Him.

I will never be able to walk my children's path for them. They must learn to walk with God alone. However, as I release her into His arms, I know that God's word is true when he said, "*For I know the thoughts that I*

think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” Jer 29:11-13

My role as a parent will never be over, but as Ashley nears the time to begin on her own path, I will know that she is not alone and that she is heading out with the Lord of her life guiding her on her own path and giving her the power to keep walking when pain envelopes her.

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that God has created each of my children for a special purpose.

The Pirates in Sweat Pants

I've often wondered if Dads worry about their children as much as Moms do. It would seem that I have been given an extra bit of worry lately. I'm beginning to think that since I have so much of it, perhaps it's actually a gift and I should embrace my worry with a little more excitement and fortitude. It's just about the time I'm thinking that worry is a good thing when God will direct me once again to the passage, "*Therefore I say to you, do not **worry** about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?*" Matt 6:25

I used to think that I was not a worrier at all. In fact, I thought that I took life as it happened. I would relish the moment! I would rejoice in my tribulations. I would not care if my child went out in public wearing holey jeans or sweat pants. Nothing would bother this great "mom 'o faith." It sounds more like a sandwich to be ordered off a menu than an act of great courage.

It takes a lot of courage to not worry. I thought it might be fun to give you a list of all the things I can worry about in any given day.

When my alarm goes off, I hit the snooze several times, before finally relenting, resulting in turning off the alarm and returning to my slumber. When I awaken to the noise of children fighting, I worry that perhaps I have become horribly lazy and thus my children will also become horribly lazy, never being able to hold down a job. Never mind that I was up three times with a sick child. Who, I'm beginning to wonder if she may have some

chronic infection, that I continue to ignore, thinking it's simply a blocked nasal passage.

As the four-year old manages to only eat the cold cereal in his bowl, I worry that he will become dependant on sugar, resulting in him becoming a diabetic later in life. And all that because I didn't get out of bed to make muffins this morning.

I see out of the corner of my eye the seven-year old pinching the nine-year old underneath the table. Both are smiling at me, although I think the nine-year old is grimacing more than smiling and I begin to worry that my children don't trust me enough to let me know when they hurt.

Worry is such a horrible enemy in our lives. It can rear its ugly head sometimes without any advanced notice whatsoever. That's what is so horrible about an enemy, they can sneak up and devour you before you even have a chance to notice they are standing in front of you, peering at you with deceiving eyes.

Sometimes worry comes because of honest to goodness sin. I bet you've never read a sentence that describes sin as honest to goodness before. Sometimes I just need to sugar coat that sin to make it seem more bearable that I have actually done such a thing as to sin. Sin is a lot like cold cereal. If you took away the sugar and removed the vitamins that were added, you'd have something pretty disgusting. But we like to sugar coat our cereal, and I like to sugar coat my sins.

When I was a kid my mom made me eat shredded wheat. If you've ever eaten shredded wheat it's an awful lot like eating hay. I often felt like I was an animal on those mornings that I would break the wheat up into my bowl. Then I would pour a little milk on it, then pile on the sugar. It wasn't quite so bad with the sugar, but it still made me think of horses eating hay. I

once thought I would see what the wheat would taste like straight out of the box. I opened it up and took a great big bite. I can't even think about it without gagging. It was horrible! That's why it needed sugar.

That's why I try to add sugar to my sins too. If I had to lay them all out, fresh from the vessel they were hiding in, you too would be gagging. So, I'm going to sugar coat, just to make them palatable to you.

Worry is one of those sugarcoated sins. In fact, for a mother to worry can almost even seem like a loving thing. If I'm worrying about the future of my child who seems to enjoy pretending to make weapons of mass destruction on a regular basis, that is a good thing. Right? Perhaps my worry will turn into action on someone else's part? If I worry out loud in the presence of my husband my hope is that he so wants to remove my worry that he instead removes the unwanted aspect of life that I'm worrying about.

I remember once receiving a phone call from my mother-in-law with a concern she was having with our family. She was worried that the children were not getting enough milk to drink. She had been at our house for a couple of days and noticed that we didn't offer them milk to drink. Instead they had water or fruit juice. Now this is a good thing for a mother, or mother-in-law to worry about. Except that it was totally unfounded. Our children had milk all the time, we had simply chosen to not take time to go to the store to pick up more milk while they were at our house.

But her worry caused me to worry that she didn't like me. I worry about that a lot actually. I don't think anyone likes me. And it's even worse if they express worry, or even look like they might be thinking about something, because then I will worry that they are thinking something bad about me because they really don't like me.

This worry about being disliked also prompts me into action at times. However, it seems that my actions based out of worry never seem to be exactly what I would like from myself.

Also in an effort to want people to like me I will take on tasks that make me look intelligent. Even if everyone knows that I'm not, I want to appear to be so. Therefore, I will volunteer to lead classes, like book club. And I usually volunteer for the books that are "intelligent" books. You know, the books that everyone talks about but you really doubt that anyone has actually read them. But we all pretend that we have. Okay, maybe you did read the book.

I had volunteered to lead Book Club for the month that we read Robinson Crusoe. Our family was in the middle of reading Pilgrim's Progress though and we really didn't want to stop in the middle. As the day for Book Club loomed on the horizon, I realized that I would have to begin reading it to the children. We managed to get through about six chapters the first week. We only had something like fifteen chapters to go. And we had three days to do it.

I'll spare you all my excuses but will move you ahead to the day right before Book Club. We still had about one third of the book left to read. I gathered the children for what I referred to as a "marathon reading session."

The younger children became restless after the third hour. Knowing they wouldn't be participating as much anyway, I released them to play in the dungeon, also known as the basement. I began seeing the ugly head of "worry" surfacing to confront me. Here I was reading a classic piece of literature to my children, but I was worried about them not doing their math that day. I was also worried that my little ones would feel as if I had abandoned them to the basement.

In my zeal to finish the book, I had not planned anything for lunch. I served potato chips, right out of the canister in which they came. I heard a faint whisper in my head, “BAD Mommy!” The whisper seemed to shout at me.

Just when I was really feeling bad about my abilities to be a good mommy, Bryan came running up from the basement. He had been playing in the dress up clothes and wanted to show me what he was wearing. He emerged with a patch over his eye, a pirate hat, a pirate shirt, and sweat pants. He had two chopsticks stuck into the top of his sweat pants. He pulled them out of his pants with great flare as he said, “Aye matey, I’m going to slice you into little pieces.”

I wasn’t sure if I should laugh or cry. Just then Briana stood up and said, “Hey Mom, Look at this neat weapon of mass destruction I made.”

Again that overwhelming worry began to enter into my heart. I suddenly worried that my children were becoming warriors. I guess warriors would be better than worriers.

What I’ve found when I’m beginning to worry that I’m a bad mommy is that if I ask God to reveal the good things to my heart, then my worry will subside.

As I did this, I saw that my children were enjoying life as I read to them. The younger children had taken a few simple items like duct tape, toilet paper tubes, and gift-wrap tubes, making something out of almost nothing. They were using their imaginations. This was something that was extremely important. I wanted my children using their brains, not simply being fed information.

They were doing exactly what I wanted, but I almost missed it because I was worried that I was failing them.

Sing a Song of Six Pants

It's often humorous to me how I can think two opposing thoughts at almost the same time. I can't even remember where I left my car keys if I don't keep them in the ignition, yet, I can carry on a great debate within my own head.

One of the constantly raging debates is related to children and chores. I know that children should be given a certain degree of responsibility, however, I often question how much they should actually do.

I've heard the phrase, "many hands make light work," in relation to my own family. I know the person who uttered that phrase obviously only had one child. Anyone with eight children knows the phrase is more aptly, "many bodies makes much laundry!"

To be quite honest, it doesn't even take many bodies to make much laundry; it simply takes one Erica.

Erica is our beauty queen daughter. She loves to look her best at all times. The only thing she hasn't quite figured out is that the pink floral doesn't exactly go with the red stripes. If someone happens to mention this to her, she will promptly run up the stairs, searching for the perfect garment to match her blue eyes.

In the process, she unfolds every item of clothing in her dresser, placing it in a heap on the floor. I don't really think (there's that word again) about it much when I see that she has different clothes on yet again that day. But at some point, I will notice that in the space of less than two hours, she has turned a relatively clean room, into a laundry heap. And you know those clothes never fit back into the drawers when the six-year old place them there. Even if she does attempt to clean the room, she will

usually end up with a large pile of clothes on the closet floor, another stuffed pile beneath her bed, and yet another pile forced between her dresser and the wall.

Triumphantly she will return to me, wearing something different, and inform me that her room is all clean! Each time she does this I'm hopeful, but skeptical.

You would think that I would go inspect the room. But I don't because I'm too busy cleaning up other things that have happened due to the "many hands" in my house.

John has decided that he would like to be a chef one day. So I allow him time to create things in the kitchen. At this point, he's mostly chosen boxed cake mixes with canned frosting. However, during the Christmas season he decided to try a new recipe each day. We all gained ten pounds, and the floor became littered with flour every day. It was a small price for cookies every day though.

Bryan, not wanting to be outdone by his older brother, often wants to create dinosaur food in the kitchen. I'm not sure what bearing this activity might have on his future career, but I'm willing to go along with just about anything as long as it's healthy, and they make a reasonable attempt at cleaning up after themselves. Okay, maybe a reasonable attempt isn't what I'm after. With some of the children I simply want them to NOTICE they made a mess!

One day Bryan spent a long time in the kitchen, rattling pots and pans, opening and closing cabinet doors, as well as every drawer in the kitchen. When my curiosity got the better of me, and I wanted to see how much damage he was doing, I began to venture into the kitchen. Quickly Bryan told me it was a secret and to "GO AWAY!"

After awhile he emerged with cups for everyone. His face glowed with satisfaction. With great fanfare he said, “Now drink it!”

Ashley looked at me. I looked at her. “Bottoms up!” I said, just as I saw something floating in the glass of “dinosaur stuff” that I was about to swallow. I wasn’t quite sure what to do. I didn’t want to gag. But I also didn’t want to thwart his culinary skills. Deciding it was better to risk illness, I drank the “dinosaur stuff.”

All the children looked at me incredulously. I gave them a thumbs up, and they all drank.

It was pretty gross. But at least we drank it together as a family!

And that brings me back to chores. I used to think that everything had to be just right. The floor had to be swept without a trace of breakfast from last week left beneath the table. The area around the couch had to be vacuumed so I couldn’t see all the stuff someone had hidden beneath it. And dishes had to be clean before they were put in the cupboard.

Slowly I’ve been learning that I could do it all myself, but what fun would there be in that? It’s almost like cleaning with eight children is an adventure. I never know what I might find lurking behind the chair, or beneath the couch cushions.

