

The Door In



At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in. - C. S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory

"I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture." Jesus, John 10:9

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Preface

In 2010, my daughter Rebekah and I made a road trip to the Southern Oregon coast, where my husband, Michael, and I first met. We chose to drive up the 101 and as we left Santa Rosa, I noticed the sign for Boonville up ahead. I reminded Rebekah of my adventures in Boonville back in 1970, and she said, “Let’s turn off and go see where you lived.”



We found the exact address where I once lived communally as part of a cult by doing some Internet research. The ranch where I had lived with its many trailers, vegetable gardens, and apple orchards was now a vineyard, and the only indication we found of its former purposes was the eerie sign shown in this picture.

In this meadow, trailers had filled up every weekend with recruits of the Unification Church coming for seminars on God’s purpose in history. Standing here brought back a flood of memories and painful emotions. But overall, the strongest feeling was thankfulness. My heart bowed in worship as I was reminded again of the power of the Holy Spirit to draw the wayward ones with His cords of kindness.

“I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love.” Hosea 11:4

This is the story of how Jesus drew one very confused and lost flower child of the 60’s to Himself. I hope as you read this story you too will be drawn to worship the One who loves so tenderly and completely.

Caveat: The events I am describing took place almost 50 years ago at a time when my mind was clouded. The description I have written is the best I remember, but my memory is fallible and has many gaps. I am well aware how over the years our subconscious can weave fact and fantasy together. I’ve tried to be as accurate as possible; what is truest in this story is the power of God to deliver.

Since writing my original conversion story, I have added more chapters covering the following years. I write some of this thinking of my little grandson, who may someday wonder about his mom’s mom.

“One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts. I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works.” Psalms 145:4-5

Chapter 1: California Dreaming

“The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

In the late summer and fall of 1969, I was one of many “flower children” living on the streets of San Francisco. Lured by the almost mystical stories I was hearing about life in California, I joined a group of acquaintances from Ann Arbor, Michigan for a month-long backpacking trip in Yosemite. The experience was life changing for me.

Five years of life in Ann Arbor during the turbulent 60’s had left me emotionally and spiritually depleted. I had arrived at the University of Michigan in 1964 as a naïve honors student, intending to major in biology and pre-med subjects. But I soon found myself swept up in the cultural and political currents around me. Participating in campus protests, marching in Washington D.C. against the Vietnam war, experimenting with LSD, harvesting marijuana in rural Michigan, adopting a bohemian lifestyle with my Jewish roommate, searching for truth in Eastern mysticism...all had left me emotionally bruised and bewildered.

I didn’t have the mental energy to plan something like a trip across country, but a door just sort of opened and I stepped in. This began when I heard that a group of friends were planning to drive cross-country and backpack in Yosemite. It sounded like a wonderful relief to be out of Ann Arbor for a month. Then I heard that one of this group of eight would not be able to go. Since my friends knew I was interested, they offered me the available space, complete with equipment and already purchased food.

I quickly packed all my belongings into storage, ended the lease on the room I was renting, and said good-by to a turbulent five years. Did I already know I was not coming back?

Yosemite

Spending that month in Yosemite was balm to my weary soul. In the midst of the intellectualism and political controversy of my college years, I had lost all sense of the beauty of nature. The very mountains and brooks seem to cry out to me that there was a better way to live...harmonious, lovely, and free.

One night during that month, I threw my cigarettes into the campfire. They had been my constant companion during the four years of college and afterwards, often my only way of staying awake

when I was up all night studying for an exam. But in the fresh meadow-scented air of Yosemite, they suddenly seemed alien and wrong.

All was not sunshine and breezes, however; there was a dark side to the camping experience. My friends had brought along drugs, a familiar part of my life the last few years. I regularly used marijuana, but avoided most other drugs. I had had several bad experiences with LSD soon after I started at the University. These LSD trips had ended in terror, and I had no interest in risking that again. But my fellow campers had brought peyote. “Peyote is different,” my friends said. “It’s natural, like marijuana, not man-made like LSD.” They convinced me that since peyote was part of the Native American lifestyle, it was the perfect accent for our beautiful environment.

Soon after eating the peyote, I wandered off by myself. The trees began glowing; each leaf and blade of grass seemed to have a life of its own and I was being drawn into the energy of the living things around me. But as I walked further and further, terror returned with crushing intensity. I had no idea where I was. The beautiful trees became dark and menacing; the call of birds and sounds of insects became sinister with evil undertones. I sought shelter in a small, enclosed area beneath a tree and tried to hide from the darkness. All alone, I felt completely desperate.

In the darkest moment of terror I felt a presence with me. A bright white-robed figure filled the space around me with unexpected comfort. I don’t remember a specific message—I’m not sure I could have made sense of words—but I do remember the sense of peace, of being known, and a feeling of being invited into something new. I fell asleep.

Later, my friends came looking for me and I heard them calling my name. We found our way back to the campsite...I had not gone far at all. My sense of being lost was all in my head. Except, of course, I really was lost in every way that mattered.

By the end of our backpacking trip, I was changed. The group had planned to spend a few days in San Francisco before heading back to Ann Arbor. After checking out the scene in Haight-Ashbury and Golden Gate Park, my friends prepared to head back home. The thought of returning to my life in Ann Arbor filled me with revulsion. I wanted to keep moving in this fresh direction of life. So when the van headed East, I stayed in San Francisco.

San Francisco

I had a friend from the University of Michigan who had moved to Berkley and looked him up. He was living in a small apartment with his girlfriend, but said I could camp in his backyard. I soon wore out my welcome and began moving from place to place with other seekers like myself, enjoying what fellowship I could find on the streets. At one point, a girl allowed me to sleep in her closet. I would creep in at night and spread my sleeping bag on the floor of the closet and creep out before anyone was awake in the morning.

The charms of this survival life style evaporated quickly and I became increasingly desperate, but still too proud to ask for help. One day when I was wandering by myself downtown, a well-dressed young man stopped me and began asking me questions and listening sympathetically. He

finally asked me if I had a place to live. When I said no, he told me that if I were to meet him at the same place on the next day, he would take me to a safe place. That sounded good to me. But as the day wore on, I became more and more uneasy about meeting him.

Something about him bothered me. A certain hardness in his eyes? The way he scanned the crowd moving by us? I never kept that appointment. In retrospect I am sure it would have led me into terrible darkness. In so many ways the Lord protected me.

A New Opportunity

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.”
Mat 7:15-16*

One day, walking through the Haight-Ashbury district, I encountered a young woman I had known at the University of Michigan. She had been in a sorority and I had been an intellectual who looked down on sororities. We had shared a class, and I had visited her at her sorority house to work on a project with her. At that time, I had been slightly won over by her friendliness and intelligence, despite her sorority affiliation.

On the streets of San Francisco, her sudden appearance was like an oasis in the desert. We sat down over a pot of tea and she asked about my life and listened intently. I told her how I wanted to change my life and so had not returned to Michigan with my friends. Then she began to tell me about her experience with a group of people who had a powerful vision for making the world a better place, who wanted to live righteous lives, and make an impact for good. My heart was strangely stirred.

When she offered to introduce me to the group the next night at dinner, I didn’t hesitate to say yes. Whatever she had found sounded a lot better than what I was experiencing on the streets. Despite the feel-good philosophies of the flower children, the realities of our lifestyle were harsh. In the crash pads where we stayed, you were likely to find everything you owned gone in the morning: so much for free love.

While some hippies offered to share what they had, many others simply assumed whatever you had was theirs. I still had a little money in a savings account, but it was rapidly disappearing. I had recently had a particularly brutal experience hitchhiking in a risky part of town, and disillusionment had replaced my starry-eyed hopes of California dreaming.

Meeting the Unification Church

The next night, clutching my friend’s written directions, I made my way up the steep hill to the address in downtown San Francisco she had given me. I knocked on the door of the large Victorian house and was immediately surrounded by warm and friendly faces. Everyone was eager to meet me, to find out more about me.

After enjoying a family style dinner, we gathered in the big living room for some rousing songs. Then someone shared a few inspirational thoughts and we all held hands and sang a final song.

Everyone I met seemed genuinely interested in me. They asked questions, listened thoughtfully, and expressed warmth and concern. I couldn't wait to come back. Most of the people I met were young men and women about my age; a small group of older Asian men and women stayed in the background, cooking, serving, and observing.

As it grew late and I prepared to leave, one of the girls who had been sitting close to me most of the evening took me aside. "You don't have to leave," she said. "You can stay here tonight. I have an extra bed in my room." And she suggested that tomorrow I could join a weekend retreat at their farm in Boonville to learn more about what they believed. She probably didn't know that the alternative to her invitation of sleeping in a real bed was tossing and turning under a bush in a park. I didn't need much persuading to stay.

My new friend showed me the bottom bunk where I could sleep and she even gave me a nightgown to wear. The next day I joined a group of somewhat dazed looking young people for a van ride to Boonville. We were all attending a special introductory weekend to find out more about the "family," as I now called them. We sang songs and conversed on the bus. The young woman sitting in the seat next to me asked me probing questions about my beliefs, what I thought about God, what I wanted in life, and seemed genuinely interested in my responses.

She stayed close to me the entire weekend, asking questions, making sure I understood what was happening, introducing me to others, getting food for me at meal times, and helping me get settled at night. We were busy every minute! After a lecture the first night, we stayed up late around the campfire singing songs. The next morning, we were up early for exercises, then breakfast, followed by more study. After study was work projects—we cleared land for a tomato garden—then lunch, more study in the afternoon, dinner, another lecture, then testimonies from family members around the campfire.

Sunday was much like Saturday, but instead of work projects, we had a church service, with singing and a message about God's eternal purpose to bring His messiah to show mankind how to live. Sunday night around the campfire, we were given the opportunity to choose to join this community and become part of God's redemptive purpose. My new friend turned to me and asked me if I would like to join. Taking this step seemed natural and right, and I said yes.

The idea that I could be part of a positive redemptive movement really appealed to me. My early years of militant activism at the University of Michigan involved dabbling with the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) and studying communist social theories. But I had increasingly turned away from activism to a spiritual search. The thought of combining social action with spirituality had never occurred to me.

The next day, I moved into the house in San Francisco. This was pretty simple, since I was currently homeless. My new sisters took me shopping and bought me a couple of outfits so I could look presentable when "seekers" came to visit at the house, and I began intensely studying

the books they gave me that explained their beliefs. Many of these were written by Koreans. I soon discovered that behind the movement was the shadowy figure of a man named Sun Myung Moon, but I wasn't yet clear on his role.

From San Francisco to Boonville

Living in the house in San Francisco was difficult for me. Though I felt safe for the first time in months, I was used to freedom and a casual lifestyle. Our life was closely regimented and I was constantly on edge feeling that I wasn't measuring up. Then a totally unexpected opportunity came up: they needed additional staff on the farm in Boonville. Perfect, I thought. In my heart, I was still looking for a way back to "nature" and the simplicity and beauty I had experienced in Yosemite. Boonville would be similar, far away from city streets, with only a small team during the week. Surprisingly, the elders accepted my offer to volunteer for this role. The next weekend I repeated the bus trip to Boonville, but this time to stay.

I soon got to know the team at the ranch and we established a pleasant rhythm of life. I was given cooking duties and enjoyed making homemade yogurt, cinnamon rolls, and granola. John, the young man who led our team, had a "flower-child" background similar to mine. He still had a fondness for organic, back-to-nature foods, and a simple life style.

After morning devotions, breakfast, and exercises, we would work in the gardens, clean the trailers where we lived, and prepare for the coming weekend. Evenings were spent reading and concluded with group devotions.

Sometimes we visited local churches or community groups that met during the week in Boonville. John had explained to us earlier in a family meeting how important it was for us to demonstrate the most exemplary citizenship as part of advancing the Kingdom of Heaven in this community. We wanted the town's residents to accept us and see us as a positive influence in the community. I don't think we were very successful. When a group of four or five of us would enter a meeting room with smiling faces, every eye in the room seemed to track our progress and conversations became stilted and difficult.

Weekends were a stark contrast to our quiet weekday rhythm. On Friday nights, a new group of recruits arrived accompanied by watchful family members who carefully shepherded them through the weekend activities. Arrival was often late at night, made later still with singing around a bonfire. Early morning devotions were followed by calisthenics, breakfast (my yoghurt and granola), and a teaching session. Then everyone participated in some kind of manual work on the land.

After lunch, which I helped prepare and serve, a long hike through the entire farm followed another teaching session. Then came dinner, further teaching, and another late night around the bonfire. It was an intense, exhausting, and tightly orchestrated weekend with no time alone and no time to process all the information that was being shared.

Questions

I still didn't really understand much about what the family believed. In addition to the books the family gave me, we read the Bible. I found myself often putting away the obscure and difficult books by Korean family members and just reading the Bible. I had been raised by God-fearing Lutheran parents. We attended church and Sunday school regularly and as a child, I had loved to read Bible stories and participate in church activities.

But as a teenager, I had grown out of my parent's religion. They didn't seem to be able to provide compelling answers to the questions I raised about creation, good and evil, social justice, the terrible deeds done by so-called Christians throughout history. I soon came to dismiss the entire Christian church as the "opiate of the masses," as identified by Karl Marx. The church seemed to me to be a source of oppression, both socially and intellectually.

My parents, intimidated by my verbal challenges, retreated, although they both prayed for my heart to change. By the time I graduated from high school I had turned my back on everything I had ever known as a child. I was determined to break away from tradition and find real truth.

Now memories of childhood experiences flooded back into my heart as I sat alone with the Bible and read familiar words. What if I had been wrong? What if the Bible really did contain the answers I was seeking? My new friends had a great respect for Jesus, but they felt that he had failed. Looking at the state of the world and the triumph of evil in so many areas, I could see why they believed that. If Jesus came to establish a righteous way of life here on earth, something had gone drastically wrong. But then doubts would come. The scriptures I had learned as a child would come rushing back. Didn't Jesus say that his kingdom was not of this world? If so, then wouldn't it be wrong to expect to see righteousness and peace here?

I shared some of these questions with the staff at the ranch during devotions and discussion times. They explained to me that when Jesus died on the cross, his life was cut off early and he was not able to complete the purpose for which he had been sent. God had wanted him to restore a perfect Godly family and usher in God's kingdom.

This sounded plausible. Certainly the world was not as it should be. If Jesus Christ had succeeded in his Kingdom mission, why was the US engaged in an unjust war in Vietnam? Why did children die of cancer? Why did men and women strive so hard to make money and live empty miserable lives?

Since God's purpose to establish a Godly family had not changed, I was told, God had sent another man to complete what Jesus failed to accomplish. Now I began to more clearly understand the role of Sun Myung Moon in the theology of the family.

Some days, all this looked plausible, and on the days it did not, life was pleasant enough for me to be able to push the questions aside. But as weeks stretched into months, the nagging uncertainties became increasingly more difficult to push aside. Weekend after weekend, buses came with new recruits and I witnessed them experiencing the same carefully orchestrated events that I had

participated in. It began to seem a little staged...why couldn't people openly and freely ask questions? Why was everyone so busy every minute?

When I watched the girl that had befriended me on my first weekend behaving exactly the same toward other young women again and again, I could not help wonder whether she had really been my "friend," or if the careful pairing I saw was part of a larger strategy to contain and manipulate newcomers.

Escape

Just as my discomfort was becoming increasingly acute, one of the Korean elders came to spend a few days at the ranch. This man was high up in the Family and was sent to inspect the activities at the farm. Before he came, we had many tense conversations about what would please him and how we could best show our commitment to the family. We cleaned and cooked and weeded the garden and tried to make everything on the ranch perfect.

During the days this dignitary and his group were at the farm, many conversations took place with low voices behind closed doors. One day I was preparing food in the kitchen in the main meeting trailer and overheard low voices outside. Then I heard my name. They were discussing me! The ranch leader was expressing concern about my spiritual state, indicating that I had been asking many questions and didn't really seem convinced of the view of history that was presented in the family.

One of the Korean dignitaries suggested that I should be sent back to the house in San Francisco, where the opportunities for education (and supervision) were more intense. He then added casually, perhaps marriage would help. The last thing I heard was, "She shall come back to San Francisco with us tomorrow," and then their voices drifted off as they continued walking.

Marriage? I began to think about bits and pieces of conversations I had heard, stories of large group weddings. One girl had told me that her friend was married in Korea to a man she had never met, and she was so happy that the Pappa San in the house had selected the right mate for



her. I had dismissed this as an oddity, but now I realized that this was the way relationships in the family were normally initiated.

This practice still continues. This picture was taken in 2009 of 10,000 couples from around the world participating in a mass wedding ceremony arranged by the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church at Sun Moon University in Asan, south of Seoul, South Korea. Many of the couples were matched by Moon himself.¹

A cold chill went through me. What had I gotten myself into? The idea of returning to San Francisco was suddenly abhorrent. I determined right then that I needed to get away.

¹ As reported in <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2009/1014/p06s08-woap.html>

In the afternoon when everyone was busy and the trailer where I slept with the other girls was empty, I snuck into our room and searched the back of the closet for my backpack and sleeping bag. The pack and sleeping bag were all I had left from my past life in Michigan. But this wasn't the time to think about the sequence of events that had brought me to this place; I needed to move quickly.

I stuffed the sleeping bag in the pack, gathered a few changes of clothes and my personal items, and added a few items of food I brought with me from the kitchen. I also placed in the pack a copy of the *New Testament* and the *Divine Principle*, which I planned to read side by side when I was no longer being observed and could think independently. Then I carefully stored the pack behind the closet door where it would not be seen.

That night, I lay down with the other girls, but didn't sleep. I lay quietly on the floor, willing my breathing to become slow and even, and listening intently to the breathing of the girls around me. Soon the rhythm of their breathing quieted, as fatigue took over and they drifted into sleep. We all worked hard enough and rose early enough that falling asleep at night was seldom an issue. But tonight, there would be no sleeping for me.

I waited, checking my watch, until the hour of midnight passed. Moving stealthily, I crept from the room in the dark, picking up my backpack, my coat, and my shoes where I had left them earlier in the evening. When I was out of sight of the trailer, I put on my shoes and began walking down the long private driveway to the county road. The night was clear, with bright stars, and only a sliver of a new moon. I kept a swift pace while trying to make as little noise as possible. On my many trips into town and back, the driveway had never before seemed to stretch so far.

What a relief when I finally felt the county road under my feet. I was familiar with this portion of the road because the family and I had regularly volunteered to pick up trash from the point where our driveway joined the road into town. I remembered clearly the town meeting at the Boonville community center when John offered to clean the streets twice a month. We all sat in a row with bright smiles on our faces. The long-term Boonville residents sat around us glancing at us with undisguised distrust if not active dislike in their eyes.

Tonight, I was banking on the goodwill of one of those distrustful citizens, or perhaps the generosity of a passing stranger. I made my way through town and found a spot under a tree where I was not visible from the road. Wrapping myself tightly in my coat, I leaned my head against the tree and eventually drifted into sleep. When the early rays of the morning sun touched my face, I woke with a start, gathered my belongings, and moved to the roadside where I hoped to hitch a ride to the coast.

I didn't have to wait long. Within a few minutes, a farmer in his truck stopped. I told him I was going to Mendocino, and he agreed to drop me off there so I quickly climbed in, eager to put distance between the farm and me. Only after about twenty minutes of driving in silence did I heave a sigh of relief. I was grateful that the farmer didn't ask awkward questions, questions that I couldn't answer.

My driver dropped me off when we came to the coastline. I knew a state park was located nearby. I had heard discussions about it in town and I also knew that it was popular with the hippies making their way up and down the coastline from San Francisco.

Even though this was a lifestyle I had left behind when I joined the family, it was the only one familiar to me. I knew the rules of the road among hippies: everyone shared what they had: food, weed, even blankets, or the warmth of each other's bodies. So now in a desperate moment, I hoped that I could find a group of hippies to join.

Even so, part of me resisted the thought of returning to the hippie lifestyle. I also remembered the emptiness and the loneliness of that life: people coming and going like the wind in the trees. Here one day and gone the next. Pretending it was "all good." Drifting through days suppressing fear of what would come next.

Because to be honest, being a hippie wasn't the only lifestyle I knew...I just didn't want to open the door to the other flood of memories that threatened to overwhelm me. A warm clean home, the smells of dinner cooking, a full refrigerator, the comfort of my bedroom and reading books late into the night, the pride my parents took in my accomplishments. It all threatened to overwhelm me...but I had rejected the middle-class life. And even though longings for these familiar comforts stirred in me, admitting these longings stirred an even more powerful sensation: guilt and shame. I knew that the only way back in that direction required asking forgiveness, admitting I was wrong. This was a narrow gate I stubbornly refused to go through.

Days in Mendocino

When I left the ranch, I had only the vaguest of plans. Mendocino was close and seemed like my best option at the moment. Beneath the practical questions of where I would stay and how I would live, I wanted time to think and process the ideas of the family and compare them with the Bible.

For weeks, I walked the beaches at Mendocino, letting the ocean breezes cleanse my mind and heart. During the day, I would go down to the beach or sit on one of the cliffs overlooking the ocean. I would sit with my back against a rock and the *Divine Principle* and the Bible spread out before me. At night I would find a sheltered spot in the campgrounds to sleep. Sometimes I would join other groups of young people who were camping in the park.

The park included an enclosed public lodge with picnic tables and a fireplace. Day campers used it for meals, and I often hung out there trying to keep warm on the foggy coast. One evening I was sitting on the floor near the fireplace with my head leaning back against the wall, half dozing, and half watching the people around me. Several days had passed since I had eaten anything and I was lost in my own private world.

I found myself drawn into watching one near-by family as they prepared a meal...mom, dad, two children. There was nothing special about this family, other than a certain sweetness in the way they interacted. The kids didn't talk back to the parents. The older brother was genuinely

solicitous of his younger sister, helping her carry loads that were heavy and patiently showing her how to set the table. Their love for each other was unmistakable.

As I watched them, I found my heart aching. A great longing came over me to be part of a real family again. Why did I feel like I had always been on the outside looking in, I wondered. As their meal preparations concluded, the family sat down and the mother prepared plates for each one. Then the four of them took each other's hands across the picnic table, bowed their heads, and the dad gave thanks to God for His goodness, His provision, and for sending Jesus. When the Amen was said, the mom took one of the plates piled with food and handed it to the little girl. I saw her whispering something to her. Then the child rose from her place, carefully holding the plate, and walked in my direction.

“Are you hungry?” she asked. “My mom wants you to have this.” I couldn't say much, but asked her to thank her mother for her kindness. Yes, I was hungry, but it wasn't just for the physical food. I was consumed with a longing to be at peace, to be reconciled with my parents, to have real friends who knew me and who I knew. And I was pretty sure that somehow the God they had thanked for their meal held the key to how that might happen.

These feelings were soon pushed to the background again in the struggle to stay alive. I soon lost interest in reading and spent more and more time with various groups of travelling hippies hanging out in Mendocino.

Chapter 2: Missing Family

“God sets the solitary in families; He brings out those who are bound into prosperity; but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.” Psalm 68:6

How did I come to be so isolated from my own family? I had wonderful, caring, hard-working parents, who had brought me up in the Lutheran church. Now we had not spoken in over a year and they had no idea where I was. How had this happened?

Beginnings

My mom and my dad grew up on adjacent farms in rural Iowa and attended local small-town schools. My dad was the first boy from his high school to attend a four-year college. He studied engineering at the University of Iowa in the early 1930's, during the worst part of the depression. To survive, he lived in an open dorm room with 140 other poor students and he worked 3 hours a day at a small hamburger shop for meals (no money). Times were tough, but not too tough for an Iowa farm boy determined to become an engineer.

My dad eventually graduated and landed a job with GE in Schenectady, NY. Once settled with a good paycheck, he could think about marriage and family, and remembered the Norwegian girl down the road from his Iowa farmstead. Their relationship developed and when he asked her to marry him, she said yes. She took the train by herself from Iowa to New York in June of 1938, where they became husband and wife.

My dad did well in his career, moving into increasingly more responsible positions in various companies, and of course he and my mom soon began thinking about starting a family. After several miscarriages, a premature baby that died after only a few hours, and an almost fatal hemorrhage, my mother was told she could not have children. So, they began to consider adoption.

They brought my brother Tom home about a year later in 1943; he was 14 months old. My sister Margaret (Tom's birth sister) arrived as a newborn a year later. But their hearts still had room for one more: me. I was three months' old when a representative of the adoption agency brought me to their home and placed me in their arms.

I don't remember when I was told that I was adopted...I seem to have always known. And even though I was well loved and cared for in every way, my unusual origin cast a shadow over my spirit. I harbored a private sense of rejection and felt that I did not belong in my family. This was

exacerbated by the fact that my brother and sister—though also adopted—were “real” siblings and actually did seem to have a lot more in common with each other than I did with them.

From a small child, I loved stories: both reading them and writing them. To me, bringing home a new book from the library was like finding buried treasure. While very young, I kept a notebook and began writing stories. One of my favorite themes was a story about a child who had been taken captive by Indians and later rescued by strong heroes. I think these stories represented my subconscious feeling of having been taken from my “real” family and raised by others. I was waiting for the ones who had lost me to find me again.

I eventually came to understand these feelings as a stronghold that Satan planted in my mind from childhood. This is a common strategy he uses with children who have been adopted. Because of this stronghold, I withdrew from those who loved me most.

Early Life in Rifle (1947-1955)

Despite the “shadow” of adoption, my early years were almost idyllic. We lived in a government housing project outside of Rifle, Colorado where my dad was an engineer at an experimental oil shale plant. Even now, I’m not quite sure what he did, but it looked very complicated. Here is a picture of me with my brother visiting my dad at work, high up in the cliffs where the mine was located.



All the houses in the project were pretty much all alike, placed in a U-shape with a community center built at the base of the U and playgrounds in the middle. Everyone knew everyone else, and from a child’s point of view, every house was home.



Here I am sitting between my brother and sister on the back steps of our government issue pre-fab home. We roamed the canyon behind our house, built forts among the trees, played cowboys and Indians, and skated for hours on the small piece of concrete our dads had laid in the central part of the housing development.

I attended a small elementary school in Rifle through 3th grade. We had no TV reception in the canyon (TV’s were barely known at this time) and the high point of our entertainment week was listening to the Lone Ranger and

Tonto on the radio on Sunday afternoon, with a bowl of fresh popcorn.

My mom was a full-time homemaker: she sewed all my clothes, canned vegetables and fruit, made delicious meals, and kept our home spotless. We even had a wonderful Boston bull terrier named Jiggs who entertained us all with his antics.

I loved school and loved reading. I had two special friends who lived close by. Life was good. But this wonderful season came to an abrupt end. The government determined that the oil-shale plant was not profitable and decided to close it. Our life was about to change dramatically.

Move to New York (1955-1964)

In June of 1955, we moved to Pittsford, a suburb of Rochester, New York. My dad started a new job at Eastman Kodak, the company he had worked for when I was adopted. We bought an old remodeled farmhouse (built in 1900) with a wrap-around porch and an acre of land behind it so my mom and dad could have a garden. The end of our lot bordered the old Erie Canal, which provided a bit of wildness for exploring and play. In the fall I started fourth grade at an elementary school in Pittsford.



This picture of our house in Pittsford at 2540 Clover Street was taken in 2015 when Michael and I visited the area. The house is exactly the same as it was when my family lived there 50 years earlier, though painted a different color.

Pittsford was not at all like Rifle, Colorado! Pittsford was an upper-middle class suburb full of wealth and sophistication. Everyone had fancy store-bought clothes and multiple TVs in their homes. Kids played organized sports or took ballet lessons, and didn't run wild and unsupervised in the open spaces. Homes were large, often with multiple stories, and big back yards.

My dad said of that year, that during fourth grade I cried myself to sleep every night. I had no friends and felt like a total outsider. On top of everything else, our sweet dog, also used to running in the open spaces, was hit by a car and killed soon after we moved to New York. I desperately wanted to return to Colorado.

By the next year I began to make friends and figure out how to fit in. First, I insisted that my mother buy my clothes, not make them. But the trauma of moving settled into the wounded area in my heart that already felt different, unwelcome, and an outsider.

I reacted to this loneliness by becoming extremely competitive. I wasn't good at any sports, but I was good at reading and remembering. Academic achievement became my all-consuming goal: I wanted to prove my worth by being first and always being right. I was already stubborn and strong willed by nature, and now I became even more determined to be on top.

The following incident demonstrates something of my stubbornness. My mom was a homemaker—she was almost always home when we got back from school. But one afternoon, she had an appointment and wasn't there. When I got off the bus, my brother Tom was already home. When he saw me coming, he locked all the doors to keep me out and then stood at the window teasing me.

My patience ran out very quickly. I knocked louder and louder with no result, other than becoming more and more angry. I finally walked down to the garage, which was unlocked, and

found my father's ax. I returned to the side door and began to chop at it with the ax. Eventually my brother gave in and opened the door, but not before I had done substantial damage to it.

This was of course a bit difficult to explain when my mom and dad returned. I don't remember exactly what my punishment was, other than losing my allowance for an indefinite time until the door was paid for. I stumbled across a poem that I wrote asking forgiveness in my mom's drawer after she died:

People act foolishly that I can say
People act foolishly every single day
People get oh so mad, act foolhardy, and that is bad.
People should be cool
If they aren't they are a fool
I am sorry and that is right
For I say it with all my might.

It was actually a rather defining moment as I saw the potential danger that feeding wrath can produce, a situation that the Bible describes well: *The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so quit before the quarrel breaks out.* Proverbs 17:14

I soon developed a reputation in school (which I was proud of) of always being right. I would argue my position with teachers and fellow students and not back down. I jumped at the opportunity to show teachers their errors, the more publicly the better. I lived in a black and white world. And while I was quick to show others their errors, I was very slow in admitting when I was wrong.

When I was thirteen, I completed confirmation classes in our local Lutheran church. On completion, our pastor gave us each a personal Bible verse. Mine was Isaiah 30:15. He had no idea how prophetic this verse would turn out to be for my life. Many years would pass before the grace of God produced the fruit of this verse.

"In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength." Isaiah 30:15

In high school, I consistently brought home high marks. I took advanced placement classes and eventually graduated as the valedictorian of my senior class. But beneath the surface I was growing increasingly unhappy.

I was becoming disillusioned with religion. I was a voracious reader, and at one point was fixated on reading books about the holocaust and the experience of prisoners in Nazi concentration camps and prisoners of war. My religious worldview could not accommodate the depravity that I read about. And no one in the church had compelling answers for my questions. I began to look for other worldviews that could help me make sense out of history, exploring philosophers like Frederick Nietzsche, Albert Camus, and other existentialists.

Life at University of Michigan and Ann Arbor (1964-1969)

My high grades ensured a number of options for college, including a full scholarship to a New York State college. But I wanted to put miles between my home and me so I chose the University of Michigan, both for its distance from New York and high academic rating. I was accepted into a special honors program as a pre-med student.



When I arrived at U of M in the fall of 1964 (my parents drove me), I didn't know much about the winds of political turmoil that were beginning to blow through this campus and many others. But I was soon to find out. I had been given a room in a special "honors" dorm with other high achievers, and it turned out that most of the girls on my floor were from New York City, and were already involved in radical politics.

The first large-scale student movement, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), had been formed on the University of Michigan campus in 1960, and in March of 1965, I attended the first teach-in, also held on our campus, where we explored ways to deflect the growing involvement of America in Vietnam. By the end of my first year of college, I was morally adrift and had abandoned my pre-med track. My goal of becoming a doctor was based on the intellectual pleasure I derived from taking challenging subjects and not on a commitment to serve and care for others. Without a moral base, this plan crumbled.

As a sophomore, I moved out of the dorm into alternative co-op housing on campus, which gave me more freedom to pursue my increasingly radicalized life style. My scholarly focus also shifted. I signed up for classes in anthropology, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. I studied Russian history and literature and explored communist thinking. Of course, in my Russian Lit class we read Dostoevsky, a profound Christian thinker, and I was faced with moral issues I would rather not deal with. As C. S. Lewis says so well in *Surprised by Joy*:

A young man [or woman] who wishes to remain a sound Atheist cannot be too careful of his reading. There are traps everywhere – "Bibles laid open, millions of surprises," as Herbert says, "fine nets and stratagems." God is, if I may say it, very unscrupulous.

In November of my sophomore year, I joined other students in the March on Washington for Peace in Vietnam. It was an eye-opening experience. We drove in a bus from Michigan to Washington, singing peace songs, sleeping, sharing snacks. That peaceful fellowship didn't carry over to our time on the streets in Washington where I watched my friends berating the police as "pigs" and had to run as stones were thrown. I was all for peace, but I certainly wasn't experiencing any of my own.

The next year, I moved into an apartment with one of my radical friends from New York City. My experience the previous year had left me a bit disillusioned with organized politics. Instead, I began experimenting more and more with drugs, taking LSD for the first time during a trip to

New York City with friends. That was a scary and disturbing experience and from then on, I avoided hard drugs, and stayed with the less traumatizing experience of marijuana.

Amazingly, I still managed to graduate early in December of 1967, due to all my high school advanced placement classes. I had also taken classes during the summers and found local jobs in Ann Arbor, to avoid going home to Rochester. My dad had gotten me a job at Eastman Kodak the summer between high school and college. I did piece work on an assembly line for camera light meters and was so utterly bored I barely survived the experience. I had clerical jobs at the U of M that were much more to my liking.

Though my parents supported me through college, they became increasingly distressed by my life style. At first, I hid most of what I was doing from them; my dad was paying my school bills, and I didn't want to endanger that. But I gradually became bolder and more outspoken in my opinions.