Several years ago, Cathy was notorious for hiding the stuff she was supposed to put away. Who would have thought that just a few years would go by and she would be cleaning the entire kitchen, doing all the dishes for our whole family, including pots and pans, and not hide anything! Even I would hide dirty dishes when company was coming over. But not Cathy! Before she goes to bed each night she inspects the kitchen to make sure it is all clean when we wake up.

With nine people living in our house on a twenty-four hour a day basis, it is never clean enough. We would wake up and the first thing after breakfast, we would spend an hour cleaning the house. By the time we finished reading for the day, doing our brain exercises, playing, working on projects, etc. The house would be a huge mess again. I would often be too tired at that point to even care what the house would look like.

What I was missing though, was that Steve cared very much. When he walked into a messy house, he would see that we didn't care enough about him to clean up for him.

After one particularly difficult time for us, I decided to change my ways. Oh, I knew I wasn't going to go from sloppy to neat. That was beyond my ability. But I could do something.

I asked the Lord to reveal to me how I could let Steve know that I really did care about him.

The solution was quite simple really. Rather than doing our morning JOYS (Joyful Obedient Youthful Service) time in the morning, I simply adjusted our schedule to do it right before we expected Steve home from work. When the schedule is working well, the children and I have spent one hour right before Steve comes home, spiffing up the house.

We decided to change the name from JOYS to Preparations for the King. What God had revealed to my heart was that I was not treating Steve like he was the king of our home, and he knew it. Even though I knew that I loved and cared for him, I was not showing him in any tangible way that I truly did care about him more than I cared about anyone else.

Now when three o'clock rolls around at our house, you will hear a shout from someone reminding us all to stop what we're doing because THE

KING is on his way home. Many hands do make the work light, when you are all working together to show the king how much you love him.

The neatest part about the whole thing was that the children were able to see that when we offer our services to those we love, it is as if doing it unto the Lord.

A Midwinter Knight's Scream

One of the “as unto the Lord” tasks that I must do is the task of getting up when I am forced out of a sound sleep by a child crying from illness, or a bad dream. I once figured that for each child I was up at least once per night for the first six months of their life, that adds up to forty-eight months of interrupted sleep in the last sixteen years. That is FOUR YEARS of interrupted sleep...at least!

Not long ago it was Christmas Eve. Steve and I had finished filling the stockings, and hiding them beneath a tablecloth on the dining room table. You see, I'm a bit of a practical joker, so this year, I replaced their normal sized stockings with little bitty stockings. I couldn't wait to see the look on Bryan's face when he came down the stairs to see his little bitty stocking. I was sure it was going to be a priceless moment for me.

We had to wait for the big kids to go to bed before we could begin the stuffing of the socks. Around one-thirty in the morning, Steve and I finally collapsed into our bed. Within seconds I was sound asleep, knowing that seven o'clock would come far too soon for my tastes.

I do much better on nine hours of uninterrupted sleep each night. But I was willing to sacrifice, plus I knew I would be able to get a nap the following day.

Ten minutes of deep sleep later; I was awakened, not by the clattering of hooves on my housetop, but the screams of a four-year old boy. I ran out of my room, hoping he didn't awaken anyone else, yet secretly hoping that everyone else had to wake up too, because I was awakened.

I could tell from his shaking that he had a bad dream. He said to me, “I had a nightmare.”

“Oh Honey,” I consoled, “would you like to tell me about it?”

“It was too horrible to talk about,” came his reply.

He didn’t even want to walk into his room. He was too scared. I also noticed that he had managed to wet his pants. This wasn’t something he did everyday so it must have been pretty scary. After getting him all cleaned up he told me that he never ever wanted to go in his room again.

“Oh great.” I thought. “He’s going to see his itty bitty stocking. But at least I’m awake to see the look on his face.”

I got a blanket and his pillow and began to walk over to the couch. He took one look at the stockings and said, “How come you buyed (that’s a real word when you’re four) little stockings?”

I told him he would find out in the morning.

As we lay there on the couch together, Bryan began asking questions. “Is everyone born on their birthday?” He asked

“Yes dear.”

“Was Jesus born on his birthday?”

“Well, no.”

“But you just said everyone was born on their birthday!”

I should have told him that clear thinking at two in the morning is not my strong suit.

I then began a long dissertation about the roots of Christmas, hoping he would simply fall asleep.

Instead, he interrupted me by saying, “I want to tell you a secret.”

“Go ahead,” I said, “there isn’t anyone awake to hear you.”

“NO! I have to tell you in your ear.”

I turned my ear to his mouth and he said, “Mom, you’re the greatest mom ever.”

No longer did it matter to me that I was not going to get much sleep, or that I would spend the night wrestling with a little boy to keep him from falling off the couch next to me, to keep him from jabbing his elbow into my ribs, and to keep him from suffocating me with his whole weight on top of me. It no longer mattered to me that I had to awaken in the night to tend to his needs.

Often though we do these things for our children and they don’t tell us that we’re the greatest. I think it helps that I wrote a book called, I’m Going to be the Greatest Mom Ever...Even if it Kills Me!

Sometimes the things that we must do, the sacrifices we must make, are because we have made a poor decision and have to suffer the consequences. Sometimes it’s simply because we live in a fallen world and bad things happen.

A few months after Erica was born, I decided to take a road trip to visit my mom. She lived six hours from our house. Ashley was all of ten at the time, but was often given a great deal of responsibility. On our drive home, Erica was crying in the back. Deciding to pull into a rest stop to nurse her, I allowed the other children to go into the bathroom while I nursed Erica.

I watched as David went into the mens’ side, and John followed Ashley into the womens’ side. I didn’t like the idea of David being in a bathroom alone, but decided there was nothing I could do at the time, and sat back, feeling a bit uneasy, but certain everything would be fine.

The uneasiness lifted as David returned to the van. I continued watching for the girls. First came Christi followed by Cathy.

Then I saw a man come running out of the ladies' room. When I looked at him I felt a horrible gut wrenching in my spirit. He had green fingernails. They looked more like talons to me. His face seemed to spit evil in all directions. My heart began to race.

I asked the girls if they saw that man. Christi told me that he was helping a girl throw up in a stall. My palms began to sweat as I was quite certain the girl was not throwing up.

Ashley came dragging John out of the bathroom. She was disgusted with him when she got in the car. It was that older sister indignation they can sometimes get when they are in charge and a child doesn't obey.

"Mom, John was so naughty! He looked under the stall at those people who were throwing up."

My body began to shake as I thought of what he saw looking under the stall. Suddenly I wanted to turn back time, to right before we stopped. I wanted to listen to the baby cry until the next rest stop. I wanted to not allow the kids to go in without me. I wanted to prevent my son from seeing something that violated his eyes and his mind. But I could not.

I hoped that it wouldn't be a big deal in his life. But it was. When the sun went down that night, John began to whimper in the back seat. He was afraid. He could see a man out the window. He couldn't erase the feeling of being scared.

This didn't end when we arrived home. For months John would cry out in fear of "the man in the window." We showed him that his room was on the second floor. But still he insisted there was a man out his window. He was haunted by him.

Finally one morning at church John asked if the elders could pray for his fear to leave. He knew the only way to calm his fear, was with the power of God.

I wish I could tell you that instantly the fear left him. But it didn't. He had to pray many nights. He began memorizing scripture so he could combat the fear.

I can still see the man in my mind when I think about it. But I know that perfect love casts out fear. And though I may fear for a moment, I know that Jesus died to cast out that fear.

Just the other day I heard Bryan say to John, "Can you go in the basement with me, I'm scared."

John took Bryan by the hand as I heard him say, "Perfect love casts out fear."

The Mommy and the Pea

When I was young, I remember having one fear in my life. And that fear was eating peas. I hated eating peas. Oh, I tried eating them, once, or twice. The rest of the time I would hide them in my cup, my pocket, my napkin, or under the mashed potatoes I would sacrifice not eating, so it could hide the peas.

I was watching a program on television once where the man who was being interviewed was talking about some psychological trauma that happens to kids, which makes them unable to eat certain foods. The illustration he used was that of a baby who was on a yellow blanket when suddenly a dog came running up causing great fright in the child who then buried his head in the yellow blanket, forever being afraid to eat corn.

He went on to explain that if you can find the source of your fear of that food, you can be able to enjoy that food. And if that doesn't work, he said, try to disguise it with something else, like chocolate ice cream.

Can you imagine?

When I would go to my dad's house after my parent's divorce, he would always fix peas. He knew I didn't like peas. And every time he made them I considered that he obviously wanted to make my life miserable. I must put in a disclaimer here. I was a teen at the time; everything everyone did was simply for the purpose of making my life miserable. Or so I thought.

Dad later confessed to me that he was just trying to make a good nutritious meal for me, and peas are of course as nutritious as you can get.

Spinach was one of those things that are pretty nutritious on the vegetable scale too, but my dad wasn't going to make that because spinach

makes him gag. I saw him do that once, and it was quite effective. My mom told him he didn't have to eat his spinach. I gagged at mine too, so I also didn't have to eat mine.

Knowing what an impact that had on me, I thought I would spare my darling children from ever having to go through the pains of watching me gag. I simply pass on most of the veggies.

Back to the psychobabble guy. As I was watching the show, I thought perhaps I could get over my fear of peas. I began to try to remember when I first noticed I didn't like peas. I couldn't point to one time. It must have been the baby food peas.

The next thought I had was that maybe I could try to disguise the vegetables by putting them in something. No, that wouldn't work; I can't eat anything that even looks like a pea may have accidentally fallen into it. Many a Jell-O salad on a salad bar has been untouched by my lips because it simply sits next to the pea salad. My rule at a salad bar is that I will not eat anything that would be next to anything that may have peas in it.

So the man's idea to put peas in chocolate ice cream was not appealing in the least. I then began to wonder what childhood fear this man had that he had to get up in front of a national audience and make them feel guilty for not eating their peas.

I have seen a couple of cute peas. There is a Veggie Tales movie that stars some cute peas. Perhaps if I had seen that movie as a child I would have been happy to have my cake, and eat my peas too. But I didn't, and the repressed memory of some horrible green thing happening to me, will forever remain locked in my brain, as so many other things are.

Even though I was unable to unlock the mysterious repressed memory, I had decided that eating healthy is pretty important.

Even though I was convinced that I wanted to have our family eat better, there were many obstacles I encountered along the way.

One of those obstacles was money. I noticed that a lot of the healthier foods are a great deal more expensive. I joined a food co-op, which helped with the cost, except that when I received the catalog, I suddenly became aware of all the products available! I didn't even know there was such a thing as quick frozen carrot juice that tasted like a chocolate shake before I received my catalog. I bought cases of it each time. Then I realized I was spending about two dollars per day, just on carrot juice for one person. Feeling guilty about the cost, I stopped drinking the carrot juice.

I bought a grain mill and began grinding my way to better health.

I ordered fifty-pound bags of several different grains. It was so fun picking up my order!