A Poem from My Parents

When I graduated from college school, my mom and dad gave me a poem they had written about my life. It pretty accurately summarizes the first 21 years. It's not great poetry by any means, but it captures their hearts very sweetly in taking in three babies and raising them with hope. Within these simple words is a prophetic thread...entrusting me to the Lord for His work to be completed.

We were young, and eager, enthusiastic, but poor,
Lived in Schenectady, Bridgeport, then Rochester opened a door.
Eastman Kodak was our livelihood,
And our little home in the country stood.

For a time, we were alone, and it seemed so long;
We wished for some heirs to make our house resound.
At first there were none, then a son we adopted.
His chosen name was Thomas, and our spirits were lofted.

He grew and he laughed, we loved to see him play,
We were proud as could be, and happy and gay.
In time there was a sister, we had to have her too;
With Margaret we were four, and that was something new.

We prayed for another, and God gave us YOU,
A four-month-old baby, with pretty eyes of blue.
She'd had good care, and for her we had the same,
Mixed with our love, -- but what could be her name?

Should it be Nancy, Ruth or Carrie,
Or Sarah, Rebecca, or maybe Mary?
We'll call her Helen, -- a torch, a light;
For to us, she was so shining bright.

We took her to church to be baptized one day.
Pastor Horn gave the blessing, and helped us pray
"We love her dear Lord, we entrust her to You,
To watch o'er and guide her, for You love her too."

We moved to Ohio, in '47, in Van Wert we abode.
Our neighbors were fascinated with the family we showed.
She laughed and cried, she played and grew,

She learned to walk and talk, and she was in charge, she knew.

In '48 to Colorado, we travelled,
Adventurers we were, and somewhat disheveled.
Her daddy worked at the plant for Oil Shale,
Her mother kept house, and three kids from setting sail.

Strong minded, our Helen, and at times quite spunky,
She was often in trouble, like a little monkey.
To steer this power was our daily task,
The job we've done will someday be unmasked.

She had special friends, she chose them with care,
Patricia and Becky were most important, while there.
They played dressup, Indians, and games, and house.
There was rarely a time that was quiet like a mouse.

She showed us her love as a child with kisses
And writing cute letters and notes with X's.
Even though she was punished, and must have felt blue,
The notes kept coming, and we knew they were true.

Books and stories, these she loved with passion,
And to learn things new, was all in fashion.
At the age of five, off to school she went
With brother Tom and sister Peg, on the bus they were sent.

Her first classes were fun, Mrs. King was the teacher,
For a knowledge-seeking child, it was she who could reach her.
She excelled in spelling, in third grade too,
Which in adulthood, now, is her worst bugaboo.

Ranch life and horses were a special attraction,
Mrs. Bernklau's home was a scene of action.
Picnics and parties, bobsleds and hayrides,
High on the mesa in the country hillsides.

In lives there are changes, milestones come and go;
Work at Oil Shale was becoming quite slow.
It soon became apparent a move would bring change,
Three young lives were to face a new age.

Fate directed a return to Rochester
And again Eastman Kodak became our master.
The country was new, and with the people a difference.
For a happy young child, it was a difficult experience.

Mrs. Brown was her teacher in Pittsford's fourth grade.
And though she was lonesome, she would not be dismayed.
She was befriended by Joanne, a friendly little girl,
They played, they worked, and were often in a whirl.

Fifth grade brought recognition with a citizenship award.
There were Brownies and Girl Scouts, with these she was not bored
Debating and language with math and science fair,
Came in Junior High and High School, which she handled with flair.

She learned of her Savior in Sunday School class,
She prayed, she sang; a sweet little lass.
Her promise to God, Dr. Behnke did hear
To him she said "My promise is sincere."

Almost as a surprise came graduation day
We couldn't believe how time had melted away
Her marks were outstanding, the first in her class;
We were bursting with pride for our younger lass.

Now college was in the offing, only a matter of choice
With our cheers and encouragement, to U of M she gave voice.
She's a senior now, and close to a degree,
No longer a child, very grown up, we agree.

We're no longer young, but still adventurous,
There has been many a blunder along life's paths.
Would we do it again? We most certainly would,
Because the rewards are in giving, not getting, as it should.

You in life's journeys should go farther than we,
Greater problems and more splendors, no doubt you'll see.
You'll face them with vigor, and your effort will be
To the best of your ability, just the same as we.

We have little to give in this twenty-first year.
You've studied, you're launched in a chosen career.
We wish you success, mixed with difficulties, too,
To keep you humble and grateful, with an inspired view.

Now who could have written this episode you will ask.
Only your mother and father who have followed you along life's path.
May the Holy Spirit dwell in your heart from this day.
To lead and guide you, to show you the way.

After Graduation

After I graduated, my parents realized more clearly how I was living and pretty much let me go my own way, hoping I am sure that I would come to my senses. Not having any clear goals, I remained in Ann Arbor, finding various jobs to pay the bills and continuing to hang out with my pot-smoking friends.

My one abortive attempt to do something constructive ended in disaster. I heard about a great need for teachers in some of the poorer mainly black schools near Detroit. These schools were so desperate they were willing to take college graduates without any teacher training. I applied and was given a class of eighth graders. I was unable to bring any control into the classroom or teach anything, and left in defeat after a few weeks.

During this time, I kept in contact with my parents, but only infrequently. Later when I joined the Moonies, all communication with them ceased. The Moonies discouraged us from contacting family and since I already felt cut off from mine, going along with this policy wasn't difficult.

I cannot imagine what that period in their life was like. I never thought about it deeply until I had children of my own (the first at age 35). What torments they experienced are still beyond my imagination. But that particular evening in the Mendocino State Park watching a family united in love was the first time I felt my heart beginning to grieve over where my path had led me.

Chapter 3: The Prodigal Comes Home

“Nobody has seen the trekking birds take their way towards such warmer spheres as do not exist, or rivers break their course through rocks and plains to run into an ocean which is not to be found. For God does not create a longing or a hope without having a fulfilling reality ready for them. But our longing is our pledge, and blessed are the homesick, for they shall come home.” Karen Blixen (Isaak Dinesen), author of Out of Africa.

Despite moments of insight, I still had a distance to go before I came to the end of my rebellious path. I met a group of young people visiting Mendocino from Marysville and struck up a friendship with one of the girls who was very outgoing and self-confident. When the group was ready to break camp, she asked me if I wanted to go back to Marysville with them. Having no plans of my own, I agreed.

My friend had been living on the road and working the system for a long time and was quite adept at survival techniques: where we could stay for free, what was safe and what wasn't. In Marysville, she took me to a government office where they gave me food stamps and a small emergency fund, based on a story she coached me to tell.

Hiding in the Hills

Based on my friend's intimate knowledge of free places to stay, we ended up at an A-frame house in the hills above Marysville in a remote area called Rackerby. Young people came and went randomly here; they would stay for a few days and move on. We stayed there often, hitchhiking down to Marysville together to pick up food stamps and replenish our supplies and visit her friends.

Gradually, I got to know many of the people moving through the area. Next door to the house where we stayed was an old goat farm. It was another hippie commune, but I heard many dark stories about it and was warned not to stay there, especially at night. Occult activities had taken place there, I was told, and evil spirits caused unexplained events and oppression.

A nearby creek had a lovely swimming hole, where I met people who were staying at the goat farm. After I got to know some of them, I would go and visit them on the farm, but only during the day. One of my new friends was a young man named Steve who had recently returned from a

tour in Vietnam. He was hard and intense and a little intimidating...clearly scarred by his experience and seemed much older than his physical age. His girlfriend was a 15-year old run away, with a baby face that made her look even younger.

We often talked together about spiritual topics. Because of his experience in Vietnam, Steve was very sensitive to the darkness at the goat farm. He told me with fear in his voice that he had seen strange manifestation and objects move for no reason. The spiritual world seemed very real to him.

Light Breaks Through

“He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” Col 1:13

When Steve disappeared for a while, I didn't think much of it, since people were always coming and going. But then one day he showed up again, returning with a specific purpose.

He had been visiting his friend Ken in Davis, CA. Ken was a former resident of the goat farm who had become a Christian a few months before. When Steve had visited Ken previously, he had been especially intrigued by discussions of the end times based on a book called *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey that everyone was then reading.

Ken invited Steve to attend a meeting where he could find out more about God's plan. In this meeting, Steve had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. “Helen,” he told me, “Jesus is real. This is what you've been looking for.” He shared the same message with everyone who would listen at the house where I stayed and at the goat farm, inviting us to come to Davis and find out for ourselves. He said that Jesus had sent him to tell us about a power greater than fear and darkness.

The next day, when Steve prepared to go back to Davis, he persuaded his girlfriend Sue to go with him. I went along too, determined to find out what he was talking about. Steve told me that he knew that as a follower of Jesus, he and Sue could no longer be together, but he said that a house for guys and one for girls was available in Davis where we could stay. Clearly, something powerful had changed him.

When we got to Davis, Steve took us to a house crowded with young people. The “meeting” had already started and several young people with guitars were leading songs. All over the room people stood with arms raised to heaven, some with tears on their cheeks. I had never seen or heard anything like this. Not once had Steven ever used the word “church” to describe what was going on, and I still didn't connect this experience with church...although it was a church meeting in the truest sense: a meeting of God's *ecclesia*, the called-out ones.

The singing continued for a while, rising and falling in intensity. Everyone seemed to know the songs, even without song sheets. Later, someone gave a message. I don't remember the message,

or even responding to it; I just remember the presence of holiness in that room and the feeling of being home.

I was graciously welcomed into the crowded girls' home, called Bethany House. The details of the next few weeks are a blur, but the Lord had me in His grip and His Word, like a hammer and fire, was breaking down all my rebellion and resistance. Later I think I went up to the altar during services at least three or four times to receive the Lord, because every time the pastor talked about this needing to be a specific event, I could not remember the exact point when I had done so.

Even later, I realized that it was more about Jesus receiving me, than me receiving Him. The first night I walked through those doors, He had enfolded me and would not let me go. My understanding of what happened took a little while to catch up with the reality, but this prodigal daughter had come home, and the Father had run to meet me and enfolded me in His robe of righteousness.

Family Reunited

“And he will turn...the hearts of the children to their fathers...” Malachi 4:6

I came into Bethany House in Davis a traumatized, fearful, and broken person, and the Lord began to gently restore me. The first thing I needed to do, I realized, was contact my parents. I wrestled with how to do this, feeling that my sinfulness and rebellion was almost beyond their forgiveness and that they would be unlikely to want to have anything to do with me. I could not bring myself to call them, so I sat down and wrote a letter. I explained where I was living and what had happened to me. I told them that I had met Jesus and He had forgiven me, and I asked for their forgiveness. This letter was postmarked Nov. 21, 1971.

A few days after putting the letter in the mail, I heard the doorbell ring and someone called me downstairs. I had received a telegram. It was from my parents saying “Hallelujah. Call us collect.”

My parents were overjoyed. I found out later that my mother had contacted many radio ministries across the country asking them to pray for me. She attended many prayer groups in their city, and she and my dad had even begun to attend a non-denominational church on Sunday nights where the pastor often preached on the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit. In their need, they had drawn close to the Lord, claiming His protection over me, and now they were seeing the fruit of their prayers.

For Christmas that year, my mom and dad sent me a Bible, and when I opened it, tears filled my eyes. Inscribed on the inside cover was “To our precious daughter, Helen. Christmas, 1970.” It was now Christmas of 1971. They had purchased this Bible in faith the previous Christmas as a gift for me, not knowing where I was, but believing that the day would come when I would welcome it.

As I spread this Bible open in my hands, a sense of the power of our covenant-keeping God overwhelmed me. He had known me and in all my wanderings, His unseen Hand had never been removed and “in returning and rest I had been saved” as the verse given me at confirmation promised.

It would be several months before my parents and I actually met each other face to face. My church was planning to take a team to visit a fellowship in Victoria British Canada and—by a coincidence clearly orchestrated by the Holy Spirit—my mom and dad had signed up for a train trip to Victoria through my dad’s place of work. They were going to be in Victoria the exact same dates as the church team. During those days, I was able to meet my mom and dad in a neutral location and begin the process of healing our relationship. Later, I would go home for a longer visit.



This is one of the few pictures I have from this time, one my mother took of my dad and me on the street in Victoria. I was wearing my “Jesus People” uniform of a long skirt and loose top, and though you can’t see it very well, I was also wearing a smile of joy, the more genuine sign of the Lord’s gracious touch on my life.

Notice that this is my dad on vacation...still wearing his tie and dress shirt as if he were reporting to the office!

Jesus People: Revival Fire

“And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.” Acts 2:46

At first, I did not realize that my experience, which was so deeply personal, was part of a larger movement that was affecting young people throughout the United States and even elsewhere in the world. Based on the heartfelt intercession of untold saints, God was pouring out His Spirit in marvelous ways to pull back a generation from the brink of destruction.

My memories of that first year of following Jesus are full of a sense of holiness and awe. God was moving in a truly wonderful way and every time we met together, we expected and received intense encounters with His Spirit and power. Our fellowship met in a public hall and consisted almost entirely of young people under the age of 25. Some were college students from UC Davis, but many like me, were refugees from the hippie life.

Our pastor Ron Coady was from New Zealand, a fiery preacher full of zeal. His wife was warm and motherly and a great comforter and encourager. Church services were long...we arrived early for prayer and pre-service worship. During the service, we would often have extended times of free-form worship. We had many talented musicians and guitar players. Often the Lord would give one of them a spontaneous new song, which they would sing out and the other musicians would follow along. It was an amazing experience to hear these songs flowing out in perfect

rhyme and measure, knowing that they were being birthed in that very moment by the power of the Spirit. At times we felt like we could hear the angels singing with us.

At almost every service, people were being saved. Young men and women with hollow haunted eye, wearing dirty clothes, came in with backpacks and bedrolls. The next week, you would see them again with a new countenance, wearing clean clothes, lifting their hands with joy. The transforming power of the Holy Spirit was real and tangible.

After the service, we would have potluck lunches before going out in the streets to witness. We would gather on street corners in Davis and sometimes in Sacramento. Someone would play guitar and the rest of us would talk with those who walked by about the power of Jesus. Later we returned to the church for evening Bible study.

When I joined the church, Pastor Coady was in the middle of teaching a series on the Tabernacle of Moses. This may seem like an unlikely topic for nourishing a bunch of spaced-out ex-hippies, but I was enthralled by the revelation of the pattern of salvation that he drew from the various furnishing and layout of the Tabernacle. He showed how each piece reflected some aspect of Christ, who was the fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed by the patterns of Old Testament worship. I felt like someone had opened a treasure chest in front of me, and suddenly all those dry, dusty stories from childhood became rich and vibrant and alive with meaning.

To this day, I am grateful for that series of teaching, which instilled in me a deep love for the Old Testament and an early understanding of the unity of the Biblical story. I have since met many believers who have focused almost entirely on the New Testament and lack the depth and richness of understanding that comes from seeing the new in light of the old.

Holiness, Repentance, and Adoption

“Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.” Ephesians 1:4-5

Most of us who had partaken of drugs, rebellion, and free love left that lifestyle deeply scarred and in need of emotional and spiritual healing. In the girls’ home, we had a basement room that we set apart as a prayer chapel. One at a time, we would go to the basement to spend time alone seeking the Lord in prayer.

I can remember often hearing the sound of weeping rising from that room and I recall my own times of tears and groaning as I lay in deep repentance before the Lord. Job’s words capture my experience:

*“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”
Job 42:5*

I had prided myself on my intelligence and enlightenment, but as Jesus said, “If the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt 6:23) Instead of enlightenment, I had been led into greater and greater darkness, until the God of the Bible reached out and rescued me from my foolish ways. Like Jacob, I would in some ways forever walk with a limp, a reminder of the weakness of who I am in the flesh and of God’s ultimate sovereignty.

During that first year in Davis, I had one special encounter with the Holy Spirit that was truly transformative. This happened when a guest speaker brought a message on adoption based on Ephesians 1:4-5.

The Holy Spirit exposed the dark and painful part of my mind that saw adoption as a form of rejection and that left me feeling like an outsider, marked as defective. After hearing this message, we had an extended time of worship. It was then God spoke very clearly to me that adoption was the method He had chosen to build His own family, the church. In fact, it is the only way to become part of His family and enter a relationship with Him. He showed me that it was actually a privilege that I was allowed to experience adoption twice: once into an earthy family and once into his spiritual family.

In my spirit, I saw His hands picking me up and placing me into the arms of my adoptive parents. He spoke to my heart, “I chose this family for you. Do you doubt my wisdom? Before you were born, I had a plan for you to be adopted, just as before the world began, I planned to form my own family through adoption.”

I cannot fully put into words the impact that this revelation had on me, but it was as if a dark shadow that had been part of me for as long as I could remember was suddenly gone. The healing wasn’t just in my understanding, but in my emotions and the deepest part of my being. The life-giving and bondage-breaking power of truth had set me free.