It was quite interesting researching the various grains that I could grind and put in bread to make it healthier. Our favorite was a grain called Kamut. Kamut is not easy to find, and get quite expensive as well. But it sure tastes great! Once when Ashley was making bread for the farmer's market, she accidentally used our bag of Kamut instead of the wheat. She got rave reviews, but my Kamut was gone, and we lost money on that week's bread.

I began making whole-wheat muffins, multi-grain pancakes and waffles, and anything else I could make with grain. I began walking past the bread aisle with disgust. "How could people eat food that is a negative food source?" I would wonder.

I began to notice that my friends began to change. The ones who bought bread didn't come around as often. The ones who made their own, became my best friends.

I've never been known for my ability to maintain moderation in my life. When I embrace a thought, an idea, or a life change, I do it with every ounce of my being.

It was not any different with the healthy living. I embraced grains with everything I had within me. I would often go to our back porch, and reach my hand into the grain bags, just to get a feel for the wheat, the rye, or the kamut.

Every meal we had lots of grain.

I began to wear out my kitchen carpet, because I was spending so much time in it. And I wasn't particularly fond of my kitchen. I did however put up a border in my kitchen with lots of different types of bread. I think it only made me long to spend more time with my family, and less time feeding them.

Suddenly I went on a kitchen strike. I didn't even see it coming, but I know the day that it happened.

I was walking through the local grocery store and ventured past the meat department. I spied a package of hot dogs. Initially my thoughts said, "Ew, gross, who would eat those."

Then I put them in my cart. I grew up on hot dogs. We had chilidogs probably two times a week at my house. I longed for a taste of my childhood. (hold the peas)

I decided it wouldn't hurt the children to have a hot dog for dinner that night. Then I bought a package of chips to go with the meal. Splurging, I headed to the dairy aisle where I purchased a container of chip dip. I couldn't believe it! Where were these impulses coming from? How could I stop them? But I didn't want to stop them. I wanted to have chilidogs, and chips and dip. And I didn't want to spend all afternoon making buns, so I

went to the bread aisle and found myself longing for a bite of Wonder white void of all nutrition, bread. So I bought it. After choosing some soft hot dog buns I headed back to the meat department where I picked out a package of bologna to go on my white, void of nutrition bread.

Not stopping there, I went through the cereal aisle and purchased for my wonderfully healthy children, some sugar sweetened cereal for breakfast the next day.

My palms were sweaty as I passed the packaged cookies, stopping only briefly to choose some chocolate sandwich cookies. Again my cart began to move, almost as if it had a mind of its own. It headed straight toward the soda pop aisle, where I placed some “kid pop” in my cart.

We were having a celebration tonight I had decided. As I was walking past the frozen foods, I noticed a great sale on frozen pizza. So, I bought twenty of them. At that moment, guilt began to take over.

“You can’t feed this garbage to your children.” My guilt told me. “Put it all back!”

My head turned slightly as I pondered returning all the items to their proper locations. Then I spied it. Out of the corner of my eye, a tremendous sight to behold. Right in front of me was the answer to my guilt. Slowly I opened the frozen food door. I perused the shelves and my hand reached in, landing on, a bag of frozen peas. I picked up five bags, and headed triumphantly to the check out.

That night we feasted on chilidogs, with onions and cheese on top, potato chips and dip, soda pop, and peas!

Of course I passed on the peas.

After dinner that night, I gave each child an Echinacea tablet, a multi-vitamin, and prayed that no one would get sick.

The children have now adopted my prayer. Often at dinner we will hear Erica say, “And please Lord, help no one in our family to get sick from Mom’s food.”

Ol' Yeller

“Do not let your adornment be merely outward-arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel-rather *let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.*” 1 Pet 3:3-4

Often as I'm yelling at my children I want to cry out to God, “Where is my gentle spirit? I have even asked him if he forgot me when he was handing out the hidden quietness. Surely he could see fit now that I'm a Christian to bestow on me the ability to always stay gentle and quiet.

I'm sure you know some of those women who are gentle and quiet. You know they would never yell at their children.

When I was a young parent, I remember the first time I yelled at my children. I yelled at my two precious little ones because they weren't cleaning their room. They were just sitting there playing. They had been in the room for an hour and all they had done was make a bigger mess. How could they be so lazy! I began to yell at them. I didn't plan on yelling at them. I wasn't intending to make them feel two feet tall. Oh wait, they were two feet tall. My point is, I wasn't motivated to yell at them because I thought it would achieve results. I yelled at them because I was mean! I yelled at them because at that moment I was not only mean, but also selfish. I wanted them to clean their room. I was tired of doing it myself. I was also sick of them not pitching in to help.

Have I mentioned yet that one of these two children was two years old? And the other was one year old?

After my rampage, my heart was broken. Perhaps that is where the hidden quiet person of the heart resides?

In my case though, I didn't pull that hidden woman out, I pushed her even deeper inside.

Yelling at my children became commonplace for me. It became easier and my heart no longer broke when I would go on a yelling rampage. Yelling was effective! It caused the children to spring into action! It motivated them! They worked hard! They got the tasks completed!

But their spirits were broken.

I'm so thankful Jesus doesn't keep us walking the same journey past the same ugly scenery year after year.

He began revealing to my heart that I needed to change.

I was standing in the kitchen I think when I heard a horrible sound coming from my living room. It was the sound of scolding. Ashley was yelling at Cathy to clean up her mess. What a horrible sound! My heart went out to Cathy knowing how painful it must be to have her sister yell at her like that.

I walked out of the kitchen and yelled at Ashley, "Why are you yelling at your sister?"

Ashley calmly looked at me and said, "Because she isn't cleaning up."

"You can't yell at your sister just because she isn't cleaning up! That isn't nice." I instructed her with my voice a bit loud in order to make the desired result come to pass.

It wasn't until several years later, the Lord gently reminded me of this incident.

Strife had become commonplace in our home among my children. Often I would hear them yelling at one another over cleaning up their rooms, making messes in someone else's spot, or simply that another child was in the way.

I realized that all the strife in my house stemmed from my own inability to hold in my frustration and anger. A flash back of many years previous occurred in my mind. I saw Ashley and Cathy in the living room. I heard Ashley yelling at Cathy. Then I heard myself yelling at Ashley. “Oh Lord, forgive me!” I pleaded. “Show me a better way. Help me to restore peace to my home by beginning with me.”

I began to explore the times that I really lose my temper. Almost invariably it’s because I have an agenda that must be completed, and the children are not helping with the agenda. I started listening to my kids when they mentioned things like, “I hate going places, you always yell at us.”

“What do you mean?” I would ask.

Then they would say, “As we’re getting ready to go, you start barking out orders to us. You yell at us to get our shoes on, brush our hair, and change our clothes. But you don’t tell us ahead of time. You just start yelling.”

I saw that I could make some changes there. Rather than noticing ten minutes before we had to leave that no one was ready, I could begin by telling them an hour ahead of time that they needed to begin getting ready to go. I once read that for every child you have it takes at least ten minutes extra to get out the door. Initially I scoffed at the idea. How could it possibly take eighty extra minutes just to get out the door? If everything were neat and in order, it wouldn’t take that long. If shoes were always where they belonged, it wouldn’t take that long. If clothes were always cleaned, folded, and put neatly in their drawers it wouldn’t take that long. If hairbrushes were actually in the drawer where they belonged and not in between the couch cushions it wouldn’t take that long.

However, the shoes are sometimes lost, clothes are often lying in a heap on their bedroom floors, and brushes, even though we own at least two per person, are rarely found.

When we rush out of the house we often get to our destination, but we look like . . . well, we looked like we rushed out of the house. It is not a pretty sight. Not only that, but it also doesn't give a good picture to the world about large families.

I had to make many personal changes in my life to help eliminate the yelling.

At one point I realized though that my circumstances couldn't dictate how I respond. If my house is a mess and company is coming to dinner, that doesn't give me the right to yell at my kids. If we need to head out the door in five minutes, it doesn't give me the right to yell at my kids because they have lost their shoes, again. If I'm trying to get a project done, and the kids are being loud and continuing to come to me with annoying questions, I still don't have the right to yell at them simply by virtue of being in authority over them.

In fact, what God has revealed to me, is that if I can show control in those situations, the results are far greater in the long run.

It's so easy for me to quickly go from calm Mommy, to irritated stressed-out yelling banshee. I have not even come close to my goal of not ever raising my voice to my children. In fact, I wasn't even sure they would notice that I was making an effort to keep from yelling at them until one day not too long ago Ashley and I were driving in the car to go shopping when I mentioned to her about my yelling struggles. She said to me, "Yeah, I had noticed that you weren't yelling at us very much anymore."

The next time I noticed myself beginning to yell at the children to clean up the house, her words came to my heart, “Yeah, I noticed.”

Instantly I asked the Lord to calm my words as he calmed the storm. Turning to David I said, “Hey Bud, sorry I yelled at you, could you please wash off the table?”

“Sure Mom,” came his reply, “I would be delighted to.”

To See or Not to See

When I was young and self conscious, I had a problem with wearing glasses. I thought they made me look dorky. This was not always wise, like when driving. It would have been all right if my vision was just slightly impaired, but it's not. Basically I can't see anything that is farther than five feet away from me.

I vividly remember driving along a desert highway in California alone without my glasses. Everywhere I looked people seemed to be jumping onto the highway. My heart would race as I thought I was going to plow some poor soul off the highway, only to discover it was a sign on the side of the road.

The next day I decided Dork or no Dork, I would make a trip to the optometrist. He scolded me for living life out of focus. After putting on the glasses and stepping outside, it seemed a whole different world had opened up to me. Colors became crisper; lines were more defined, the tennis balls no longer hit me in the head when I played tennis.

Even with glasses however, my life was still out of focus. It wasn't until the day I turned my life over to Christ that I saw what I had been missing all that time.

One of my favorite aspects of being a Christian is that I serve a God who is living, a God who cares enough for me and loves me, so that when His word is proclaimed it can reach into my depths and touch the very heart of my soul by making his word clear.

Recently our family was privileged to have a man named Michael Ginn share from the word with us. He has memorized almost the entire New

Testament, as well as much of the Old Testament. His fervor for the Lord was amazing, and contagious.

As he recited for us in a dramatic way the story of the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, again the truth that the Bible "is living and powerful and sharper than any two edged sword" was thrust home for me. I saw the story unfold in my mind. I saw the woman walk into the room. I saw her look not in any direction. For the first time I realized she could not have withstood the "talk" if she had been looking about the room. She would have been unable to ignore the stares of those who "knew" her. Why was she able to walk into the room, let down her hair, and begin to weep at the feet of Jesus?

I am not a Bible scholar. I do not know Greek, with the exception of the alphabet that I learned to impress my Greek neighbor when I was eight. I don't know a lot of the culture of Jesus' time. What I have learned though, is that for a woman to let down her hair in public was grounds for divorce. This simple act could have cost her her marriage. Why did she do it? How could she avoid the whispers of the crowd?

As I watched the story unfold, I could see her walk into the room totally and completely focused on her Lord and Master. I believe it was that focus on him that convicted her of her sin.

I find it interesting that the Bible simply calls her a sinner. That puts me in exactly the same place she is. But am I strong enough to do what she did? Would I avoid the stares and whispers of those who "know" me? Would I be so bold as to walk right up to the Lord and begin washing his feet? Or would I be more likely to cower under the weight of the stares and whispers? I'm afraid if I'm really being honest here that I would cower. I don't like being stared at or whispered about, especially not in front of me.

When I think of this story, I see the woman's strength to overcome those societal demands that we all have placed on us. Why did this "sinner" have such strength? And more importantly, how can I have the same strength?

What I saw in my mind as the story was being recited was a woman totally focused on the Lord. This was her bridegroom. She was willing to let down her hair for him. She was willing to be scorned by those in the room. She was even willing to weep in public.

The day I walked down the aisle to meet my groom at the altar, all I could see was him standing waiting for me. The rest of the church and the people blurred as I made my way to him. I was focused that day on a person who would become a vital part of the rest of my life.

We are the bride of Christ! What a wonderful picture!

As a fellow sinner with the woman, I want to be so focused on my groom, Jesus, that the crowds of life are blurred and I can live seeing clearly where He wants me to go, and what He wants me to do.

The Great Awakening

In my mind I was able to see the picture so clearly. Sometimes however, I will hold in my hand a picture and not always see clearly until the Lord places the picture in my heart.

Not too long ago Erica brought me a drawing and a bouquet of dandelions. She said excitedly, "I wrote your name upside down." Sure enough, there on the paper was the word, "WOW." When Erica draws pictures, it's still mostly scribbles, but she intermingles things like words and numbers among the scribbles. She will bring me several pictures a day that I must treasure.

I remember stumbling upon a Mother's Day card I had created for my mom when I was five years old. I couldn't believe I had actually drawn such a hideous expression of my love for her. Yet, she treasured it. I told her to throw the card away. "I can't!" she replied a little too quickly and loudly for my tastes. She went on to explain that she cannot bring back the little five year old girl who drew the picture for her, but when she looks at the card, she can go back in time to the vision of the girl bringing her the first of the dandelion bouquets and presenting her with a Mother's Day Card. I decided to accept her explanation even though I really had no idea what she was talking about at the time.

I long ago quit giving my mom pictures to treasure. I even have children, who have ceased giving me pictures, although I still receive on average about 15 pictures per day. Sometimes I can see in the child's face that this is a picture I MUST treasure. Which means, "Don't let Bryan destroy it." So I quickly put them in my folder of "pictures to treasure".

One day about two years ago, my mom gave me a picture to treasure. I was lying in a hospital bed when she arrived with the picture in hand. She couldn't disguise the look of horror on her face when she walked in and saw me, yet she remained cheerful. What she saw was her little five year old (all grown up of course) lying near death after having delivered a baby under dire circumstances several hours earlier. The picture she held in her hand was a picture of the baby I had delivered. He had been taken to a children's hospital in another city. On her way to see me, she stopped to see the baby whose life was hanging by a thread. She said to me, "I wanted to come to you right away, but I knew you couldn't go to him, so I did. I sang to him and tickled his feet, just like you would if you could be there." She then handed me the picture that I will forever treasure.

A few days later I discovered that she was fearful that taking the time to stop and take a picture of the baby might mean that I would be dead when she arrived at my hospital bed. But she was willing to risk never getting to see me again, in order to bring me a picture to treasure.

My mom showed me that day what being a mother is all about. It's about unconditional love. It's about treasuring the pictures. It's about singing songs and tickling toes. But most importantly, it's about being willing to sacrifice my wants and desires for the sake of my children.

Everything I Need to Know, I Learned on a Three Day Road Trip with My Eight Children

Last summer I embarked on the “trip of a lifetime!” I had to take one of my daughter’s horses to Georgia to meet and spend time with her “husband.” The original plan was that Ashley and I would go alone. But as I thought about leaving the other children home, I felt compelled to take them with us. So I announced on Wednesday that they would all be going with me to Georgia. We had to make a quick trip to Ohio to drop off a friend’s horse, since we were going that direction anyway.

I learned many things on the trip that I would like to share with you. You’ve all heard of the book *Everything I Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten*. Well, this trip was like that for me, *Everything I Need to Know, I Learned on a Three Day Road Trip with My Eight Children*.

I have always been taught to learn from my mistakes. I have also tried to learn from the mistakes of others. Sometimes though, there is just no other way but to make your own mistakes.

When I was visiting college as a young adult, a truck driver kidnapped me. After a couple of hours in the truck I asked how long I was going to have to be in the truck. The response was, “who knows!” Later that night we arrived at our destination. We arrived in a town whose name escapes me at the moment. As my mom and step-dad looked for the grain elevator they began to sense a mistake might have been made. (Did I forget to mention my kidnappers were my mom and step-dad?) After reviewing the paper they had, they realized the mistake. They were supposed to be in the same town, but the town was in the state of Illinois, not Missouri. We drove all night to arrive in Illinois.

This mistake is one I should have been able to avoid, simply because I had seen someone else make that mistake. Well, I didn't quite avoid the mistake myself.

The first lesson I learned was to check your destination prior to heading in a certain direction. I was supposed to drop off a horse in Edon, Ohio. When I went to Mapquest, I typed in Eden, Ohio. They aren't apparently in the same location. I realized that I had gone about five hours out of my way. All was not lost however. I didn't recall having ever been to the capitol of Indiana before. Now I can say that I have been to Indianapolis. I also had never driven 16 hours in one day before. Now I can say that I have. Up until that point I had never talked with my husband on a cell phone while driving down the road with a horse trailer on the back. I can now say that I have done that. Except that I did throw the phone at my daughter while I was trying to merge onto the freeway with a lot of traffic, saying, "YOU talk!"

The freeway helped teach me many lessons. One in particular though has to do with movie watching. I borrowed a friend's television/VCR and some movies. My children were a little concerned that I would want to buy my own TV/VCR. I can assure you if I was tempted at any point, the temptation disappeared. I was driving down the freeway near Cincinnati when I suddenly heard sirens and car tires squealing. Frantically I looked in my rear view mirror. No sign of anything amiss. Of course that could be because all I could see out of my rear view mirror was the trailer. It was while looking in my side mirrors that I realized the sirens and screeching tires were coming from inside my van. I decided to stick with cute animated movies.

My children taught many of the lessons I learned to me. I learned that when you arrive at a motel at three thirty in the morning, you should NEVER volunteer to sleep in a twin bed with the three-year old who has been cooped up in a van for several hours. I ended up sleeping on the floor. Some lessons are difficult to learn however. The second night I found myself once again with the three-year old sharing my bed. After several hours of sleep, he was wide-awake. I decided to sleep anyway. After a couple hours of blissful sleep I realized there were feet in my face. I opened my eyes to discover Bryan had piled the couch cushions on top of the bed and had fallen asleep on top of the “mountain”. Unfortunately, he had fallen asleep sideways, with his feet resting on my cheek. I decided the next night I would not sleep with the three-year old.

Keeping my resolve, I did not sleep with the three-year old. I did not actually sleep much at all because I hadn't planned ahead. I assumed I could easily find a motel the weekend prior to the fourth of July. Everywhere I stopped I was greeted with a smiling face telling me, “I'm sorry, we're all sold out.”

I tried pleading, begging, and even using guilt on the hotel clerks, but to no avail. There were no clerks willing to give us the keys to their homes so that I could get some sleep. I also learned that rest stops are very noisy; not exactly conducive to resting. All was not lost though. As I was looking for some caffeine in a gas station, I remembered that cappuccino has caffeine. I had never tried a cappuccino but decided it was worth a shot. I asked the clerk if it has a lot of caffeine. She replied, “YES!”

I then asked if it had a lot of calories. Again she replied, “YES!”

I decided to purchase it anyway. After singeing my taste buds, I decided it was very tasty. I ended up having three of them. Now I know that I like cappuccinos.

After dropping off our horse in Georgia, we decided as a family that we would like to say “y’all.” We would be the first native Iowans to say, “y’all.” As we were discussing our love for the southern accent, my daughter slipped in the word, “ain’t” to which I promptly told her would not be allowed in our vocabulary. We decided it would be fun to play with some accents, so we began singing Jesus Loves Me in several different music styles and accents. I think we sang it about 25 times. It was great fun!

It’s quite interesting what questions kids can come up with while sitting in a van for hours. I learned that I should carry a laptop with an encyclopedia built in so that we could answer all the questions that come up. David wanted me to tell him the exact requirements that he would need in order to get his pilot’s license. I didn’t know the answer. John wanted to know how many wild animals live in Georgia. I didn’t know. Briana wanted to know when we were going to get there. I didn’t know.

As we drove through beautiful scenery and horse country, we began to wish that we could live in the places we were visiting. The more we thought about it, the more discontent we became with our own location.

We live about forty minutes from a city. As that city came into view after a long trip, we experienced an awesome lesson from God. Ashley pointed to the sky and said, “Mom, it looks like there is a lake over there.” She was right. We could not even see the city. All we could see was a “mirage” of a lake. We could even see what appeared to be boats on the water and even waves. We couldn’t take our eyes off the lake in the

distance. It was so beautiful! As we sat in awe in the van watching the lake for the next thirty minutes, we realized that life isn't about what you have around you, but how you look at it. Some of the kids in the van couldn't even see the lake that Ashley and I couldn't take our eyes off of. As we sat in awe of God's creation we tried to figure out why we were given such a wonderful sight. We realized that even around our home in the flatlands of Iowa there are beautiful sights to behold. We just have to be willing to see them.

I love how the Lord has the power to show us what we aren't always able to see.

Love

The Call of the Child

The nurse looked at me with a bit of frustration as she scolded, “What are you doing out of bed?”

“Is my baby crying?” I asked her.

“Yes, that was your baby, but you’re supposed to be getting rest tonight. You need your strength.” Then she added, “How did you hear your baby all the way down the hall and with your door closed?”

I didn’t have an answer for her. All I knew was that I was asleep when suddenly I heard David cry out for me. Instinctively I got up, with a great deal of pain after having had a c-section that morning, and walked down to the nursery to retrieve my baby.

The nurse tried to tell me that they could care for my baby for the night and that it would be best for me to sleep. I would have none of it. “I need my baby with me.” I told the nurse.

She brought David’s wheel clad crib out to me. I was thankful to have something to hold on to as I was feeling quite weak. The walk back to my room wasn’t quite as brisk as the one to retrieve the baby.

As I looked at my now peaceful baby I wondered too how I had been able to hear his cry and know that it was my child crying. As he nursed contentedly I thought of my other children at home. I hoped they weren’t crying for their Mommy. I had hoped they weren’t in need of something that only I could fill.