From Unity to Division

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” 1 Tim 4:1

Once we were cleaned up from the hippie life style, the hard work of learning how to walk in a manner that pleased the Lord began. For many of us, our minds and self-images had to be rebuilt as God laid a foundation for His character in our hearts. This was hard work. The simple realities of being responsible, getting a job, being accountable to one another, and living in the “real world” at times were overwhelming. And of course, eventually some gave up and turned away.

At the same time, weeds began to grow up among the good grain. I remember the first time I encountered a group from the “Children of God” on the streets in Sacramento. They greeted us as Christian brothers and sisters, but something seemed a little strange about them. Soon we were hearing of friends that had joined this group, and then rumors of their drug use, justified by a teaching that marijuana was one of “herbs of the field” that God had given us to enjoy. The sad reality was that false teaching was already rampant in the Jesus People Movement.

But for me, life was generally good. I went through a sequence of low-skilled jobs, tailored for developing humility and Christian character. Since I had no job history or references, I had to take what I could get. My first job was as a field worker picking tomatoes. I lived with the other migrant laborers in a large shed-like dormitory. The shed was broken up into individual units, but the walls separating the units were only 7 feet high, sort of like stalls for people. We rose before the sun did to climb on the big harvesting machines and sort the tomatoes as they were picked up from the field. It isn't a job that had much to recommend it.

After I moved out of Bethany House, I moved into an apartment shared with three other believing young women. I benefited greatly from their fellowship...none of them had fallen quite so far out of “normal” society as I had, so I found their discipline and energy helpful in keeping me moving forward.

Later, I worked for a year as a nursing assistant in a senior care facility, where the brother who led Bethany House worked as a nurse. Eventually again through a sister in the church, I was able to get a job as a typist for a local Davis newspaper. One summer, I stayed with a friend in Lake County and we worked in a pear packing plant. Another summer, I accompanied the same friend to Northern California to work for the forest service.

People around me were growing in the Lord, some were getting married, and I felt that my life would continue on pretty much the same as it was. But again, the future held some surprises.

Trinity Tabernacle, the fellowship where I had found the Lord, experienced its own crisis when Pastor Coady, our senior pastor, took a sabbatical and traveled to India. This lively Pentecostal preacher returned from India as a bishop in the Syrio-Chaldean Church, an ancient body that traced its lineage from the first-century visit of the Apostle Thomas to India.

The first Sunday he was to preach after his return, we arrived for the service excited to welcome him home. As the service began, I turned in shock when some of our brothers entered the room dressed in long black robes swinging incense censers. Pastor Coady followed, also dressed in elaborate robes and holding a bishop's staff. The order of service was printed and handed to us, with chants and recitations.

Most of us stood in stunned disbelief. In addition to Ron Coady, the senior pastor, we had two associate pastors. Within a few weeks, the church had split in three directions with a portion of the community following each of these men. I was devastated. I found the whole situation so painful and repugnant that I could not see myself remaining where I was. As a new believer saved

out of cult, I could not comprehend how true Christians could disagree. Hadn't Jesus called us as one body?

When a friend asked me if I would like to take care of her house in southern Oregon for six months I gladly accepted. I wanted to leave all the turmoil behind.

It was there—when my next-door neighbor sent her handsome, single younger brother over to take my trash to the dump—that the Lord opened up a new and unexpected chapter in my life.

Chapter 4: Oregon

First Days



Living in rural Oregon was balm for my soul. I had a lovely, if somewhat primitive, little house to live in with a stream running behind and trees and fields on all sides. Wild blackberries grew up and down the long driveway and I woke to the sound of birds in the trees next to the upstairs window.

I attended the local community church located two miles down the country road. The church was filled with old-timers who loved to sing hymns and attend church potluck suppers.

Living up the road from me was a young Christian family who had also come out of the Jesus People Movement and we soon developed a friendship. Frank was a building contractor and his wife Lauren a homemaker. They had built their own home next to Lauren's parents' home.

Frank and Lauren had gotten saved partly through the influence of hippy foresters who spent time nearby. They were from a ministry called Lighthouse Ranch in Eureka, northern California. Many of them were saved under the ministry of Jim Durkin, who ran the ranch as a half-way house for recovering hippies.² Groups from Lighthouse Ranch would come and plant trees for the Forest Service as a way of generating income, camping out and inviting locals to join them in fellowship.

Knowing there were people close by who understood a little of my own background was a great comfort.

But even with free rent, I needed spending money so I began looking for work. The first job I found was picking daffodils for a local flower grower. Like most of the jobs I had done that required manual labor, I found it challenging. The flower picking team was almost all women. We wore heavy gloves because the sap from the daffodils was very irritating and could cause rashes and infections. The gloves reduced my manual dexterity, which wasn't that great to begin with. I was usually way back in my row when the other ladies had finished theirs.

² http://www.jim-durkin.tlchrist.info/lighthouse_ranch.htm

It was an interesting summer. People say in Oregon you can experience every season in one day. And we often did have rain, followed by warm sun, followed by dark glowering skies. But I did get plenty of outdoor time, even though I ended up in the doctor's office with a bad infection in my thumb that required removing part of the nail.

I also had plenty of time to read. I would stop at the small library in Myrtle Point and look for books to read. It was during this time that I discovered the delights of the Chronicles of Narnia by C. S. Lewis. I also read all of the Anne of Green Gables series by L. M. Montgomery. The local library was better stocked with children's books than books for adults. I had missed all of these books in my own childhood because I wanted to read "serious" books. I thoroughly enjoyed being a child again and developed a life-long love for C. S. Lewis. Whenever I need to renew the magic of discovering Narnia, I listen to the Harper Audiobook series again.

Occasionally Lauren's younger brother Michael would come to visit his parents and I would see him in church. He was living in Southern California and going to Melodyland School of the Bible. We never really had an opportunity to talk until one day Lauren sent him over with his dad's pickup truck to take my trash to the dump with theirs.

Oregon was the first place I had ever lived that didn't have garbage service. I was a bit horrified by the pile of refuse that was accumulating from my very modest daily life. (I owned a very small Datsun hatchback, inappropriate for transporting anything much larger than a suitcase.) So when Michael stopped by with his kind offer, I greeted him as gift from heaven.

I was a little surprised when he asked me if I wanted to go along, but having nothing else that needed my attention and a little curious about where the dump was in case I had to get there myself, I said yes. We chatted some on the drive and I asked him about his Bible classes. Then somehow we got into a long discussion about various views on the end times. He held the pre-tribulation view of Jesus' second coming and I was more of an amillennialist. Who would imagine a relationship developing from a trip to the dump discussing opposing views of the end times? God's ways are definitely not our ways.

When my friend and her husband returned to their home after six months, I had no desire to leave the area. They let me stay on their property temporarily in a small cabin located behind their house.

If I was going to stay longer, though, I needed a better way of making money than picking daffodils. Even back in the 1970's, this area of rural Oregon didn't have much industry or

commerce. Close by where I lived, however, was a large Church of the Brethren camp that welcomed groups of young campers all summer. And that's how I ended up cooking again for large crowds; I guess my experience cooking for the Moonies finally paid off.



When the busy summer came to an end, I was given the opportunity to stay on as the camp caretaker. My duties were minimal and the position included a small house. It sounded perfect, until I found myself alone in the cabin at night with the wind rattling branches against the window and the closest neighbor a half a mile away. My imagination went in all the wrong directions.

And to add fuel to the fire, I began to hear scratching noises. I would lie in bed terrified, repeating scriptures and praying. Finally, I came to the sensible realization that the house wasn't haunted; I had a rat inside! I purchased a trap and before long, the rat was no longer an issue.

During this time, I began to attend Women's Aglow meetings in Coos Bay. These meetings sustained me during a time when I often felt like a stranger in a strange land. Even though I loved the quiet rural setting, my background and experience were so unlike the local residents that I was very lonely. At Women's Aglow I found fellowship, joy in worship, and an expectancy that God speaks. I found one special friend through Aglow, an older more experienced woman with a tender heart who spent many hours listening to me and praying with me.

At one of these meetings, a leader prayed for me and shared these words that the Spirit gave her: "You have hollered out to me, "My God, My God, where are you?" And you have hollered out and said 'If you're there, reveal yourself.' And I have revealed myself and will continue to reveal myself as the healer of the past. You shall not walk in the shadows of the past but you shall walk in the sunlight of the day."

I had literally shouted those exact words one night when I was working with a friend packing pears during a summer in Lake County. I walked up and down the road outside her parent's house yelling out my sense of forsakenness. I knew Jesus had forgiven me, but I still felt unacceptable and left out of the good lives everyone else was building. When I heard these prophetic words, I was overcome with a sense of being known...that God was at work and I could trust his pace in my life.

I stayed at Camp Myrtlewood all that winter and started working during the day at a child care center in Myrtle Point. When the camp directors returned for the summer and needed the cabin, I moved in with a single mom who I had met at a Bible study.

Even though I told myself that I had left Davis behind, emotionally I was still deeply connected to the people I knew there, especially the young men and women that shared the communal homes when I first came. We had walked through deep water together and moved from heart wrenching confessions of sin to joyful times of worship and praise. The community we had was an essential part of the foundation that Christ had laid in my heart.

It was only natural that out of this closeness, couples had begun to form. Even before I left, a wedding seemed to be announced every month. I was always on the sidelines. After I left, I corresponded with friends and got even more wedding invitations. One was for the wedding of a former roommate—the one I packed pears with.

I decided to go, though my feelings were mixed. I was concerned about being pulled into life in Davis again, since I felt so strongly that what had happened with the church split was wrong. I started out in my green Datsun hatchback listening to Mustard Seed Faith on an 8-track tape. When I crossed the border into California five hours later, I felt that I couldn't go any further. I turned around and headed back toward Oregon. But 15 minutes later I convinced myself that I owned it to my roommate to attend her wedding and turned toward California again.

I literally drove in circles for over an hour and by then, I was ready to drive off the road into a tree to end the confusion. I pulled into a roadside stop and just cried out to God for help. When I had calmed down enough to listen, I clearly heard the Holy Spirit tell me that the decision was mine and that he would love me whether I chose to go or stay. With that I could make the decision, knowing that I wasn't going to step outside the circle of God's care.

I went to the wedding. It was actually the last event I went to in Davis. The emotional hold was no longer there. I spoke with the pastor of one of the churches formed from the split of Trinity Evangelical. I could tell he was trying to encourage me to come back and join his fellowship, but nothing in my heart responded. I left grateful for all that God had done during my season in Davis, but I knew very clearly that the season was over.

Marriage



I saw Lauren's brother Michael from time to time when he came home to visit family. We occasionally went with his sister and brother-in-law into town for dinner and a movie. His sister often invited me over to her home when he was coming to dinner and I began to look forward to his visits. This is a picture of us after one such meal together.

Michael had decided not to continue with the school in Southern California, and after a lot of prayer and discussion, enrolled in Multnomah Bible College in Portland. Since he was much closer now, he came home more often and I loved

the evenings when we had dinner and he played the guitar and sang worship songs. The sweetness of that worship began to open my heart to the thought that I might be able to spend my life with him. And when he asked me to marry him, I said yes.

Michael was in school in Portland and I was working in Myrtle Point so we carried on our relationship by phone. As we talked about wedding plans, making arrangements loomed with difficulties. Neither of us had much money. Even though my parents and I were reconciled, I didn't feel comfortable asking them for help. So one day we decided simply to elope. Easter



break was coming up and Michael had time off school. We drove to Reno where we were married before the Justice of the Peace, witnessed by two strangers and the Holy Spirit. We spent a few days in Tahoe before driving back.

My trusty green Datsun broke down just past the Oregon border in a small town on the Saturday night before Easter Sunday. We knew we couldn't get any mechanical help till Monday, so we found a motel and went to Easter service at a small church nearby. They were excited to have some potential new members until they heard our sad story and realized we wouldn't be coming again.

Once we got back to Myrtle Point, I moved in with Michael's grandmother in her doublewide trailer and Michael drove back to Portland to school. After telling some of his fellow students what he had done over Easter break and receiving their congratulations, he was surprised to be called in by the dean of students. As kindly as possible the dean informed Michael that he was no longer welcome as a student at Multnomah. The school had a rule that no student could get married while enrolled without the permission of the administration.

Naturally this came as quite a shock. Michael had never read the fine print of student rules. When we got married March 22, 1978, I was 2-months shy of 32 years old and Michael was approaching 29. The thought had never occurred to us that we needed permission to marry.

So we found our life rather abruptly redirected. After prayer and discussion with some counselors, Michael decided to transfer to Western Evangelical Seminary in Milwaukie, south of Portland, and we moved to Portland together in late summer. (In 1993, Western Evangelical merged with George Fox University and no longer has an independent identity.)



Before we moved, my mom and dad came to Oregon to meet Michael and his family. We enjoyed a great visit with them. This picture captures all the important men in my life at this point. From left to right: 1. Emmitt Curtis, the pastor of the Bridge Community Church. The Lord used Emmitt to lead Michael to Jesus. 2. Frank Sproul (married to Lauren, Michael's sister) with their two boys, Peter and Seth. 3. Michael. 4. My dad, wearing a tie as usual, even on vacation in rural Oregon. 5. Michael's dad Ken Ernst.

Life in Portland

We enjoyed setting up house in our first apartment in Portland. We paid \$195 for a two-bedroom modern unit in a good area. (I'm telling you this to let you understand better the sticker shock we later experienced when we moved to Santa Barbara!)

I was desperate for a job to help pay our bills and after answering many interesting ads, with no response, finally gave up and took a job at Pendleton Woolen Mills. I was promised I could make up to \$15 an hour sewing woolen shirts. Having grown up with a sewing machine, I thought how hard could this be?

When I arrived for job training, I was given the task of sewing pockets on shirtfronts in an assembly line scenario. The base rate was actually \$9 an hour; \$15 was possible with bonuses for exceeding your standard quota. I carefully learned the steps to attach the pocket correctly and was then put to work. I thought I would easily be able to increase my production, until the thread began breaking frequently on my machine. It took me forever to rethread this complicated machine. I would ask for help, but naturally, no one wanted to reduce their own output by helping me.

At first I thought I was doing something wrong, but eventually I spoke to a supervisor about it. When the machine was examined, a small burr was found on the side of the needle that weakened the thread when it passed over. Once that was corrected, life got easier at work, other than being very boring. I got a headset radio to pass the time and listened to hours of *Through the Bible* with J. Vernon McGee. How I loved this plain talking preacher and his exposition of Biblical truth. He went to heaven in 1988 but you can still listen to his sermons online.³

Later when funds became increasingly tight, we moved to a cottage (better described as shed?) on the Western Evangelical Campus. Beginning in the early 1900's, the Willamette Evangelical Camp Meeting Association purchased 8.5 acres, much of it covered with old evergreen trees, and held their first camp meeting outside with over 1,000 people in 1905. People came with tents and sleeping bags, but over the years, more and more buildings were constructed—a dorm, education building, and chapel—and 90 leases were made available for the construction of personal summer cottages.⁴



When Michael attended seminary, those “summer” cottages were rented at low cost to students all year long, and we moved into one in late fall. It was basically a studio with a small kitchen, a bathroom, and a single room for sleeping and living. The outside walls were paper thin, with no insulation—not that different from living in a tent. Here we lived through one of the worst ice storms in Portland history.

³ <https://www.ttb.org/about/about-thru-the-bible>

⁴ <https://pamplinmedia.com/ct/28-opinion/269060-143287-sad-ending-for-jennings-lodge-property>

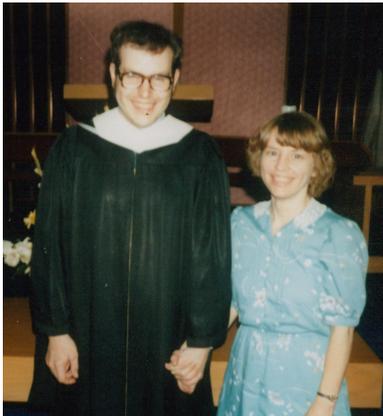
On the night of January 9-10, 1979, Portland experienced a devastating freezing rain. We lay in bed listening to the crack of tree limbs as they became weighted down with ice, wondering if perhaps we should be under the bed rather than on top in case one of those limbs fell on us. Later we found out that of the 90 cottages, only one was damaged by a falling tree. This had to be a small miracle attributable to 90 students and couples desperately pleading with God to spare their lives.

The ice storm closed the airport, felled trees throughout the city, and knocked out transformers, leaving 100,000 homes without heat or electricity.⁵ Having no news to listen to, I decided to go to work to get out of the cold. I will never forget that six-mile drive on icy roads. The only reason I survived is that no one else was out driving; I crept along at about 10 mph slipping and sliding in all directions. When I arrive at the building where I worked, I found it dark and locked. Then I had to turn around and slip and slide home.

That summer we were offered a more suitable cottage that had a living room and bedroom and insulated walls. We didn't have to think long before we said yes! I also found a new job working as a clerk at Omark Industries, a manufacturer of chains for saw chains. Omark had offices in a new, well-appointed building and offered free continental breakfast and good health insurance. I was happy to be sitting at a desk, even though my job consisted in reconciling bills and payments.

It could have been a great job, but my immediate supervisor was the one whose mistakes I had been tasked to find, and she wasn't too happy about it. Her antagonistic attitude made me miserable.

God did a lot of work in my heart over that year. I prayed constantly for her, but never saw any change in her attitude; if anything it grew worse when she found I was a Christian. But though she didn't change, I did. Though I fretted at first, eventually I was able to submit and serve graciously regardless of her response. And eventually this job too came to an end after Michael graduated.



Michael's graduation turned out to be an explosive event. My parents flew in from Iowa to attend and as they were flying into Portland, on May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helen's, located in Washington state 40 miles north of Portland, violently erupted. This eruption was the deadliest and most economically destructive volcanic event in the history of the United States.

The eruption certainly added drama to the week they were with us. The city was blanketed in ash. Fortunately, we lived South of Portland so for us it wasn't as bad as the neighborhoods in the North.

Michael's graduation was lovely and we also celebrated my birthday on May 20. Then we had to face the looming question: What next?

⁵ <https://www.wweek.com/portland/article-4178-1979.html>

Without any definite plans, we returned to Bridge to move in with Michael's grandmother again.

The Next Step: Dora Community Church



As we explored local options, we heard about a small church located in Dora, about 50 miles from Myrtle Point. The closest town to Bridge, where we lived, was named Remote, but Dora was *really* remote. The area was agricultural and the small town had a library and a school. On Sundays, the community church met in the school.

Along with the pastoral position came the responsibility of caretaking a historic local cemetery. The cemetery included a “parsonage,” consisting of a small mobile home on the property with a front door that opened on a grave. As caretaker, Michael was responsible for mowing the grass and general cemetery upkeep. Near the mobile home was a small wooden chapel that had begun to lean with age.



I think our presence there was also intended to discourage vandalism. We used to joke about how we would have a front row seat for the rapture when Jesus came back and all the graves opened.

So we began our first and only experience of pastoral life. The Dora Community Church existed largely because of the will and support of Jim, a large property holder in the area, who was also the chairman of the board of elders. It didn't take long for Michael's ideas and his to clash.

Jim was a cessationist and had definite ideas about the gifts of the Spirit ending with the Apostles. Michael and I had both experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit and considered experiencing the gifts of the Spirit a part of normal Christian life.

This all came to a head surprisingly when we showed the movie “The Cross and the Switchblade” on a Friday night at the school. Now there wasn't much to do in Dora, so this event actually attracted quite a crowd. This movie, produced in 1970, was based on the book David Wilkerson wrote about his experience with preaching to gangs in New York City. Wilkerson was very clear about his dependence on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring deliverance to those in bondage to drugs and gangs. The board chairman was not pleased.

After about a year of struggling in a situation without agreement, we decided that Amos 3:3 applied: “*How can two walk together unless they be agreed.*” Michael submitted his resignation and we moved back temporarily to his grandmother's home in Bridge. But we knew we couldn't stay in that situation for long.

Michael grown up in Santa Barbara, California, and attended local schools before his parents moved to Oregon. In addition, his older sister Michelle still lived in Montecito with her husband and family.

Michelle encouraged us to come to Santa Barbara. She had been writing us letters about the new church she was attending. This was a growing charismatic church and she was sure we would fit right in. And she offered to let us stay at her home while we looked for a place to rent.

After much discussion and prayer, and a few tears, we eventually packed my little green Datsun with as much as it would hold and headed down to Santa Barbara, CA in the Fall of 1981.

Chapter 5: Santa Barbara

First Days in Santa Barbara

Michael's sister Michelle and her family lived in Montecito, in what was actually the guesthouse of a larger estate. After ten years of barely scraping by in various forms of poverty, I felt very out of place in this wealthy and exclusive neighborhood. As we drove around Santa Barbara, I felt a heaviness and oppression I had never experienced before.

But we were determined to put down roots. After answering ads for many places to live that we found unsuitable, we decided to go to a property management firm for guidance in finding an apartment. The helpful woman asked us what we were expecting to pay per month and we said \$250, which was more than we had ever paid for a place. She only smiled tiredly and said you won't find much available for that price.

In the next few weeks, we looked at every crumbling one-room studio and every one-bedroom apartment next to the freeway or railroad tracks from Goleta to Carpinteria as we got to know firsthand exactly what \$250 would get us.

And that's how we ended up in Isla Vista, the bedroom community of UCSB, in a student apartment building. For \$400 we rented a townhouse with a living room/kitchen combination downstairs and a bedroom and bathroom upstairs. It had one small window in the front looking out on an asphalt parking lot. We moved in with our personal possessions and furnished the place with a foam pad we put on the floor for sleeping and a card table with two folding chairs as our dining room set.

The first night as we lay rather dismally on our makeshift foam pad bed, I could hear snoring through the wall next to us where a single guy lived. It was too much; I lay on the bed and sobbed. So much for the search for back to nature and the peaceful life. That era was definitely over.

Michael got a job working the night shift at Devereux, a residential center for developmentally challenged teenagers and adults. It was located near our apartment so he was able to ride a bicycle to work. After looking for a job for weeks with no results, I signing up with a temporary agency to do office work. My first assignment was with a local company that did high tech work for the military. I stuffed my anti-war memories of marching on Washington into the background and tried to smile cheerfully as I entered the office.

Eventually I was hired at a small software company in Goleta to be the secretary to the President of the company. Dr. Leon Presser had left UCSB to found Softool, a company that made configuration management software that helped software developers keep track of the changes they made. At the time it seemed like just another ho-hum job without a future, but it was to turn out to be the beginning of a 30-year career as a technical writer in the software industry.

As we got settled in the community and had steady income and references, we were eventually able to move out of Isla Vista into an apartment closer to Santa Barbara in a quiet neighborhood. This was a great relief!

Growing in the Word of Faith Movement

The church that Michelle attended had a new pastor who was related to Michelle by marriage. Keith Hudson had married Mary Perry in 1979 and they had recently moved to Santa Barbara, where Mary had grown up. Mary was the half-sister of Michelle's husband James Armstrong.

We became regulars at the services that Keith and Mary led at Word of Faith in Santa Barbara, attending prayer meetings, and becoming prayer counselors. We experienced some genuine moves of the Spirit and enjoyed the ministry of a number of guest speakers. One of them was Dave Roberson, a traveling preacher with a healing ministry. Michael received a true deliverance with Dave prayed for him. Michael was subject to nightmares and had been since a child. While staying overnight with his grandmother, he had gotten tangled up in his sleeping bag and had terrible nightmares afterwards of choking. Many nights in the early days of our marriage, he would wake me up flailing desperately. After Dave Roberson prayed for him, the nightmares ceased.

Eventually Michael became part of the worship band, and one Sunday when the designated worship leader failed to show up, he became a worship leader. Michael took this calling very seriously, spending hours researching songs, adapting chords and keys so that songs could be sung easily, attending practice with other members of the worship team, and praying for songs that would support whatever theme the Holy Spirit was emphasizing in the sermons. He was a very good worship leader because he had a genuinely worshipful spirit that drew us into the throne room.

Being a worship leader had its own set of challenges, as Michael discovered he was now on the front line of a lot of spiritual warfare. He learned to pray and discern God's voice in the midst of conflicts.

Eventually, Michael and I proved our loyalty enough to be presented on June 10, 1984 with Certificates of License to preach and exercise our gifts in the work of ministry.

Becoming Parents

I was facing challenges of a different kind. Michael and I had talked about children, but after 5 years, I had sort if figured that wasn't part of the life God had for us. But God is full of surprises;

I was a few months past 37 when I discovered I was pregnant. My first clue was feeling nauseous when I made coffee for my boss at work. It had never bothered me before!



A doctor visit soon confirmed the pregnancy. On February 21, 1984, we welcomed Rebekah Jean into our family. The doctor had induced my labor early in the morning and after I spent many hours of pushing, he decided a cesarean section was necessary. I got to see Bekah's lovely face at 10:23 pm. It was a long day. In 1984, husbands were not invited into the delivery room, so Michael had to wait a little longer for his first glimpse of our

precious gift.

I was in the hospital for five days and when they finally sent me home, my milk had not yet come in. The combination of drugs used to induce labor followed by an emergency C-section had thrown my body into confusion. The nurses assured me that everything would be all right and if I had any questions, I could call the hospital. After two days at home, I did call and ask if I could come back! I was afraid Bekah would starve to death. But eventually everything worked out and she grew and exceeded the charts.

Being naively ignorant of labor laws, I had quit my job before Bekah was born. Looking back, I honestly don't know how we survived. The landlord of the apartment where we lived told us we would have to move, since children were not allowed in this building. We heard through the church social network about an apartment in downtown Santa Barbara with two bedrooms and amazingly low rent. We applied and were accepted and quickly moved in.

It wasn't long before we figured out why the rent was so low. The building was infested with termites. Our apartment was in the front of the building and had wood beam ceilings. I would go in to check on Bekah in her crib and find her covered with sawdust grains from the termites chewing the wood beams above her. We tacked a sheet to the ceiling over her crib to protect her.

In God's mercy, my former employer called me before too long and asked if I would like to work part time from home. We somehow managed to keep food on the table during those years. I remember taking walks in my neighborhood with Bekah in the stroller and crying out my misery to the Lord. This was not my idea of a life that showed God's blessing.

I felt like a captive that had been dragged to Santa Barbara. I didn't fit in with all the cool young moms with their elegant strollers and well-dressed babies meandering around the well-groomed parks near our neighborhood. I had a \$5 umbrella stroller from a used children's good store, Bekah wore hand-me-downs from friends at church, and I wore ratty jeans. Besides I was almost twice as old as the twenty-somethings with the color coordinated diaper bags and accessories, and was mistaken for Bekah's grandmother more than once.

One day as I was praying (complaining?), God spoke a word to me. I don't know if the voice was audible but it might as well have been because the impact was so clear:

Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. Jeremiah 29:7

I studied this passage from Jeremiah about Israel in captivity in Babylon. God was basically telling the Israelites that there was no way out of the situation they were in except to wait for His timing and purpose to be fulfilled. For them, this was 70 years. I wasn't sure how long it would be for me, but from then on, whenever I felt my heart began to chafe under our poverty and felt the oppression of the wealth and arrogance of the city where I lived, I would immediately begin to pray for the city, for God's spirit to move and show men and women that Jesus was the strong tower where they could find safety, not their wealth (*A rich man's wealth is his strong city, and like a high wall in his imagination. Prov. 18:11*).

A few years later, I was able to lead Word of Faith in a Bible study on Praying for the City. In the study, we examined the place of the city in God's plan, and how cities could both bring blessing and curse. I adopted a principle from John Dawson's book *Taking our Cities for God*. He said, "Determining your city's redemptive gift is even more important than discerning the nature of evil principalities. Principalities rule through perverting the gift of a city in the same way an individual's gift is turned to the enemy's use through sin."

So I read a lot of books about the history of Santa Barbara, especially by Walter Tompkins who wrote separate small books on various Santa Barbara neighborhoods. From the early days of the city, it was a place of refreshment with hot springs, beaches, and lovely hotels. That was a gift we could pray into. At the same time you could understand the scars produced by the treatment of the Indians, and by racial conflict between Spanish settlers and Americans coming from the East, and later the oppressive treatment of Chinese laborers.

I enjoyed opportunities to lead studies on this and other topics such as Proverbs and the spiritual armor described in Ephesians 6. During the time when Bekah was small, I also became involved in running the nursery at church. As a new mom with high standards, I wanted to know exactly how the nursery was being run, that toys were clean, that supplies were adequate, and snacks appropriate. Since competition in this area was minimal, I eventually was put in charge of the nursery and even paid a small salary.

In September of 1996 when Bekah was two and a half, we enrolled her at Trinity Baptist preschool. She stayed there all the way through kindergarten and we established a basic rhythm of life. Michael worked from 7 to 3 pm at Devereaux. I would drop Bekah off at pre-school around 9 am, and Michael would pick her up at 3:30. We were glad that she only had to be there for 6.5 hours, rather than from 8 am to 6 pm like some of the other children.

I enjoyed my work. When I worked from home, I was given the manuals that the engineers worked on to correct and edit. After I went back to the office, I continued in that role. Eventually I asked so many questions and found so many inconsistencies that they asked me to become a software tester. I enjoyed that too, but my real passion was writing. After my knowledge of the software grew through testing, I moved back into the role of writing user guides and online help.

Deaths in the Family

During this time Michael's dad and my mom entered their last battles with cancer.

Ken Ernst Sr.



Ken Ernst Sr., Michael's father, was a well-known cartoonist. He began illustrating Mary Worth in 1942. With Allen Saunders, who wrote the story lines, Ken made Apple Mary, a penniless victim of the Great Depression, into a woman of dignity whose life was closely interwoven with the hundreds of characters who populated her world. The strip appeared in many newspapers in the United States and Canada and dozens more overseas. Ken's style of illustration opened the way for other "soap opera" strips such as Rex Morgan, MD.

Ken had grown up in Staunton, Ill, near Chicago. His father Fred Ernst and mother Jeannette Dreiboltz were both children of German immigrants. Fred was 16 years older than Jeannette, who married him when she was 19 and he was 35. They ran *The White Delicatessen* for many years on West Madison Street in Chicago. When I met Jeannette long after Fred was gone, she was still quite famous for her pies.

Ken became a Christian late in life as a result of the witness of his adult children, starting with his son Ken Jr. He took his faith seriously and became a true disciple in the local community church. In 1985, Ken was diagnosed with inoperable pancreatic cancer and died of a heart attack on August 6. It was a great loss for us.

Blanche Stone (nee Henriksen) (Jan 24, 1913 - Sept 2, 1988)

My mother was the daughter of first-generation Norwegian immigrants, and was quite proud of her heritage. Her mother Martha Bakke was one of ten sisters, five of whom immigrated to America as young women looking for husbands. Martha, then 16 years old, arrived at Ellis Island in April of 1904 with \$16. She came with her older sister Helena (20 years old) who had \$27.

Pictures of these sisters show stern and steely-eyed women who knew how to survive in tough times. All five sisters married hard-working Iowa farmers. Martha married John Henry Henrikson, the son of Norwegian immigrants, who became my maternal grandfather. Little coddling took place in these homes, and my mother, who actually had a very delicate nature, grew up to carry on some of that sternness and reticence to express affection.



One of the highpoints of my mother's life was visiting Norway. In 1957, my mom and dad left my sister Margaret and I with Aunt Myrtle (my mom's sister) and Uncle Don for the summer while they travelled to Norway and connected with distant relatives. Myrtle and Don lived on the original Iowa farmstead where my mom had grown up. The Norway trip was a joyful time of reconnecting for my mom, but not so much fun for my sister and I who had never experienced farm life before. We did learn

to enjoy collecting the eggs and playing in the silo, but using the chamber pot and the outhouse are not among my favorite childhood memories!

My mother had a long battle with leukemia. The doctors gave her six months to live, but she held on for over two years to celebrate her 50th wedding anniversary on June 9, 1988. All of us gathered in Iowa for this celebration. My mom slipped away a few months later on Sept 2. My dad took care of her at home up to the end, demonstrating once again the reality of God's faithful covenant love through his patience and self-sacrifice.



Shortly after my mom died, the Lord gave me a dream of her in heaven. She was dressed in lovely clothes, her face radiant and joyful, dancing gracefully before his throne. I had never seen my mom dance in real life, but I knew my mom had become her true self in the presence of her Savior. The Lord is so kind to comfort us with these glimpses of redemption.

Disillusionment with Word of Faith

Life went on with the normal challenges for the next six years. Our social and emotional life revolved around the church. We were at every service and prayer meeting and I continued to supervise the nursery, even when Bekah had moved on to the 3 and 4-year-old room.

We went to conferences featuring big name Word of Faith preachers such as Kenneth and Gloria Copland when they came to Los Angeles. We visited Apostle Fred Price's church Los Angeles. We had many special speakers come and visit our own Word of Faith church, prophets with words for everyone who lined up and preachers promising blessing if we gave seed money into their ministry.

But the message we were hearing gradually came to sound more and more hollow. We must have heard Luke 6:38 preached a hundred times: *"Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."* If I let my Bible fall open it was sure to open to a page with a scripture about giving.

We learned over and over about the spiritual gifts and how special God's prophets were. *"Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!"* (Psalm 105:15) was another favorite text and the answer to any challenging questions about leadership.

Contributing to our disillusionment was the fact that Michael's sister Michelle was the church administrator and knew all the ins and outs of church finance. Little bits and pieces would trickle down to us, and it became more and more obvious that something was wrong. Our youth director was arrested, tried, and imprisoned for molesting girls in his care. How did all these anointed prophets miss this? And then there was the night that Pastor Keith prayed for young people, lined

up in front of the congregation. He laid hands on one young person and prophesied over her as if she were a boy. Granted, this particular teenager had short hair and loose-fitting jeans and shirt, but would a prophet of God mistake a girl for a boy?