Even though David was my fourth child, there were still fears and unknowns that go along with each new baby. I prayed that he would always be comforted by me. I prayed that God would always show me what to do when he cried.

When Christi was a baby she cried all the time. Her cries would touch me deeply, but there was rarely anything I could do to soothe her cries. I would hold her, and still she would cry. I would feed her, and still the cries continued. Her pacifier did not do its job. Her diaper was dry. For months she cried. I cried many tears because of my inability to meet her unspoken needs. I almost gave up being a parent to any more children because of my apparent failure at the very basic of all parenting skills.

It was at that point, the very lowest point for me, that the Lord, in His love for me, ministered to my heart. He met me in the place of my pain. He didn't require of me to have all the answers before He met with me. He didn't require of me to be a perfect parent. He simply met me there.

What I've noticed when I am in my greatest pain is that Jesus' presence in my life is even stronger. When I yell, "It's not fair," He is there with me. When I slam the door and run out of the house, trying to escape the pain I'm feeling, He goes with me. When I am overcome with guilt for something I've said out of anger, He forgives me. When I cry, He sometimes cries.

There have been several times in my life when I knew that Jesus was crying with me. I wanted Him to fix everything! Instead He chose to cry with me. Even though my desire is for a life that runs smoothly, where I never mess up, never have pain, and never have to endure hardships, more than that, I want someone who is willing to cry with me.

When I read the passages in John chapter eleven, when Jesus brings Lazarus back from the dead, it speaks to me a great deal. Not only does it tell me that Jesus does have the power to do that, but it also tells me that there are times when He must wait to bring about His perfect will.

Have you ever wondered what Mary and Martha were thinking about Jesus at the time? Do you wonder if their faith was shaking because He didn't come? Do you think they blamed Jesus? Have you ever wondered what Mary was thinking when she was sitting in her house?

Sometimes I wish there weren't so many unanswered questions. When I think about Mary, I see my hero! She is the one who spends much time with Jesus. She is the one who has great faith. She is the one I want to be like! But what does she say to Jesus when the going gets tough? She says to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." John 11:32b.

Is it a statement of faith? She knows that Jesus could have saved her brother. Or is she blaming Him? "If you had done what I wanted, I would not be suffering like this!"

How often do we look at Jesus' response to our pleas in our own finite desire to not suffer here on earth?

When we read further in the chapter we see that this incident, the raising of Lazarus from the dead, is the final miracle which prompts the Pharisees to have him arrested. "Then, from that day on, they plotted to put Him to death. Therefore Jesus no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there into the country near the wilderness, to a city called Ephraim, and there remained with His disciples."

This chapter is such a great illustration that helps me to understand the concept that even though the Lord desires to meet my cries, often there is a greater advantage in our pain that we cannot see.

Jesus wept for Martha! He knew that He needed to allow her that pain so that WE can be saved.

Interestingly, there is a clue even in this chapter of the greater plan Jesus was carrying out.

This part is talking about Caiphus, “Now this he did not say on his own authority; but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but also that He would gather together in one the children of God who were scattered abroad.” John 11:53,54.

Oh, don't you wish Jesus would give us clues about what he is working on in our lives? But if we knew what He was doing, there would be no need for faith, and there would be no need for Him in our lives, allowing us to cling to Him.

The Way We Weren't

Often I wish I could go back into my life and undo all those things that caused me shame. Even though I grasp onto the promise that I am a new creation and that Christ has set me free from the hold my past has on me, there are times when I am haunted by the things I've done, the people I've hurt, and the damage I've done to myself, and to my future.

Someone recently reminded me that the word, "testimony" contains a very simple word. And that word is "test."

After becoming a Christian I often thought that I had failed the test that Christ had given me in my younger years. I wondered if I had made better choices, if I had somehow managed to be a better person, if God would have been able to use me in a more powerful way. Perhaps, I wouldn't have brought a bunch of junk into my marriage. Perhaps there wouldn't be occasional bouts of regret when I feel I need to inform my children of the life I lived prior to walking with Jesus on a daily basis. Perhaps I wouldn't question my own ability to be a vessel that Jesus can use to minister to others. Perhaps if I hadn't sinned so much, I could be a better mom.

I know that my sins have been wiped clean, but does that mean I'm a failure as a Christian when I look at my dad and know that one day I hurt him so deeply I could not forgive myself? Often that feeling of unforgiveness stems from being too scared to even ask because we are so ashamed of ourselves that we hope, even though we are certain it is not, that the person who has been hurt by us, has somehow miraculously forgotten the pain that was inflicted to them at our hand.

I was stationed at Lowery, AFB in Denver, Colorado, when my dad announced he was planning to marry again. His wedding was planned, and coincided with my transfer to a new duty station. While at Lowery, I had met, and fell in love with a fellow airman. Naturally, my hindsight would tell me that love was not even close to the emotion I felt with him. I had planned to marry this airman after getting to my new duty station. He had been kicked out of the Air Force and was planning to move with me.

I went home to spend some leave before heading out for the high desert of California and to attend my dad's wedding.

My dad wasn't real thrilled with my announcement that I had found "someone" to marry. Several incidences later, he told me that I was making a huge mistake. I refused to listen to his counsel. I knew this guy way better than he did; he had only known him for a couple of days.

The morning of my dad's wedding I went to the motel where my "intended" was staying. He didn't like what my dad had to say about him and convinced me that if we were going to have a good marriage, we must leave my family behind and ignore all those who would counsel me against getting married. Three hours before my dad's wedding, I left town, without even so much as a goodbye. Even now, twenty years later, the tears still flow freely when I think of the pain I caused him. I phoned him two hours later, informing him that I was now in another state and would be unable to attend his wedding.

On my way to California, we stopped in Las Vegas, so we could be married before arriving at my duty station.

He failed to mention to me that he and another woman were still married. I knew he had a child, but he assured me that she wouldn't come between us. Another thing he failed to mention to me was his desire to hurt

people who irritate him. All these things didn't come into the light, until a few months had passed. It was a marriage that was not made in heaven. Life in that marriage was hell for me. I didn't know from one day to the next if today would be a day that I would be hit, or would I simply be destroyed with his words.

I cried out to the God of my youth. It was time for deliverance for me. I could not go on like that anymore. Thinking back, I don't know how I could have ever felt love for a man who was so mean and spiteful to me, but I had convinced myself that there was love somewhere. Not really knowing what to do, but knowing that somewhere in the Bible that I had been given by my dad when I was confirmed in the church while in High School, my deliverance was clear.

I would search for that deliverance, but I could not find it. I was unwilling at the time to change my heart. All I wanted was to be delivered from my pain; not to have my heart renewed. I knew though that marriage was for a lifetime. I'm not sure how I knew that, but deep inside me was a yearning to not allow myself to fail in marriage. Perhaps it came from already feeling like a failure in life?

It wasn't until he nearly killed me, that I had to make the decision to leave. Fear gripped me. I wasn't sure that he wouldn't hunt me down. I was afraid he would come back, find me gone, and decide that I should pay.

I had left him only my Bible.

That Sunday I went to church. I knew that I needed to be cleansed of something. I felt dirty and violated. But I didn't find cleansing there, I only found distance.

Where was God? Why would He allow me to make choices that were so detrimental to my very existence? These are questions that haunted me.

Rather than looking to God for my answers I began an urgent quest for love. My heart was broken and my life was a shambles.

I think that deep within us is a longing for the unconditional love that only Jesus can provide us. When we don't find that we go searching for the filling of that emptiness in other ways.

After I left my husband the pain was so incredible, and the feeling of failure so strong, that I turned to the only thing that would make me feel "normal." Perhaps not feel would be more accurate.

I turned to drinking, drugs, and sex, as a way to heal my hurts and to make me feel "worthy."

Being the life of the party turned out to be a fast way to destruction.

I was walking on a path that was leading me straight to hell, and I knew it.

The Lady and the Camp

It was while on this path leading to hell that I met a young officer named Camp. His stature of officer and gentleman caused me to re-evaluate my life. I didn't like who I had become. The sin had engulfed my life, and I wanted out of it all.

I'm not sure if I can pinpoint if it was the Lord at work in my life because I begged Him to fix me, or if my desire to be good, was at work in my life at the time. What I do know is that there is a big difference between desiring to be good, and being in desperate need of a savior.

I desired to learn once again about the God of my youth, a God who I only saw at a distance. He was the one talked of on occasion while the preacher stood at the pulpit. Rarely did the words have a lasting impact on me. A lasting impact was what I needed. All I knew was that I needed to begin living a life pleasing to the God who watched from a distance.

Jesus was knocking on the door of my heart. I think I opened the door, but wasn't willing to allow Jesus to come in and transform my heart. I thought I was perfectly capable of doing that on my own. What was I thinking? Did I not remember the past year? I had made a shambles of my life, but now I had a new vision for myself.

After Steve and I became a couple, I knew that I had to act in a manner worthy of being an officer's wife.

Being a good wife was something I had longed to be from the very beginning of my memory.

It's funny to me now when I see my attempts at moral choices, apart from the Holy Spirit working in my life. It simply isn't possible! I may have been good, but I was far from moral. Steve and I move in with each

other. I saw this as a good moral decision. After all, I reasoned, we were already acting like we were married, we may as well live in the same place. Plus it was financially responsible, or so I reasoned. It's amazing how blind we are until we finally are able to see clearly.

I've often felt like Saul on the road to Damascus. Here he was a persecutor of Christians on a journey to destroy those in The Way. But God had a plan for Saul and it wasn't to get people out of the way. It took a blinding light, the Lord Himself, and a servant of God's to get Saul to see his true purpose in life.

That is how powerful a touch from a living and active God can be! It can transform a life that has not lived for God, and turn them around to see where they had been going, while at the same time, showing them the direction to head.

I have been sharing with you the "test"imony of my life up to the point of my conversion.

My conversion didn't seem to be as spectacular as that of a blinding light, the voice of Jesus, and a servant of God's. However, it was a servant of God, one who was listening to the voice of Jesus, who helped remove the blindness from my eyes.

Mere words cannot express what it is like to suddenly be able to see after all those years of blindness. I sometimes think of myself as being a blind woman who lived alone in a house and had never been taught the basic ways of getting by in a sighted world. Oh sure, I could manage, but until the blinders were taken off I hadn't been able to see what a mess I had made of my house.

As I've lived my life now I feel that even though I have a testimony of Jesus Christ saving me through His blood. However, each day that I live is also a testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit that now resides in my heart.

My free will allows me to make choices that are simply not the choices that God would desire for me to make.

I'm now at the point that my daily walk with the Lord is more important than the testimony that led me to this place. It is Him working in me daily, that shows me how much He loves me.

Particularly I need Him to help me see when I am stumbling. Just the other day He did just that. Often times it is painful when the Lord reveals the dark parts that still reside in my heart. Steve was praying with our family, as he does every evening, when I caught my mind not agreeing with him in prayer. I'm not sure what he was praying for exactly, but when the Lord showed me that dark spot in my heart it made tears fall from my eyes. Here I was a woman who desperately desired for her husband to lead the family in spiritual ways not agreeing with him in prayer! What in the world was I thinking?