There were other conflicts over the special privileges of leadership.

Interestingly, one influence that was drawing us more and more away from Word of Faith was music. Now no one could ever claim that the music that typified the Word of Faith movement had much artistic merit. We used to sing Christian lyrics to old bar songs and march around the sanctuary waving flags, singing verses such as:

Cast out the Devil! Resist him and he will flee.
Cast out the Devil! We have the victory.
Cast out the Devil and stomp him on the floor!

As a worship leader, Michael was looking for more spiritual songs and we subscribed to Integrity Music and received new music tapes regularly. Michael was drawn to the worshipful lyrics coming out of the Vineyard, fresh songs full of God's glory. One weekend, we took Bekah to Disneyland on a Saturday and on Sunday we visited the Vineyard. That became a bone of contention with the pastors, who didn't understand why we didn't go to Fred Price's church if we were in that neighborhood.

Another Baby!

As all this was happening, I woke up one day feeling ill. This went on for a few mornings, and I found myself wondering, could it be? I was now 44 years old, way past the time of having babies. But it was true; I was definitely pregnant. I struggled with this for a while; I was just beginning to advance in my career with increased responsibility and corresponding bigger salary. Bekah was in school full-time and we all had more independence.

But the Holy Spirit comforted me and whispered to my heart that this child would bring much joy. I was sure we were going to have a boy. This baby was much more active than Rebekah had been, constantly kicking. I imagined a champion football player when I should have been picturing a ballerina.

About a week before I went into labor, I read this passage in my morning devotions:

"And Jesus led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them" Luke 24:50.

And just like that, I knew we were having a girl and that we would name her Bethany. This was definitely as far as God was taking us regarding adding children to our family. Joy became her middle name based on His promise to me. On Jan 14, 1991, at 5:24 pm, Bethany Joy arrived by C-section at Cottage Hospital, a few weeks early, but a perfect, lovely child.

We did however have a bit of a challenge getting her home. Softool Corp. had decided to change their insurance provider, beginning January 1, 1991. Management had been very solicitous of me, since I was the first employee in the history of the company to be pregnant. At that time, the company was composed largely of recent UCSB graduates, most single. So a private meeting was arranged with the new insurance representative who assured me that the transition would be completely smooth and I would have no problems with coverage.

Perhaps if Bethany had arrived on schedule in February, that might have been true. As it was, when I was ready to leave, the nurse placed Bethany in my arms and pushed my wheelchair downstairs. But instead of going out to where Michael waited with the car, she wheeled me into the insurance office where I was informed that I would not be allowed to leave until I came up with several thousand dollars, since I had no insurance. After a few frantic phone calls, we eventually worked everything out and took our new precious bundle home.

This time, however, I couldn't endure dealing with termite droppings in the crib again. My sweet and generous father had come to visit us over Christmas and he saw my distress at the idea of bringing another baby into our shabby apartment. God moved upon his heart to offer to help us move. Shortly after Bethany was born, we were able to move into a duplex on a dirt road behind a golf course. We had windows that let in sunshine, two bedrooms, a patio, a yard, and a quiet street where Bekah could ride her bike. And we had hookups for a washer and dryer in our house. For the first time in many years, I wouldn't have to carry laundry somewhere outside my home!



My dad's generosity included not only help with the security deposit on the duplex but also money to purchase a new washer and dryer and a new refrigerator. God was so kind to us! Other than having to go back to work when Bethany was 8 weeks old, my heart was full. But even in this, God's kindness was evident.

I knew Lucy Regelado from church where she helped with the children. An older widow, she loved Jesus and loved children. I knew she was living on a limited pension, so I asked her if she would be willing to care for little Bethany in our home. We worked out an arrangement that lasted until Bethany was able to go to preschool. I am forever grateful for her support during this time. She not only took care of Bethany, she cleaned my kitchen and did laundry. She folded the clean laundry so carefully Michael and I used to joke that it looked like it had been ironed. I have never forgotten God's provision during this time of our life and whenever I am tempted to fear lack in some area, I remember His goodness and laugh.

Leaving Word of Faith

An added benefit of our new duplex home was a family that went to Word of Faith who lived at the end of the street. They had a son about Rebekah's age so she had a playmate. As we were such close neighbors, I found myself confiding in his mother. I told her about my growing

reservations about what was going on at Word of Faith, the one-sided emphasis on wealth, the way leadership set themselves above reproof. That proved to be the beginning of the end for our time at Word of Faith, as she repeated everything I told her to the pastor's wife.

This eventually led to a phone call from the pastor telling us that it would be better if we didn't show up for the next Sunday service, or for that matter, it would be even better if we never showed up again.

Though our hearts had been heading in the direction of leaving Word of Faith, this abrupt end was quite a shock. We wanted leaving to be in our timing and at our initiative, rather than essentially being kicked out. In retrospect, my lack of wisdom in sharing my thoughts led directly to how our departure played out. But I can also see God's mercy in bringing an end to an unhealthy situation that we might have allowing to linger on longer and longer.

As we processed what had happened, the Holy Spirit had to show me a lot of difficult lessons as a result of our years in Word of Faith. In the end, I had to admit that the leadership style of Word of Faith wasn't that different than that of the Moonies. While the Unification Church led by Sun Myung Moon clearly met the definition of a cult, the Word of Faith movement as we experienced it also had cultish elements. The following are three important ones:

- **Exclusive.** We were expected to only fellowship with other Word of Faith ministries and taught that we had a special hold on truth; other churches and denominations were missing the fullness of what we had.
- **Authoritarian.** Leaders were above reproach and operated on different principles than regular believers. Dissent and disagreement were discouraged. Looking and acting right was very important.
- **Selective use of Scriptures.** Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 that: "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*" Yet we heard the same few scriptures over and over. A church that neglects the whole Bible but emphasizes only certain themes leaves believers incomplete, vulnerable, and confused.

I had to ask myself what was in me that led me from one cultish experience to another, and I realized that God was calling me to grow up. Because I had made so many poor choices during my years of rebellion, I didn't fully trust that the Holy Spirit could lead me in paths of righteousness. Instead, I liked the idea of a strong leader giving direction so I could simply do what I was told, rather than learning to trust the Holy Spirit.

However, over and over again, the New Testament proclaimed freedom from a yoke of bondage. Jesus calls us friends, not servants, and his true children are those who are led by the Spirit. I emerged from our experience with Word of Faith with a much greater desire to read the Bible for myself, to ask the Holy Spirit to lead me into truth, and to be a Berean, examining everything I was told to see if it is really in the scripture.

Keith and Mary Hudson had left Word of Faith by the time we left. They continued to pursue ministry through evangelism and speaking engagements. They are better known now as the parents of Katie Perry, the pop singer, who took her mother's maiden name as a stage name. I took care of Katie in the nursery for three years; she was a year younger than Rebekah.

Attending Calvary Chapel

After visiting a few churches around town, we settled into Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara. Our experience at Word of Faith had convinced us of the primary importance of teaching systematically through the Bible, one book at a time. This was a hallmark of the Calvary Chapel approach to scripture. We also appreciated their well-run children's church and activities for kids, and their welcoming attitude. Calvary Chapel Santa Barbara would be our church home until we moved to Carpinteria.

So by 1994, we had left Word of Faith and found a new church and Bethany had started preschool at Trinity Baptist, where Bekah had gone to school. Rebekah was attending Vieja Valley Elementary School, in an exclusive area of town called Hope Ranch. Life seemed to be settling into a new pattern, but I was growing increasingly restless at my job.

Several factors at work combined to bring me to the point where I started looking for a new job. Finding a job was a slow process, but eventually after several interviews I was offered a job at QAD, another software company located in Carpinteria, about 12 miles south of where we lived. In March of 1995 I started working at QAD—a larger company with a more exciting future than Softool. With the new job came more money and we began to think about moving.

Working in Carpinteria, I was concerned about the girls being so far from me. This concern was partly based on my experience of the Painted Cave fire in 1990 when I was pregnant with Bethany. I was working late at Softool in Goleta the night the fire broke out, in a room without windows. I finally got ready to leave around 7:30 pm and when I went outside, I was assaulted by the smell of smoke. The security guard warned me that there was a big fire near the freeway. I jumped in my car and started racing back to town. The fire jumped the freeway at 7:42 pm and the freeway was closed behind me, but I managed to squeak through and made it home.

So we began to consider moving to Carpinteria.

Chapter 6: Carpinteria

The Lord gave us a wonderful relator, a friend from church, who helped us walk through all the challenges of being first time homebuyers. We were thinking of getting a VA loan since Michael had served in the National Guard, but my faithful father offered us money for a down payment. After looking at many condos in search of an affordable option, we settled on a three-bedroom condo on the South edge of Carpinteria, with a glimpse of the ocean from the upstairs bedroom. We moved into the condo in April of 1996. The girls finished the school year in Santa Barbara, and in June, Bethany started at Kinderkirk, a church-run preschool in Carpinteria, while Bekah started seventh grade at Carpinteria Middle School in the fall.



In the same month that we experienced the blessing of a new home, we also experienced another great loss. Michael's brother Ken succumbed to leukemia at the young age of 48, leaving his wife Elizabeth with three young children. Michael and Ken were only 15 months apart and had experienced a lot of life together. It was not easy to say good-bye to him.

Once we were settled in our home, Bethany adjusted quickly to the move. Adapting was much more of a challenge for Rebekah. Her previous school drew from a demographic that was largely white, well educated, and well-to-do business people. Carpinteria High School was predominately Latinos, many spoke Spanish as their first language, and parents worked in the local agriculture industry.

If I have often thought that in trying to keep our girls physically safe, I put them in the path of a different kind of danger, especially Rebekah, who experienced a number of rocky years trying to find friends and fit in. Moving with a child just entering adolescence is probably not the best idea. But purchasing anything in her previous school district was impossible. The high cost of living in the Central Coast region takes its toll on families and certainly affected ours.

After moving to Carpinteria, we began attending the small local Calvary Chapel Mountain Shores that met in the elementary school gymnasium. Michael became part of the worship team and a member of the elder board and we enjoyed getting to know everyone who attended. We fellowshiped at this church while Bethany was in elementary school and Bekah finished high school.

Working at QAD

Working at QAD was a challenge at many levels. QAD developed manufacturing inventory software, supporting both manufacturing and financial processes. When I started, I really had no idea what they did. My only experience of manufacturing was the horribly painful summer before college when I worked on an assembly line at Eastman Kodak. And regarding finance and accounting, I considered myself doing well if I could balance my checkbook.

The Lord showed his mercy to me in that I was assigned to write about a new module being developed for managing service calls. Asking for help was something I could understand and managing the process of providing help seemed quite intuitive to me. I wrote the longest manual ever produced at QAD about this complex module and it was quite well received.

But the other challenge at QAD was working as part of a team. At Softool, I had been the sole technical writer so I decided all the stylistic issues myself. When I started at QAD, I found that we had a “team” of individuals. The approach was rather like the book of Judges: everyone did what was right in their own eyes. This affected our documentation at both a high level and in the details. Various documents looked nothing like each other, and consistent rules for product naming and grammar choices were non-existent: is it cancelling or canceling? (And yes, you have to be a grammar nerd to care!)

Since I was the one who had the greatest problem with inconsistency, I found myself in charge of the task of creating a Corporate Style Guide. Once the guide was written and approved, we needed someone to ensure guidelines were actually applied. That led me into an editorial role. Editing the company-wide set of manuals became a great opportunity to learn how the various software modules worked, and I gradually developed a good understanding of the product as a whole.

As people came and left our department, I stayed. As a result, I was eventually offered the position of manager of the Knowledge Engineering department (our fancy term for technical writing). This led to a whole new dimension of challenges in guiding and managing people. I was the manager of the department from 2000 to 2006.

Michael’s Mom Dies (July 5, 2000)

For years, Michael and I took the girls up to Oregon to visit his parents almost every summer. After Michael’s father died in 1985, his mother sold the big house in the country and moved into a small home in Myrtle Point. Her own health began to decline, largely due to emphysema from smoking. In July of 2000, when we heard that the end was near, we made a hurried trip over the July 4th holiday and arrived in time to spend a few days at her bedside. She died on July 5, 2000 at the age of 85.



Michael’s mom had faced some difficult challenges starting with the death of her mother when she was only

11. She seems to have lived with various older sisters as a teenager. Her mother Beatrice Clark was married at the age of 15, had 9 children in close succession, and died at the age of 35. Beatrice was of Irish descent. Beatrice's mother Mary McCarthy had also died young. She was the daughter of two Irish immigrants who had escaped Ireland during the potato famine. Mary's father John McCarthy left Ireland by himself as a boy of 13 in 1847. We learned on a recent trip to Ireland that many families sent the strongest of their children on the boats to America in hopes that they would survive and start a new life while the weak ones stayed in Ireland and died.

John McCarthy was definitely a survivor. He had many occupations and ended up as a well-known and respected hat merchant in Lafayette, Ill. In 1858, he married Margaret Calnan, who was also born in County Cork, Ireland, and who had left her parents and home during the potato famine to come to America with her aunt.

John retained his bitterness over how the Irish had been treated by the English during the famine and in 1866, he was appointed a colonel in the Fenian army when they invaded Canada, the most accessible part of the British empire that the American Irish could attack. This little-known episode of American history is documented in the book *When the Irish Invaded Canada: The Incredible True Story of the Civil War Veterans Who Fought for Ireland's Freedom* by Christopher Klein.

We love having Irish as part of our heritage. My father's grandmother Isabella McCormick came to America as a small child with her family in 1850 as a result of the potato famine. When I discovered my birth family, I found that my birth mother was born and raised in Northern Ireland, completing the Irish connections.

Changes and Growth in the Decade of 2000

Career and Travels

As manager of the technical writing group at QAD I had many responsibilities especially during a period of growth when we added several international offices. With the extra work, however, came the wonderful opportunity of traveling.

In May, 2004, I made my first trip overseas. QAD had opened an office in Limerick, Ireland. Ireland was a popular location for software companies at the time because of the many university graduates looking for jobs in technology. Microsoft had also recently opened an office there. As the office staff grew, we hired a writer to work out of the office in Limerick and I was sent over to train him.

My first international trip introduced me quickly to the challenges of travel. I flew from LAX to Chicago, and from Chicago I took a red-eye to Shannon airport outside Limerick. I fell asleep on the long flight to wake up to the voice of the pilot telling us we were landing in Boston! While over the Atlantic, he had turned the plane back because of engine problems and thought it best to let us sleep without worry.

My corporate travel agent was able to arrange a flight out of Boston for me the next day. I will always remember the feeling I had in Ireland, something that I didn't feel in any other country I visited...I felt like I had come home. I loved everything about Ireland, the accents, the music, the shape of the rolling hills and scattered sheep. As it turns out, in a way I had. I tell more about that in the chapter on finding my birth family.

At the end of Dec 2005, I planned a trip to Shanghai and Bethany was able to go with me. I was sent to QAD's Shanghai office to train our first Chinese writer. Hunter was a delightful young man who had learned colloquial English from watching American movies, and probably knew more slang than I did. This trip also had its challenges. Our flight to China left from San Francisco. The connecting flight from Santa Barbara was delayed by fog and we arrived at our gate in San Francisco to see our plane beginning to taxi away. After a night in an airport hotel, we caught another flight to Shanghai.

Everything about this trip was new to me. We stayed in an amazing hotel. QAD had offices in the lower part of the building and visitors received a discounted rate on hotel rooms in the top floors. This is probably the most luxurious place I have ever stayed in. Bethany hung out in the room during the day and we went on adventures every night. Hunter, my writing employee, escorted us around the city and took us places most tourists don't go. We did touristy things too, going to a temple, watching a gymnastics show, and on the weekend, we toured a water town, a city that had canals for streets. This trip was an eye-opening experience for both of us.

After that I had a few years with regular international trips. One time I spent a week in Limerick, then took the train to Dublin, and flew to Birmingham England for two weeks. On that trip I was able to spend a weekend in London, tour the city, and take in a play (Peter Pan) with my niece Jennifer who lived in London.

I attended a conference in Amsterdam and had a day to visit museums. Van Gogh was a highlight and seeing Ann Frank's home. Having a company party next to the Red-Light district was a definite low point. I wandered off for fresh air at one point but did an about face when I saw unclothed women standing in the windows along the street. At this point I definitely felt like a "foreigner."

Reality Carpinteria Begins Sept 2003

In 2003, our little Calvary Chapel had been experiencing some leadership challenges. When Britt Merrick, a local surfing legend, decided to start a church called Reality in Carpinteria, we saw this as God's answer for a new beginning and immediately got involved. Britt had been the college pastor at Calvary Chapel in Santa Barbara, and now wanted to start a new work in his home town.

Reality was a great place for Bethany to grow up as they had a strong and adventurous youth group where she thrived.

As I write this, Reality Carpinteria has entered its 16th year, which sounds like a very long time to me. Reality is where I really learned to pray and where God touched my heart and gave me a fresh passion for reaching the unreached.