I'll tell you what I was thinking. I was thinking that my way was better than his was and I was not going to agree in prayer with him for a spiritual direction for us.

Steve had no idea I wasn't agreeing with him, so what was the harm? The harm was that Jesus did know! Jesus knew that at that moment, my heart was not melded with my husband's heart. I was walking outside of the union that God had placed us in together.

Initially I found myself wanting to argue with God on this point. I was pretty certain that my way was right, so shouldn't I silently send up my own appeal? The answer is a resounding, NO!

I do not hold veto power in prayer. I had never seen this in my life before. It made me wonder how many times I secretly went against my husband while pretending to pray with him.

As I cried out to God for forgiveness, he revealed to my heart that I was not to get caught up in how many times I had done it in the past, for there were too many to even count, but that now was to be a time of change in my heart.

I could have stood in front of anyone and proclaimed that I was a submissive wife for the most part. What God revealed to me was that I was being a fraud. How could I be a submissive wife on the outside, while sabotaging his prayers on the inside? I could not!

I'm finding that God is often asking me to remove the masks that I wear. Just when I get feeling like I'm doing great, He shows me a new mask I must take off.

This all may sound depressing to you. How can I ever attain glory if I am constantly being molded and changed into the likeness of Christ? Perhaps it's one of those paradox things that preachers like to talk about. Even though the molding is painful, and it's difficult when God reveals yet another "fallen short of the glory of God" being changed more into the likeness of Christ is one of the most beautiful experiences we can ever have.

Terri Camp and the Eight Dwarfs

One of the greatest pleasures for me is when my children hide God's word in their heart. It is a great thrill when I say, "Children?"

In unison, the children all say, "obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth. Ephesians 6:1-3!"

This passage of scripture has been read so many times in my house, that the page in my Bible which holds that verse is falling out. Sometimes I will find it sitting on the couch next to me. Or perhaps Bryan removed it thinking that if that verse to obey your parents was not in his mommy's Bible, then it did not actually exist? I wouldn't put it past him!

Another scripture verse that I like the children to know is Romans 3 verse 23, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Occasionally when children memorize scripture they don't get it quite right. Erica had come to me with a triumphant attitude and said, "I would like to tell you my verse."

"Okay, Erica, go ahead."

She hesitated for a moment as she pondered the exact words she needed to say, then with a flourish and great fanfare as only Erica can do, she exclaimed, "For all are short for the glory of God!"

I wasn't quite sure if I could laugh at her at that moment, but I couldn't help myself.

Stature has been quite an issue at our house. Steve and I are both the runts of our respective families. I was encouraged when all of my children were shorter than me for the first few years of their lives. Ashley seemed to

stop growing right about the same height as me, if you can call five-two a height.

When Christi was all of twelve, she began growing. Before I could stop feeding her, she passed me, by several inches. Cathy who is now thirteen seems to be gaining on Christi. Just the other morning we noticed that David, who is only eleven, had once again grown overnight, and was threatening to grow past everyone in the house.

I had no idea that I would be surpassed in height by an eleven-year old! Everyone has begun to notice that I'm being overrun by the giants in the jungle.

Not long ago after church at least five people came up to me and said, "I noticed you're being outgrown." Oh yes, they may overpower me with strength, but they will never cease to be under my command. They are still my children, and they must continue to obey me! Thus sayeth Ephesians six!

I've been searching a lot recently about the way to be a good parent. I've looked to worldly examples. The only problem with those examples is that we cannot actually reach into their hearts to know what is truly happening.

We can however, reach the heart of God and see what He requires of us. The best way to see His heart is by seriously thinking about how he instructs us. How can we bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord, (Eph 6:4) if we don't know the very character of God?

Now I don't want to even presume to know all the facets of God's character, it will take me a lifetime, and then some. God does not fit into any mold of mine. As far as I can see in His Word, He also doesn't do things the same way every time. He is unpredictable. However, He allows

us to look into the very heart of Himself many times. We can see that he is kind, full of mercy, compassionate, and willing to become like us to become our sacrifice because He gave us free will.

What I've noticed myself is the more I have gotten to know the Heart of God, the more my parenting style has changed.

Initially, I knew nothing of God and simply stumbled through parenting my children. Much in the way that a man stumbles in the dark before his eyes have adjusted.

Then for me, I began to seek change above all else. I wanted change in my own life; therefore, I saw my role as a parent to be one who causes change. I wanted the children's behavior to change, I wanted their habits to change, and most importantly, I wanted their hearts to change. Essentially what I sought was perfection. Anything short of that would have to be dealt with swiftly and surely.

Perhaps Erica's version of the scripture, "All are short for the glory of God," isn't too far off? It is in our shortcomings, not in our perfections that the Glory of God is revealed in our lives. It is when we allow ourselves to be real with our children, and with the world at large, that God can shine through most powerfully. It is also when we can empty ourselves of what we "think" life should be that He is able to come in and transform us.

An example of this happened not too long ago as I sought out Bryan to administer appropriate discipline. One of the things children aren't allowed to do in our home is to run and hide. Bryan had apparently forgotten that he wasn't allowed to do this and went beneath the pool table to hide.

My mind began to whirl as I tried to figure out what to do with this naughty little boy who would hide beneath the pool table, trying desperately to avoid the wrath of Mom.

Just as I was feeling my blood begin to boil at his stubbornness, a phrase uttered by my friend who had been to a Mark Hamby talk entered my mind. “Err on the side of Mercy.”

I knew at that moment, it was the answer for Bryan. I was to err on the side of Mercy. Instead of my customary, “Get into the bathroom young man!” I crawled under the pool table and sat beside him. He stopped being angry for a minute and smiled at me. Perhaps it was the idea that Mom was sitting beneath the pool table all scrunched up just to talk with him. I’m not sure what was going through his head at the time, but I know what was going through mine.

I was scrunched up and didn’t want to spend a great deal of time in that uncomfortable position. “So, how are you doing today Bud?” I asked him.

“Not good!” He replied. Progress is being made! He went from crying and grumping, to speaking! He scooted a little closer to me. Then he put his head on my shoulder. It was almost like he was telling me, “Thanks for coming to my place. I just need to talk.”

Thinking perhaps it’s a good opportunity for a moment of spiritual growth, I questioned him, “Do you know what happens to bad boys?” I figured he would say no, then I would have the opportunity to tell him how important it is to have the Holy Spirit living in you, so that you can call upon Him to help you not make the bad choices in life.

However, he quickly answered my question. He said, “Bad boys grow up to become BAD GUYS!”

“Yes! That’s right. If little boys don’t learn how to call on the Holy Spirit to help them, they will grow up to become bad guys. You don’t want to be a bad guy do you?”

When he hesitated answering my question I thought perhaps I was in a bit of trouble. Here I was sitting under the little pool table having a philosophical life changing moment with my son, and he’s hesitating about if he wants to grow up to become a bad guy.

I gave him a moment to reflect. He then said to me, “If I point this way, (pointing to the right) I will be a good boy. If I point this way, (pointing to the left) I will be a bad boy.

I couldn’t believe he was doing this! Doesn’t he know it’s not an option? I wanted to shout at him, “You don’t get to choose! You MUST be good! There aren’t any other options!”

That’s when the Lord in His oh so gentle way said to me, “I let you choose.”

But what if Bryan chooses to be a bad boy? What would I do then? Would I have any options left?

If I truly want my children to walk with the Lord throughout their lives, then I must be the one to show them what He is like.

Suddenly my mind was flooded with the times that I have tried shaping Bryan by telling him he didn’t have any choice. How wrong I was! He does have a choice. He was born with a free will, just as I was. I simply don’t want him to make the choice he makes.

The battle now rages in my mind. How can I be merciful and forgiving, while still training my children to walk the way of the Lord? Can I be merciful when my children make the wrong choices?

How can I ever get my children to be obedient the way I want when I want them to, if I am practicing the art of Mercy?

I don't know that I have an answer to that question. But I know that for now, Jesus has requested me to be the example of Him in their lives. And He wants me to err on the side of Mercy.

Bryan interrupted my thoughts "I will choose . . ." he hesitated a moment, "I will choose . . ." Then with great fanfare he pointed to the right! Immediately he hugged me, then said, "I'm ready to be good!"

I then felt the Lord minister to me again, "See! I do it with you! Do it with them! Err on the side of Mercy!"

Nobody Knows the Trouble I'm In

I'm often like Bryan underneath the pool table. I often want to be able to put my head on someone's shoulder and be able to talk to them about the trouble I'm in.

There seems to be an unwritten rule in the church community that the acceptable troubles are allowed to be voiced, but there are some that cannot come up in conversation, before the prayer committee, or even to our friends.

We all know the topics that are not allowed. We know these because we are willing to stand up and pray for Aunt Bertha's gall bladder surgery, but we are completely unwilling to open up our hearts and pour out that we aren't sure we can remain married to the man nicely sitting next to us in the pew.

Now I'm not saying that next Sunday we should all stand up in church telling all of our troubles. But that we have to be willing to allow others to see God at work in our lives, through the good times, and through the bad times. And I'm not talking just financially. That seems to be one of the acceptable topics.

I talked a few days ago with a woman who is planning to leave her husband. There is no one at her church who even has a clue that she is unhappy. There is no one in her very own church who is praying for her. There is no one there who even suspects there might be a problem with her husband beating her children, and abusing her. They attended a marriage enrichment class which was designed to draw couples closer together. For her, it made the hypocrisy in her own life even more evident in her eyes. Neither she nor her husband would ever willingly admit to their local body

of believers that there was something drastically wrong. If either of them had been willing to remove the masks of “perfect Christian family” a long time ago, perhaps it would have made things different for them now. Perhaps his addiction to pornography wouldn’t be so deeply imbedded in his life? Perhaps her inability to be intimate with her husband could have been eliminated?

But we don’t talk about those things. I’ve often wondered why in the Christian community our divorce rate is higher than that of the world at large. Of course I have my own theories, which I am going to share with you. I think it’s because we keep everything in so much, that we attempt to hide our very selves from God.

Now I know some of you said, “you can’t hide from God!” And I said that too. Because it is true that you can’t hide from God. But when we force the feelings we are having so far into the deepest recesses of our hearts, unwilling to allow anyone to see the pain we are living on a daily basis, then we are not hiding from God, we are hiding from ourselves.

Sin is bitter. I certainly don’t want it festering in my heart. Sometimes I think that if I confess that sin, it will cause it to be even worse. And we’ve seen it happen.

We know that Christians are known for shooting their wounded. Yet we feel powerless to change, in fact, we take up our arms! When we gather together with our best friends, do you know what we talk about? We talk about the fallen Christians.

The conversation goes something like this ... “Did you hear about Larry and Sue?”

“Oh yes! Can you believe it? They were such a cute couple and those girls were always so well dressed!”

“Well, I heard, now I don’t want to gossip, but I heard that Sue had decided to cut her hair, and that was the beginning of the fall for Larry. And now that he’s left he’s going out with a lady half his age!”

Naturally the whole group of ladies gasp at the thought.

Now what if the conversation goes more like this . . .

“Hi ladies, I have a desperate need and could sure use some prayer.”

Says Sue to the ladies at the ladies’ Bible study group.

“Sue, would you like to share with us what it is?”

“It’s extremely difficult to confess this to you all, because you’re all such women of God and everything, but I’ve been having thoughts about another man. I love my husband, but this other man is all I can think about, and I can’t seem to shake it on my own.”

Together the women, without asking details, but knowing the heart of Sue, gather together, laying hands on her, and pray for this sin to be lifted from her life.

Six months later we find Sue in the same Bible Study when a woman comes and says, “Ladies, it’s extremely difficult to tell you all this . . .”

Sue is able to minister to this new woman because Sue has walked through the fire and lived to tell about it.

I’ve been thinking about this issue of confessing our sins one to another a lot lately. Sometimes there are others who simply don’t want to hear it. I wonder why that is. Why would a person of faith not want to pray for a struggling brother or sister in the Lord?

I don’t think the answer is quite that simple. We’ve spent years trying to perfect our faith. Our pride keeps us from telling others our sins. But that same pride that keeps us from obeying James 5:16, “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The

effective fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” also keeps us from praying effective fervent prayers.

Oh, how I hate pride!

This past year has found me leaning more on the Lord than I ever remember doing in the past. Part of that comes from my life getting busier and more complicated, as speaking engagements have increased, and my “public” face is seen more, I have found that my pride has swelled me beyond recognition.

It’s not an “oh I’m so great pride” because I certainly know that I am not! The pride comes in when I am feeling like I’m doing what God desires for me to do, and others may not see it that way.

One of my new ventures this year is a Time of Refreshment that we call Talk A Latté. My vision for this was of women sharing their hearts with one another. It meant there would be times when I would have to confess my sins to others. I don’t believe at all that we are to live in our sins, but I do believe that if we can share those sins with others, while sharing how God has delivered us, and shown us His path to walk, that women can be ministered to in a more powerful way than if I simply stood up at a podium with a “to-do” list.

After the first talk, I saw women weeping at their tables. Many were huddled around each other praying fervently for the brokenness in their friends.

Then the criticism came into my e-mail. My pride can sometimes be so swelled that even if I see fifty women weeping and praying with each other, that one e-mail which tells me I went too far in sharing my heart is the one that festers in me.

It makes me rethink the vision. It causes me to evaluate all that I do in my life. It even creates in me a thought that perhaps I did not hear from God in the first place and that I am simply moving under my own power. It is the pride that tells me I should no longer bare my heart, my pains, and my sins to those who might criticize. It is my pride that makes me almost lay down all that I am doing and give up. It is my pride that keeps my heart from spilling out onto my keyboard. It is my pride that keeps me from calling Jesus and asking Him.

What if He says I was wrong? What if He reminds me that I went ahead without Him? What if He decides that I am no longer worthy to be used by Him?

The Merchant of Repentance

Is it possible for me to become unworthy of His use?

Is that a lie that Satan likes to use on us to keep us from being used by Him?

I believe it is. I also believe that He uses our unworthiness to be able to minister to others. I would hope to one day measure myself among the great “failures” that God has used for His Glory. I would count myself in good company with Moses, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Peter, and Paul.

I have not always felt that way though. When I first joined the Christian community, I found that when the subject of abortion would come up, I would be gripped with fear that people would discover the secret that I had hidden in my heart.

A few years after becoming a Christian, a dear friend was working at a Crisis Pregnancy Center. I once had to pick her up, and felt shame and remorse just being near the building. I had been a coward as a young girl. I was not strong enough to stand up and tell people that abortion was NOT an option for me.

On the way home that evening I shared with my friend a secret that I was certain would change our friendship forever. I told her the story of my first abortion.

I remember the fear of walking into a big pink building that had a huge sign on it that said, “Planned Parenthood.” I was being accompanied by my mom who was suspicious that I might be pregnant. The waiting room was quite inviting. There were normal magazines lying around on the end tables. Curiously none of them were about parenting. We were given some basic pamphlets to read. All I knew while I sat there was that I had a baby

growing inside me, and it made me happy to know that life had been created within me.

We were called into the counseling room, just Mom and me. The counselor talked to my mom about why it was important for me to have an abortion at this age. She told her that for me to have a baby when I was just still a baby myself would be more life threatening than if I had a simple procedure to eliminate the tissue. My mom signed the papers for me to return in a week. I was already eleven weeks along, and we would have to be quick to get in under the twelve-week time frame.

I planned how I could run away. I knew the last thing I wanted to do was destroy the life that was growing inside me. But then, they made it sound so easy. It would be just a little painful, not nearly the pain of actually giving birth to a child.

The night before my appointment I packed my bags preparing to run away and begin a new life. Then reality forced me to see that a pregnant fourteen-year old on the streets was probably not the best course for my life to take. Seeing no way out, I went to my appointment the following morning. There was no choice presented to me except that of killing my unborn child.

After the procedure was complete, there was a sudden coldness that enveloped me. I knew I had made the wrong decision. I wasn't strong enough to stand up to those making the decision for me. If only I had fled the night before.

Those feelings haunted me.

A year later, I found myself once again in the same situation. Now, I say, "found myself" as if I had no responsibility in my actions. That would be complete nonsense, but in order to not feel so much pain, I had to

somehow make myself not feel much of anything. I seemed to walk through life numb to all that went on around me.

Something inside me though wanted to feel. I wanted to feel something, anything. Perhaps I wanted to replace the baby that I had previously aborted.

I wanted a child. I wanted to be married. My boyfriend was willing to marry me so I hid my pregnancy from my dad. When I was past what I thought was the legal time frame for abortions, twelve weeks, I informed my dad that I was pregnant. I figured I had taken the choice away by not telling anyone that I was pregnant.

Imagine my surprise to find out there were doctors who would perform the procedure, regardless how far along you were. I'll never forget the day my dad drove me to the office, sat with me in the waiting room, and drove me back. It was all so cold and unfeeling. It had to be that way. It could not be any other way or we would be unable to live with what we had done.

After telling my story to my friend, she told me that she too had two abortions, but that she was getting healing through post-abortion counseling.

I never really thought I needed to be healed of it. After talking it over with my husband, we decided that perhaps there were some issues that I had never gotten over, and perhaps it would help mend my heart.

What I discovered was that I was still very angry with my parents for taking away my choice. I had felt all along that either I was too weak of a human being to stick up for myself, or I allowed them to reason away something that could not be reasoned.

For the first time I was able to forgive them on a level that could only be given from God. A coldness that had developed in my heart was

suddenly lifted when I allowed God to work in my heart to forgive them. That was the easy part of the process.

The difficult part was being able to believe that God could forgive me. How could He ever forgive the likes of me? How could he ever trust me with a life growing inside my body? How could He possibly love me unconditionally?

Of all the horrible things I had done the abortions were the events that I could never talk about. They were the things that prevented me from living a truly free life. I knew when I asked Jesus into my heart that He had cleansed me, but I wasn't so sure that He would forgive me.

It wasn't until I forced myself to see that on the cross with Jesus were all the sins of my past and future. They weren't just the sins that He could forgive; they were all of my sins, even the ones that I had shoved under the carpet. In that one night, I had a vision of Jesus with tears in his eyes. But his tears were for me, tears of sorrow over what I had done, but also tears that revealed a love so deep, that He knew how painful it was to know that your own children had been killed, and that you could have done something to prevent it. It was that night that I confessed my need to be forgiven. It was the first time I had ever prayed seeking God's forgiveness for what I had done. It was an indescribable feeling that washed over me. It was a feeling of unconditional love. It wasn't based on anything I did or didn't do, it was simply because I was willing to come to the cross, lay down my burdens, and accept the Love that He had for me.

Withering Hearts

Being able to accept love has often been difficult for me. I seemed to be on a perpetual search for unconditional love. I always seemed to feel that if I was just good enough, then life would sail along smoothly and all would be right in my world.

Growing up I was a strange kind of kid. I seemed to have a lot of “mental” problems. In second grade I didn’t like my teacher and was subsequently sick a lot that year. I made a miraculous recovery when I moved into the third grade.

Again I had a teacher I didn’t like when I was in sixth grade. Every morning was a struggle to get out of bed and head off to school. I can’t even imagine how difficult that was for my mom to decipher if I truly was sick, or just trying to get out of something.

I began going to my first counselor in sixth grade. I was taken out of class a couple of times a week to discuss my problems. I don’t know if I ever talked about my fear of failing or about not feeling loved. I just remember feeling like there must have been something wrong with me that made my parents send me for therapy. Somehow I was messed up in my mind and I couldn’t control it. Almost daily I longed to run away from home.

You might be wondering what was so horrible in my life that made me want to run away at the age of 12. When I think about this, I really don’t have any idea. At the time I had two parents who loved me very much. Why would I want to flee from that? Perhaps even then I was searching for the love of Jesus?

I've often wondered if my being "messed up in the head" and all the trouble I caused my parents that year was the catalyst to them separating the following year, which was followed by a full-fledged divorce the following year.

Little did I know that the day my dad took my mom to a mental ward in a hospital would be the last time my life would ever be "normal" again. She never came home to stay after that. I wondered if I drove them to the divorce.

I don't think my thoughts were unique. When a divorce happens in a family, regardless of the reasons, children often bear the blame. The sad thing is that often they don't share that with anyone. It's too much of a shame. What kind of child would be so horrible that it would cause such a division between the parents? I often thought it was all my fault.

In the months that followed, I grew to hate my father. He didn't do anything to deserve my hatred, except in my mind he was unwilling to fight to keep our family together. He gave up! And I hated him for that.

He once had told me that marriage took a lot of work. When the word "divorce" entered the picture, I wondered why he was no longer willing to work. His words that he hadn't loved my mom for quite awhile haunted me. If he could stop loving my mom, was it possible he had also stopped loving me?

My heart hardened against him. If he was going to stop loving me, there was no way I was going to let it hurt as deeply as I saw it hurting my mom.

I hope this has been made clear up to this point, but if it hasn't, I want to be certain that no one believes there was anything that my dad actually did which made me think he had stopped loving me. I simply felt that he

divorced not only my mom, but me as well. My parents tried very hard to have an amicable divorce. They were going to remain cordial to one another, not shoot each other down, or talk badly about one another. And for the most part, they did quite well.

Still, I blamed Dad for everything that went wrong in our lives from that point on. It wasn't right, but it's how it was. And because of that, I withdrew from him almost completely.