When Michael went to seminary, we attended a seminar on reaching Muslims and seriously considered whether the Lord might be calling us into cross-cultural ministry. That idea gradually faded and as we moved to California and began a family, our focus became very much local. But a key focus of Reality leadership was a heart to send missionaries and to pray for them. I began attending mission prayer meetings and God began awakening in me his passion for the lost.

The Lord also gave me two adventurous daughters. Their travels taught me much about cross-cultural realities and the power of prayer.

Rebekah Studies and Lives Abroad

Rebekah graduated from Carpinteria High School in 2002. A year earlier she had discovered that she had a talent for running and running fast. She currently still holds the girls' record for the mile (5:13) and the two-mile (11:06) at Carpinteria High School since 2002. Her running drew the attention of the track coach at Westmont who offered her a scholarship. But an injury late in the Spring 2002 season proved the beginning of the end of her running career. After a year at Westmont, she transferred to Santa Barbara City College, a much more affordable option.

In the Fall of 2004, Rebekah participated in a semester abroad in China as part of her sophomore year at Santa Barbara City. It was during that trip that I discovered the joys of Skype. She was able to communicate with me from a Computer Café. I will never forget the joy of seeing her face the first time at midnight when we finally managed to achieve a successful connection. I have been very grateful over the years for the technology that has allowed me to stay in contact with my traveling daughters!

After getting her AA degree at City College, Rebekah decided that she wanted to finish college in Hawaii and was accepted at Hawaii Pacific University starting in January 2005. That Christmas, she spent a month in Uganda living with Joshua, a local Ugandan pastor, and his family and teaching at his orphanage, an experience that deeply affected her and influenced the shape of her

next years.



After Rebekah graduated from Hawaii Pacific University in 2006, she spent some time at a ministry in Mexico but still had a longing to return to Africa. While working in Santa Barbara, she began researching jobs abroad. She soon discovered that the simplest and easiest type of job to get abroad was serving as a nanny in a home in the location of interest.

She began checking out many families in different locations, and finally settled on a well-educated Muslim family living in Cairo. In November of 2006 they finalized a job offer and she flew off to

Egypt to care for three young boys.

Once in Cairo, the day-to-day reality of living with this family was nothing like it had been described. In Muslim cultures, men and sons are often given a higher priority than women, and Rebekah found herself forbidden to correct the behavior of the boys she was in charge of. This quickly became frustrating. In his kindness, the Lord had prepared a way of escape.

Our niece (Bekah's cousin) married a young man from an Egyptian Coptic family. He still had close relatives living in Cairo and Bekah was able to contact them. They provided her a place to live while she tried to figure out her next step. That step involved going to graduate school at the American University in Cairo where she took classes in Refugee Resettlement and International Law. While she was waiting to start school in the Fall, she decided to visit Uganda again.

Her trip in May of 2007 coincided with a business trip I was taking to Ireland. I made a quick decision to meet her in Kampala for a week when my two weeks at my company office in Limerick were over. I got a yellow fever vaccination in Ireland and purchased some supplies such as soccer balls and candy and left from Heathrow on a Friday night. Pastor Joshua was kind enough to pick me up at the airport and take Bekah and I to a comfortable guest house where we shared a room for the week.

My first adventure in a third-world country was an eye-opening experience. I think I was most impressed by the traffic...even worse than in China. How did anyone know when to stop and when to go? And pedestrians took their life in their hands trying to cross busy roads.

I especially enjoyed worshiping at the local church and experiencing personally how worship in any language is heavenly...you don't need to understand the words to enter the worship. I also enjoyed meeting Joshua's family. The first time we went to his house, which was a simple concrete structure behind security walls, his children were watching an American children's program on TBN. Watching them dance and clap as a bunch of white kids sang rather sober American songs was a bit unreal. It was also painful to realize that TBN was the primary face of American Christianity that was being seen here.

Bekah and I had a full week of activities. We visited Joshua's orphanage where Bekah had worked and delivered some books I had brought to the head of a home for handicapped children. I got to meet a young boy I had sponsored through Africa Renewal Ministries and we toured the children's homes at Bethany Village.

We took one day to be tourists and visited the source of the Nile in Jinja where we explored the banks by boat and had a fish dinner at the boat pier. As we were driving there, we came across an overturned truck and Rebekah decided to take a couple of pictures. A few minutes later, we heard a siren behind us and a police car soon came alongside us and motioned us to stop. Police in Uganda look like soldiers...they carry rifles, not guns in holsters, and this policeman with his gun pointed was angry. He wanted to know who had the camera. He was planning to destroy it, but Bekah had deleted the pictures, and Joshua managed to calm him down so that we were able to continue. Joshua explained that the truck had been full of illegally harvested trees taken from

government land and the “policeman” had been hired to make sure no one knew about the illegal operation.

One evening, Bekah and I sat in the veranda of the guest house, listening to the crickets and watching the sun set over the hills of Kampala. The guest house was at the top of a hill above the noise and people, and my heart was filled with gratitude for the opportunity to be in this beautiful country and experience it with my daughter. Kampala is a city of many hills and while I was looking out I noticed that almost every hill had some kind of large building on the top. When I asked Bekah about it she said the buildings were mosques. Some were not being used, but money was being sent to purchase all the hilltops for the construction of Muslim places of worship.

A sense of urgency to bring the Gospel to the nations overwhelmed me...especially to bring strong Gospel teaching to shore up churches from the syncretism endemic in the culture. God birthed in me a deeper passion to pray for his Word to go forth than I had ever experienced before. The Holy Spirit packed a lot of experience into that week in Kampala!

Bekah started school at the American University in Cairo in the Fall and in 2010 she earned a Master’s degree in International Human Rights Law. She returned to Uganda during that time to do research. Her thesis was titled *Armed Conflict in Light of Colonialism’s Legacy: Reweaving the Social Fabric of Uganda*, published December 2009.

Her Master’s degree led to a job with Church World Services, an organization under contract to the US government to interview refugees and process the paperwork for entry into the US. Rebekah was based in Nairobi, Kenya, but travelled to refugee camps all over Africa. In April of 2011, I was able to visit Bekah in Kenya and experience a little of her life there.

Bethany Explores the World

Because of the seven-year difference in their ages, during much of the time that Bethany was in Jr. High and High School, Rebekah was living either away from home or internationally.

Reality Church opened when Bethany was 12, and just entering junior high. Part of Reality’s vision was to reach youth, and as a result, the youth group was a priority. Dom and Emily Balli were her first youth leaders and Emily had a profound influence on Bethany by encouraging her to think about missions and to step out of her comfort zone.



With Emily’s encouragement, Bethany went on her first mission trip in 2004 when she was 13. She travelled first to Texas and then to Panama with a large group of junior high girls, organized through Focus on the Family’s Brio magazine. Traveling with a group without knowing anyone was a huge step for a somewhat shy junior high girl, but God blessed this time by growing her interest missions as well as her confidence.

And over the next few years, Reality was very intentional about engaging the youth in missions. As a result, Bethany began traveling internationally almost every summer.

In August 2005, the summer before Bethany started high school, Reality sent a team of youth and adults to Thailand to visit Baan Emmanuel, a children's home run by Ron Miller. Letting her go to Thailand was a struggle for me, since she was one of the youngest in the group going. But Bethany was mature for her age, serious about following the Lord, and very determined.

This trip had a deep impact on her and was the beginning of a lasting interest in SE Asia. "Mom," she told me when she returned that summer, "these kids have nothing compared to us but they never complain and they are actually full of joy." She couldn't get over how the older kids helped the younger ones get ready for school and how all the children gathered early in the morning to pray and sing praises to Jesus before a simple breakfast of rice. That was the sweet side of her experience, but sorrow was also mixed in. Her face stricken by a new awareness of the effect of sin in the world as she showed me pictures of little girls younger than herself who had been rescued from prostitution and slavery.

The trip also impacted me to become even more involved with missions at Reality. That year I joined the Sending Team, a group of staff and non-staff people who wanted to help those feeling called to serve cross-culturally to discern God's voice and be supported as they pursued steps of obedience.

One of my initial assignments on the Sending Team was to be the point person for a team going to Sri Lanka the summer of 2006. This was a volatile time in Sri Lanka with several outbreaks of violence. Praying for this team and gathering others to pray was both challenging and rewarding. God protected them and used them and God taught me much about being a watchman on the wall for others.

In 2007, the summer after 10th grade, Bethany joined a team from Global Expeditions in an outreach to Hong Kong and Southern China from July 10 to Aug 4. Through English teaching, drama, music, and games, the team built relationships and presented the plan of salvation. She returned home exhausted and actually had a hard time as school began. When I finally took her to see the doctor, it turned out that she had contracted mononucleosis. This particular team was perhaps too aggressive in their goals and timelines and kept the teens constantly on the move. This was another lesson on the importance of ensuring that Sabbath rest is part of any ministry outreach.

Perspectives

As I got more involved with missions, I realized that I needed to become better informed about the issues of cross-cultural ministry. This is when I first heard about the Perspectives on the World Christian Movement course and signed up to take it in the Spring of 2008 at Montecito Covenant Church. Each week, I left directly from work to attend the three-hour class, which made for a very long day. Perspectives looks missions from four lenses: the Biblical foundation, the history, cross-cultural aspects, and mission strategy.

I was completely absorbed by this class, as I discovered how God's heart for the nations could be found from Genesis to Revelation. I loved the history section especially and began immediately researching missionary biographies to read. The cultural section was also helpful as I began to see how Western assumptions about cultural truths had damaged the witness for Christ and that God was looking for humble learners.

The first missionary biography I read was *To the Golden Shore: The Life of Adoniram Judson* by Courtney Anderson. Adoniram Judson and his wife Anne were among the first missionaries sent from America. Judson's life was one of extraordinary persistence in the face of enormous obstacles. He lost children, two wives, spent time being tortured in a Burmese prison, and experienced a year of despair when he sat daily in a grave he had dug beside the wife he had recently buried. Yet through everything, God kept and restored him and in the end he saw great fruit from his labors.

I always recommend this book as an introduction to missions because it immediately eliminates any romantic notions of living abroad!

The Perspectives class was truly life changing for me. For the first time, I was able to see with a new focus and clarity the overarching story of the Bible and God's eternal intention to include every race, tribe, and tongue in his redeemed world.

The timing of this class was also opportune, because I was about to need all the faith I could muster for Bethany's next adventure.

Bethany's Trip with Challenges

On Wednesday, July 16, 2008 a team of youth and youth leaders from Reality Carpinteria left for another two-week ministry trip to Baan Emmanuel in Northern Thailand. The team included Bethany and her friend (later husband) Mulch Stetson, and five other teens, as well as the youth pastor and 4 other adult leaders.

In some ways this trip was a turning point for me. Bethany was so excited to go on this trip. As a high school junior, she got her first "real" job as a barista at a local coffee shop and carefully saved money to cover the plane fare. She and the others in the youth group held bake sales, car washes, and cooked tacos to raise even more money. They collected medical supplies and other items for the children and packed extra bags, taking only what was absolutely necessary for themselves. The group met regularly during the weeks before the trip to learn more about Thailand, the Thai people, and culture. They prayed and read scriptures and asked the Lord to prepare their hearts for this experience.

I saw the team off on the bus to LAX and then headed to work. When I checked my phone later, I was shocked to see 19 missed calls from Bethany. Something was wrong! When I connected with her, she told me that the airline was refusing to let her board the plane because her passport expired within six months of their return date. This was July and her passport expired in January

of the next year, exactly 5 ½ months after their return date. Even after desperate negotiations with the airline, the team eventually left without her.

She called a few minutes later, all strength drained from her voice, “It’s over. They’ve closed the plane’s doors. And the airline attendant just told me that my ticket can’t be reused.” For the first time since the nightmare began, my daughter’s voice broke and the tears came. “Mom,” she sobbed, “I’m not going; you have to come pick me up.”

My daughter was alone at Los Angeles International Airport, her plans of renewing her friendship with the Thai children snatched away. Devastated I sat in my office behind closed doors fighting tears myself. Summoning all my strength I told Bethany to give me some time to think; I wasn’t going down to pick her up without a plan. Then putting down the phone, I cried out silently to the Lord for help. “God,” I prayed, “How could this happen? How could we not have known about this rule? How could you let my daughter be so disappointed?” Deep within, I felt His voice strengthen me, “Trust me; don’t give up. Keep fighting. I will make a way.”

I posted a quick prayer request on the team’s blog site and began making phone calls. Many calls later, I had a plan. Bethany was to be picked up by a friend—a young woman who lived in LA close to the airport. Our wonderful travel agent was able to get her on a flight to Thailand leaving two days later, even though the airline agent had told Bethany that her ticket couldn’t be reused. All she needed now was a new passport.

Acting on faith, I told Bethany to stop on the way to her friend’s apartment to have new passport photos taken. This picture was the result...at this point, she could barely stand up; she hadn’t eaten all day, and had a terrible headache. No smile for the camera.



Because we lived close to Los Angeles, we were fortunate to have access to a regional passport center. I would pick her up early in the next morning and we would be at the center when they opened hoping for a chance to get a new passport that day. Then we would stay overnight in LA and I would take her to the airport the next day.

At 4 AM the next morning I found myself on the freeway driving to Los Angeles, praying that the passport renewal process would be successful. I had carefully researched the requirements and had her birth certificate tucked away in my purse with a completed application form. Everything went smoothly. I found her friend’s apartment, we drove to the center, and after waiting anxiously for an hour were able to get an appointment. Within the next hour, we had completed all the forms and were told to return at 1 pm to pick up the passport. That afternoon, with passport in hand, we found a hotel, fell exhausted on the beds, and took long and much needed naps.

The next morning, Bethany was soon ready to pass through airport security and leave me behind. It was only then I fully realized that I was sending my 17-year-old daughter half way around the world by herself! She had no team of laughing, praying friends to share her experience; no

seasoned adult leaders; a 17-hour layover in Singapore by herself, and on top of everything else, she was flying into Chiang Mai, not Chiang Rai, and had to negotiate a four-hour bus ride by herself. What was I thinking!

“Trust Me,” I heard the Lord’s voice again. Giving my daughter a last hug, I sent her off through the gate.

The adventure didn’t end at the LA airport. In Singapore, she found free Internet access and we chatted online on and off during her 17-hour layover. The next leg of the flight was to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand but her ultimate destination was Chiang Rai, four hours even further north, near the border of Myanmar and Laos. Ron, the orphanage director, had picked up the team Chiang Mai, but making the long trip again for one person was too costly. Bethany would need to take a bus by herself through the mountains of Thailand to Chiang Rai. Friends of the orphanage director who lived in Chiang Mai and spoke Thai would help her get on the bus.

At 3 AM that morning, the beep of my cell phone on the nightstand woke me up. I groped for the phone in the dark, seeing a text message from Bethany. “Mom,” she texted, “I’m at the airport in Chiang Mai and no one is here for me. What should I do?” Panic gripped me; but again the Lord’s voice whispered, “Trust me; don’t give up.” “Just wait and pray,” I texted back. “They’ll come.” Monsoon rains delayed the friends for over an hour, but they did indeed show up.

Bethany spent the night with this delightful missionary couple and they helped her find the right bus to Chiang Rai the next morning. It seemed forever before her final victorious text message arrived: “They got me!” She was picked up by her team and embraced by a truckload of Thai children...joy restored!



Relief washed over me...along with the realization of how wrong I had been. I had not sent my daughter half way around the world alone. The One who had promised never to leave us or forsake us had been with Bethany and prayers on both sides of the ocean were smoothing her path. It’s true that Bethany’s trip was different than the rest of the team; she had a few less days in Thailand and she missed some of the fun experiences they had. But her detour had actually been the direct path to a powerful lesson in faith and trust for both of us.

My Dad is Called Home (Nov 5, 2008)



After my mom died in 1988, my dad continued to live by himself and remained active in his church and community. For almost twenty years, he was healthy and independent and often came to visit us for Christmas. But toward the end of his life he began to weaken and was diagnosed with bladder cancer.

At the age of 93, he chose radiation treatment, wanting to prolong life, but the treatment weakened him even more. When I went to Iowa to visit him, I found him becoming unable to care for himself and during the summer of 2008, I talked him into moving into an assisted living situation. Leaving home was the beginning of his final decline and in November, I was getting regular calls from the nurses about his failing condition.



On November 25, 2008 I met my sister at the airport in Denver and we flew together to Iowa. When we landed, I had a message on my phone from the nurse that my dad had taken his last breath. It was hard not being there with him. I found comfort that he did have a special friend with him at the end...a sweet neighbor lady, a widow, and member of his church who had become his regular companion.

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Michael and Bethany flew to Iowa for the funeral and my dad was laid to rest in West Bend, next to my mom, near where they had both attended school as children.

My dad was a special man. I found one of the best descriptions of his personality in Tom Brokow's book *The Greatest Generation*.