My withdrawal from my dad left me empty, alone, and in pain. In addition to losing my family as I knew it, we moved to a new city, leaving my friends behind. I found myself lost in the big city. There was no one for me to cry out to. I didn't even have the words to cry.

The pain in my heart manifested itself into a physical pain in my abdomen. After countless tests, I was admitted to the mental ward of a hospital.

This only compounded in me that I was nothing but a big pain to everyone around me. I honestly don't know what anyone could have done for me. My heart was broken, and the only way for it to be fixed was for me to feel unconditional love, and that wasn't going to happen because I wasn't willing to open my heart.

That's when I went searching for that love. I learned how to manipulate men to get what I wanted from them. Even though I had guarded my heart, I was still very vulnerable to the pain of rejection.

Even though I was considered by many to be of perhaps higher than average intelligence, my heart had taken over my life and I was unable to function on any kind of intelligent level. School for me was worthless. In one year I was late for school over one hundred times, and I lived across the street from the school.

My report card revealed the story of not a person of above average intelligence, but one who didn't care one way or the other.

When my dad confronted me about the report card, I didn't see that as caring, but as interfering in my life, and I didn't want his help at all. If he really wanted to help me, then he would decide to love my mom.

For years I waited for him to come to his senses. He didn't. Slowly I began to accept the fact that Mom was going to be with men other than my dad.

My mom had decided to marry someone else. Again I found myself moving. Was her new husband going to love her? Would he love me too? Or was I simply in the way? We moved into his house before the wedding. One night a terrible fight ensued, and he hit her. She ran out of the house, leaving me there alone again.

She returned the following day, but the damage was done.

Shortly after I was called into the principal's office at the new school I had been attending. There was kindness in his eyes as he told me that I was throwing my life away. He told me I would be expelled from school if I missed one more day or skipped one more class.

That conversation woke me up. I wanted more from my life than to be a pregnant high-school dropout.

That night I phoned my dad for the first time not out of obligation, but because I needed him. I remember the tears flowing out of my eyes as I dialed the phone worried that he might reject me. Through tears I asked him if I could come spend the weekend with him.

That phone call changed the direction my life had been taking. Even though my mom loved me and did the best she could under the

circumstances, a young girl needs the love and guidance of her dad over that of the friendship of her mom.

My dad showed me that I had potential. He helped me to set goals for my life. He encouraged me to live out my dreams.

He also sent me to a counselor. This time it was different though, this time, I wanted my life to change. I wanted to be more than I was. I wanted to stop living in pain.

Under the guidance of my dad, I flourished, bringing home report cards that reflected A's and only occasionally a B. I even got my life together enough that I graduated from high school a year early. I had wrecked my chances of getting into a really good private college, so I headed to the nearest University.

As soon as I was out from under his authority though, I once again began making really bad choices.

Several years went by when I was simply surviving from one moment to the next, not sure whose bed I was sleeping in, or what circumstances brought me there.

Again I found myself going to see a counselor. My Commander ordered me to see him when he noticed the signs of someone who was obviously unfit for military service at the time. I had recently been beaten by the man I thought was married to me, raped by several security policemen, and been caught doing drugs. Now that I think about it, that would be enough to send anyone over the edge. I didn't see it like that though. I saw myself as a failure for being unable to handle all that life had brought to me.

For many years afterwards I would wear a cloud over me that told me I was unstable, and could at any moment fall off the edge of life.

It wasn't until I discovered the unconditional love of my savior that the cloud above me was lifted.

The most awesome verse I ever read in the Bible was this, "For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Rom 5:6-8.

Sound Mind

The Presents of God

I am notorious in my family for wanting to share the contents of presents that I have bought long before the present is to be opened. The joy I get in presents is being able to pick them out and having the person discover the “perfect” gift that I have chosen.

My husband, however, delights in the actual opening of the present. He thrives on the surprise. Often I will buy myself several Christmas presents, wrap them up and say they are from him. He’s always so surprised!

For me, it isn’t the opening, but the story behind the gift. What was the person thinking when she chose this red turtleneck for me? Why was he certain I would love that old book found in the antique store? How did they know I loved that Thomas Kincaid print? (Those are all hints for any of you who feel inclined to buy me a present)

I’m a bit odd in the gift department. I would rather not have a gift if the person were simply going to walk around Wal Mart until they find something they can give me. I would prefer to get a gift in the middle of May that says, “I was thinking of you when I saw this gift and I just HAD to get it for you.

My best friend, Debi, is very similar to me. We were walking around Kohl’s the other day, looking for items we could buy for people. She needed a new head covering to wear to a special party with her husband. As she looked at head-coverings, I spied a little black hat with a flower on it. I put the hat on and said to her, “So what do you think of my head-covering?”

She looked at me and informed me that I could not leave the store without buying the hat. She said, “anything that cute on you has to be purchased.” She then added, “If you won’t buy it, then I will buy it for you and give it to you for Christmas.”

I knew that my friend had been having a not so easy time of it financially so I agreed that she could give it to me for Christmas, but I would pay for it. I took my purchases to the desk, paid for my hat, and thanked my friend for the wonderful gift she gave me.

Recently the Lord has given me several gifts. He just allowed other people to purchase them for him.

I must digress for just a moment, but I’m sure you’ll understand when I finally do get back to the story at hand.

Last year I chose a theme for my life. The theme I chose was “love”. Always having preconceived notions of how God is going to work in my life, I figured that He was going to show me how to love others. I knew that I failed miserably in that area and was certain the Lord would help me learn to love others. Instead He chose to show me how much He loves me.

I went to a speaking engagement in North Carolina. After a couple of hours of sleep, I had to arise to prepare for my workshop. When I looked in the mirror I thought to myself, “Oh dear! I look dreadful!” Then a thought came to my mind that was totally out of the ordinary for me. I decided that it would have been nice if I had a little gold necklace around my neck. I guess I must have figured it would take the audience’s eyes off my ragged face. I finished getting dressed and went into the home of my hostess. Shortly after going into her house she produced a package for me. I knew instantly when I saw the long narrow box that it was the exact necklace that I “needed.”

I gave the pretense of not knowing what the present was. Actually I couldn't believe that God bought ME a present. But He did. He just used a dear woman who prayed about a gift for me, to give me just what He wanted to put into my heart.

Not long after that I was driving in my car fretting about my business. I was fretting that I wouldn't have enough money for expenses that were coming up soon. The Lord said to me, "What are you doing? Give it to me!" So I did. Because when God reminds you of your sin, the best thing to do is quickly stop sinning.

The next day Steve and I had gone Christmas shopping at Wal Mart, walking around trying to find presents to give to people. It wasn't a lot of fun to me, and I developed a headache. As we drove home, I rifled through the glove compartment in search of a headache relief. Instead I discovered a small stack of checks and credit card receipts which were not processed from a conference I did in May. Instantly I thanked the Lord for showing me how much He loves me and that He is the one in whom I must trust.

A few days later I once again found myself shopping at Wal Mart. Maybe I should buy stock! As I ventured around the Christmas section I thought to myself that I really wanted a wreath on my door this year. Instantly my thoughts took me back many years to the scent of a wreath hanging on the door of my childhood home. It always reminded me of warmth, love, and family.

Yes, a wreath was just what I needed this year! So I bought a wreath holder. It was brass with jingle bells on it. It was the kind that slipped over the door to hold the wreath securely.

Eventually I would buy the wreath to go with the holder, I thought. Or perhaps the wreath would be my decoration gift next year.

I went on a quick trip to Oklahoma last weekend. When I arrived home at 7:00 in the morning, my eyes instantly fell on a box that was sitting next to the pool table in the kitchen. (It's a little pool table) As I continued looking at the box, the excitement began to build as I thought, "God bought me a wreath!" My husband, who had been home with the children all weekend hadn't even noticed the box sitting there in the middle of the kitchen. He looked dumbfounded as I said, "What's in the box?" I then told him I was certain God had bought me a wreath. I then searched for the wreath holder I had purchased a few days earlier. I told him the whole story. He then looked at the box, which had a return address of a florist in Virginia. I love being right, and tend to gloat about it. This was no exception. I jumped up and down in spite of having just driven ten hours and not having slept more than thirty minutes in a twenty-four hour period.

Quickly Steve shushed me so I wouldn't wake the kids. And I hadn't even opened the box yet.

Opening the box was another adventure, as I now wanted to smell the fresh green smell. I also wanted to know who on the other side of the country had been listening to God's call. The smell was as glorious as I remembered!

I was a bit surprised to find the package was from a woman who has become a very dear friend after having spent a night with us on a journey to Oregon with her family. But that is another story.

After telling her what a blessing the wreath was to me, she added that she had prayed for me on Saturday that I would be encouraged when I arrived home after such a long quick trip. Little did she know that she would be the answer to her prayer, because she obeyed the call of the Lord.

In a few short weeks the Lord has brought me to a better understanding of his unfathomable love for us. He has shown me that the phrase, “Jesus loves you” is the milk of Christianity. It is the food for the newborn Christian. Yet, in His marvelous, often peculiar way, He has also shown me that it is the meat of the seasoned Christian. It is that love of a Father, who prompts people to lavish me extravagantly, who prompts people to pray for me, when I need encouragement, and who reminds me ever so gently, that if I just give it all to Him, he will provide just what I need, when I need it. It is also the love of the Father who willingly abandoned his only son for just a moment, so that we could have eternal life in the mansions that He is preparing for us.

Finally I had found the unconditional love I had so longed for my entire life! And now I can stand at the throne of Grace and cry out Abba Father, and I will not be ashamed. My Daddy who created the universe will be waiting with open arms when I run to Him; when my time on this earth is done. But in the meantime, He has sent the comforter to reside in my heart, healing the hurts, forgiving the pains, and living a life that is victorious in Him! No longer do I have to fear, because I have the power, the love, and the sound mind that He enables me to have.

Prologue

We all have our stories to tell, and they continue long past one of them is written down.

So much has happened since the writing of this book. Ashley and Cathy are now married. I'm Gramma T. to Hunter Green and a little girl who is "on the way."

I am no longer married to Steve. We were married almost nineteen years. That is another story to tell for another time. Erica recently asked me when I was going to write another book so I could tell the world about all the miracles God has done these past four years. I told her, "Soon."

There was a four-year hiatus from writing and speaking as I worked full-time, went to school to get my real estate license, and of course all the challenges that came with being a single mom and homeschooling the kids.

The hiatus is over! I've launched a couple of websites for moms.

<http://www.tadahmom.com>

<http://www.tadahmoms.com> (community of moms who want to live a Ta-Dah life)

I hope you will join us and share your stories with us as I have shared mine with you.

It's possible you received this book as part of your subscription to the ta-dah mom website. If so, I am sure you will love your time there. New content is added daily, so visit often!

If you would like to invite me to speak at one of your gatherings or would just like to drop me a note, send it to terri@terriscamp.com

Thank you,

Terri "Ta-Dah Mom" Camp