Brokow details the ramping up of military production during WWII and the complex assembly of planes, tanks, and all that was necessary for war. Keeping assembly lines moving became a major national goal, and downtime for repairs was to be avoided at all cost. Under these circumstances, Boeing sent out a call for Iowa farm boys, because they found that young men who had grown up on rural farms were able to diagnose problems and fix them with whatever was at hand without lengthy downtime and waiting for parts.

This is how one of the characters in *The Greatest Generation* describes the farm boy character:

He says Boeing tried to find farm boys for their workforce "because we were used to long hours. Out on the farm we got up at four A.M. to milk the cows and then milked them again at eight-thirty that night. So hard work wasn't anything." There was another dividend for Boeing in hiring farm boys at a time when the aircraft industry was in a do-or-die creative phase. Farm boys were inventive and good with their hands. They were accustomed to finding solutions to mechanical and design problems on their own. There was no one else to ask when the tractor broke down or the threshing machine fouled, no 1-800-CALL HELP operators standing by in those days.⁶

My dad had that kind of mechanical inventiveness and persistence; he could fix anything that needed fixing. He spent WWII with a high security clearance at Eastman Kodak managing the maintenance and operation of a department that made fuses for detonating anti-aircraft shells. These shells were critical to the war effort and at times shipped directly from Rochester to the battlefield. He continued at Kodak with increasingly responsible positions. When he retired, he

⁶ Brokow, Tom, *The Greatest Generation*, Random House, NY, 1998, Page 92

and my mother moved to Mason City and he bought a van and equipped it as a mobile workplace and became a handyman.

In his 90's, he was installing security devices for "the old people" who needed them. How we missed his gentle loving presence in our family.

Changes at Work

I enjoyed my position managing the technical writing group at QAD. Even as a manager, I still had some opportunity to write and edit, both activities that I found deeply satisfying. I was also included in many planning activities and found that I actually enjoyed making time lines and managing schedules. I would have been content in that position long term. But in 2006, upper management began a set of organizational changes. My department, which had always been a part of Research and Development, was going to be moved under a different executive, and he envisioned a broad set of changes in the way work would be done.

As part of that vision, he decided that the department needed a new manager. I was offered a position in R&D as a "product architect" in release management, based on my experience with schedules and planning. This position was an awkward fit for me and eliminated the activities I enjoyed most: writing and editing. After three years, when QAD implemented a volunteer separation program, I decided to leave. In May of 2009, I was officially unemployed at the age of 63.

In the Spring of 2009, Reality hosted their first Perspectives class. I attended the coordinator training and signed up to help with grading and administration. Bethany and Mulch as high school students both took the class and wrote a joint paper on the Rohingya.

Chapter 7: The 2010's and Retirement

A Happy Wedding

After high school graduation, Bethany planned to return to Baan Emmanuel to spend a longer period working with the children. She found another young woman with a similar interest, and the two of them spent five weeks at the orphanage. When she returned, she started her first year at Santa Barbara City College.

The next summer in 2010, Reality again sent a team to Thailand from June 20 – July 3, and again Mulch and Bethany were part of the team.



In June of 2011, I was able to go on a week trip to Haiti to visit a home for children managed by Child Hope International. This trip involved much preparation, study, and prayer. Haiti is unfortunately a textbook example of the scenario described by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert in their classic work *When Helping Hurts*. It was hard for us not to see ourselves as part of problem, rather than part of the solution. I am glad to see that mission thought is now turning more to home-centered care for orphans.



Bethany graduated from Santa Barbara City College the summer of 2011. By then her relationship with Mulch had developed into much more than friendship, so wedding planning became the focus.

On September 10, 2011, they celebrate among friends and family with a lovely ceremony at the Stow House in Goleta and began life together as husband and wife.

After the wedding, Bethany took a year off school to work before resuming education at UCSB where she graduated in June of 2014 with a degree in Global Studies. Among other classes on the Middle East, she also studied Arabic for two years, and celebrated her graduation with a summer trip to Bethlehem with Holy Land Trust as part of the Palestine Summer Encounter program. For two months, she lived with a Christian Palestinian family in Bethlehem and worked to create a leadership curriculum for women and girls. She also arrived in Tel Aviv when rockets were landing on the city and spent her first few days in a bomb shelter, assuring us she was “perfectly safe.”

There can be, we know, no safer place than in the center of God's will and he did indeed keep her safe. Mulch joined her in Bethlehem at the end of her session and they were able to travel around Europe before coming home.

Finding My Birth Family

When God healed my sense of rejection from being adopted, I lost all interest in knowing about my birth family. In some ways, I felt that trying to find out about them would dishonor the loving parents God had given me.

However, a number of circumstances led me to begin pursuing information about my birth mother. A key discovery was finding my adoption papers in a lockbox at my father's bank after he died in 2008. This document revealed my pre-adoption last name. I also knew from my father's autobiography that the agency I came from was the Hillside Children's Center in Rochester, NY.

At this point my daughter Bethany began to express a strong desire to know more about the background of my adoption. Since I no longer had to be concerned about hurting my dad's feelings, I felt free to contact the agency, which I did in the fall of 2009. I honestly didn't expect to get any useful information, because from my online research, I knew that agencies kept most records tightly guarded. I had read over and over again about the frustration and disappointment of adoptees pursuing information about birth families.

In December of 2009, I received non-identifying information from Hillside Children's Center. The amount of detailed information was completely unexpected. This is a summary of what I discovered.

My birth mother was 21 years old when I was born. She was Irish and had met and married an American GI in Europe. She had become pregnant and that baby was born premature and died. They then agreed that she should come to the US and stay with his parents, since this was safer. When her husband returned to the US at the war's end, they had traveled about some, and finding that she was pregnant, decided they were not ready for a family and planned to give me up for adoption. My father informed his family that I was stillborn and no one visited in the hospital (where I was left).

My birthfather was 29, and the oldest of four children of German and Dutch ancestry. His father was 58; his mother had died in 1937 and his dad remarried. My birthfather had 2 brothers, both in the service: one 27, one 24. He also had a 19-year-old sister still at home.

My mother was the youngest of three children. Her dad was 60 and a machinist. Her mother was 65 and she described her as "a quiet, relaxed person with a nice sense of humor and had a consuming interest in religion and maintaining religious observances within the family." She had high blood pressure and arthritis in her knees. She was 5' 2" and had always been quite stout. She had blonde hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion.

Her brother was 29 and served 6 years as a bomber pilot. Her sister was 32 and was a teacher.

Naturally we were taken aback by specific detailed information. It was both interesting in itself and also sufficiently detailed to make us want more.

One other circumstance, in addition to finding my adoption papers, was instrumental in our search. By law, the government releases census records 72 years after they are compiled. As a result, in April 2012, the 1940 census records were made public. So when Bethany began searching online for a family with my last name living in Monroe County New York in 1940 with three sons and a daughter, it didn't take long for her to come up with a match.

After Bethany located the family and determined all the names, she found some of them on Facebook. She also determined that my birth mother and father had stayed married and had two children after me, both of whom were alive. She eventually sent a letter to my birth sister (to preserve her anonymity, I'll call her S).

Naturally S was taken aback, having no idea that her mother had had another child before her. But she saw that the information Bethany had was compelling. In addition, she talked to her one surviving aunt about a stillborn child born to her mother in 1946. Her aunt remembered when this happened, and how she and her husband had wondered that there was no funeral for the infant. This was a confirmation of Bethany's story.

S also told Bethany that she found it ironic because her mother had a similar adoption experience to mine. After she married her American soldier on Feb 17, 1943, in Belfast, Ireland, he was sent to France and she applied for a visa to come to the U. S. For the visa application, she needed her birth certificate, that the people she thought were her parents were not listed on it.

But there was of course more to the story. It took a while to discover the rest. Actually I think it took S some time to put the pieces together and then have the courage to share with me. Bethany and I met S and her husband in Bend, Oregon in August of 2013. They were on a cross-country motorcycle trip and their club was having a gathering in Bend. We met for dinner on **August 28, 2013** in a quiet restaurant by a stream.

After finding out about me, S had remembered a box of her mother's letters that she had never looked at closely. Feeling that there might be more to the story than we had pieced together, she read through them carefully in chronological order.

At dinner, S and her husband filled us in on all the research they had been doing over the months since Bethany first contacted them. At the end of their story, S gave me a letter that her mother had written to her father while he was still overseas. I didn't realize until I got home that the letter she gave me was dated **August 28, 1945**...Robin gave it to me exactly 68 years to the day after my birth mother wrote it. It sort of stunned me a bit when I realized this...I don't think this is a coincidence, but a sign from God that His hand was involved in this meeting. August 28, 1945 is also almost exactly 9 months before my birth on May 20, 1946. S later gave me a few additional letters.

The letters and other family information let us piece together what had happened and why my birth mom had felt that she needed to give me up for adoption. It is not a surprising story of a

lonely young woman being thrown closely together with another young man and the results; maybe what is surprising is that after giving me up for adoption, she and her husband stayed together for 50 years and raised two well-adjusted children.

The only conclusion I can draw from this experience is to bow in humble worship before the almighty King. He is weaving our stories according to his purposes. Now and then we get a glimpse of his sovereign hand arranging details, but someday, we will behold him face to face, and then all will become clear.

One verse of a hymn by Robert Murray M'Cheyne sums this up perfectly:

When this passing world is done,
When has sunk yon radiant sun,
When I stand with Christ on high,
Looking o'er life's history,
Then, Lord, shall I fully know—
Not till then—how much I owe.

In August 2015, Michael and I visited Rochester, New York and spent a couple of days in Pittsford where I grew up. Rebekah joined us there and we were able to meet one of my aunts and her extended family. They were very kind and gracious to us.

Officially Retired

In 2009, I had left full-time employment at QAD after 14 years of progressively responsible positions. For a few years I continued to work as a contract employee for various software and engineering companies around town. I worked on facial recognition software, user guides for thermal cameras, standard operating procedures (SOPs) for manufacturing of music systems, more SOPs for manufacturing a medical device for use during thyroid surgery, and an installation guide for a refrigeration system. I also worked as a temporary contractor several times with my former colleagues at QAD.

With some extra free time, I explored volunteer opportunities. I trained as a CASA (court appointed special advocate) and was assigned a teenage girl who I met with for over a year before she moved out of the county. Later, I trained as an English language tutor with the library and tutored a middle-aged man from Central Asia for over a year.

In January of 2014, I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and went through the surgical removal of my thyroid, followed by a special treatment that involved swallowing a radioactive pill. The treatment made me dangerous to be around and I spent a week in isolation. I put the week to good use by transferring all of my father's genealogy research into an online Ancestry.com family tree. I found this kind of research a lot of fun and eventually built a tree for Michael's family also.

On the same day as my surgery, my brother Tom lost his battle with cancer. I woke up from the anesthesia to be told that he had died. It was a sad day.

In April of 2014, my old boss at QAD asked me to come back and fill in while she was training an employee to take over for someone who left. That ended abruptly in August 2014 when I collapsed in the parking lot with a life-threatening pulmonary embolism. After these experiences, I began to sense it was time to slow down.

In the Summer of 2016, Michael also officially retired from his job at Devereaux where he had faithfully cared for clients for over 25 years. We celebrated by visiting Rebekah who was then living in Denver, Colorado, and I had an opportunity to revisit places from my childhood and show Michael where I had grown up in Rifle and Anvil Points.

I continued to find use for my love of writing by helping with missionary newsletters and became quite adept at MailChimp as well as supporting several websites for Christian non-profits.

A Grandson!



In Fall of 2016, Bethany and Mulch came to us with a wonderful announcement: they were expecting a baby. On March 30, 2017, Oliver Duane arrived weighing in at 9lbs 7 oz. And what a sweet and wonderful addition to our family he has been. In many ways, he is the inspiration for this story that you are reading.

If you remember, I was often mistaken for Bekah and Bethany's grandmother, since I had them both later in life. I count every year as a gift from God but also know that more years are not guaranteed.

As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away. So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

Psalms 90: 10, 12

So I have written this story with Oliver in mind. Someday when he is curious about his grandmother and how Grammy and Boppy got together, this record will help him to understand the mercy and grace of God that followed us all the days of our lives, and that will follow him also.

But the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to children's children Psalm 103:17

God didn't let us enjoy Oliver for long, however, because he had placed a new vision in Bethany and Mulch's heart. In October of 2017, they packed all their belongings into a POD and shipped it and their cars to Hawaii to join Ryan and Zoe Hilner in their calling to plant a church in Honolulu.

Reading, Writing, and Praying

Make the Vision Plain

One of the projects I took on when I stopped working full time was developing my own website (makethevisionplain.com). The theme of the website was from Habakkuk 2:2: “Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.”

This scripture appealed to me because it described what I had spent most of my adult life doing. As a technical writer, I recorded others’ visions and in doing so, tried to make complicated concepts plain so that users could make systems work effectively (run with them).

This scripture also tied in with my love of reading, and reading good books. So on my website, I included lots of book reviews, especially missionary biographies.

My love of books also led me to initiate several book clubs.

- In Fall 2015, we read *Praying with Paul* by D. A. Carson. This book had a tremendous impact on how I understood prayer. A careful look at all of Paul’s prayers in detail reveals that his focus is on the growth of Christian character, endurance, and the knowledge of God. This contrasted quite starkly with the focus of many of my prayers on asking for blessings and relief from difficult circumstances.
- In the Summer of 2016, we read *The Cross of Christ* by John Stott. This was one of the first theologically dense books that I read with close and detailed attention and it rewarded every bit of the effort we put into it. There is nothing more important to the foundation of faith than understanding the truths that Stott brings out in this book.
- Summer of 2017, *Knowledge of the Holy* by A. W. Tozer. We thought this short book would be an easy read but found ourselves challenged on almost every page by the Holy God revealed to us.
- Summer of 2018, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament* by Christopher J.H. Wright. This book was a wonderful look into the unity of scripture, opening our eyes to the single story being told by the One Author.
- Fall of 2018, *Prayer: A Biblical Perspective* by Eric Alexander. This was another “simple” look at prayer that opened up unexpected depths as we sought to put into practice what we were reading.
- Winter 2019, *Jonah* by Tim Keller. All of Keller’s books are wonderful, but this look at the mercy of God through the eyes of His reluctant prophet brought all of us much conviction of our own lack of mercy.
- Summer of 2019, *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus* by Nabeel Qureshi opened up a new world of understanding to many of us who had no idea what it would be like to grow up in a Muslim home. Nabeel took us step by step through the process of how the Holy Spirit dismantled the Muslim worldview and brought him to his knees at the feet of Jesus.

Missions Prayer

One of the greatest blessings I have had since leaving full time work is having time to pray. Starting in 2012, I began hosting a weekly prayer meeting in my home. This prayer evolved over the years from a general focus on the needs of the church and our own personal needs to a focus on those serving in global ministry. The Lord brought into this group mothers of those serving abroad as well as some who were going themselves so that we built up a real and intense knowledge of the issues they were facing in various places of ministry.

This prayer group has been a true “School of Prayer” where the Holy Spirit has taught us how to persevere and how to listen for God’s direction in prayer.

A Watchman

Through these last few years, I can see how God has been drawing me more and more into his Word and prayer. When I look back at the scripture in Habakkuk, the verse that precedes the one I chose for my website has now taken on a more intense and relevant meaning:

I will take my stand at my watch post and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint. Habakkuk 2:1

Watching and listening can sound passive but require a fully alert and awake mind. The watchman is actually very busy, looking for danger, warning the vulnerable, staying alert for the purpose of prayer (Eph 6:18), and finally, reminding God of his promises:

I have set watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day or night. You who make mention of the LORD, do not keep silent, and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isaiah 62:6

I often think of my experience of the moving of the Holy Spirit in the early 70’s and long for that power and presence again. But God doesn’t do the same thing twice...our Father loves diversity. One look at the creatures in the oceans makes that clear: so many fish all uniquely colored and shaped. What is unchanging is his promises to hear our cries.

I am learning first hand of the inexhaustible riches of our loving heavenly Father...there is always more to learn, more ways to experience his grace and truth.

Here are some thoughts on the book of Habakkuk, which has become increasingly precious to me over the years.

Thoughts on Habakkuk

In the years since I first created my website, I have discovered many reasons to love Habakkuk. Habakkuk is short (the 4th shortest book in the Old Testament) but packed with truth. And of

course—and most obviously—the fact that God told Habakkuk to write is secondary to the actual message he wrote down.

Here are some of the reasons I have grown to love Habakkuk over the years.

Habakkuk is a man of prayer. Habakkuk is introduced to us through his prayer, which is not for his own needs. He is an intercessor whose heart breaks over the condition of the world around him: a world filled with violence, where God’s word and ways are no longer followed, and wickedness prevails. His world sound a lot like the one we live in and I find my own heart often crying out “How long, O Lord,” as I scan the local and world headlines.

Habakkuk receives an answer to his prayer central to redemptive history. To his intercessor, God entrusts a glimpse of his plans to purify his people by bringing a great evil against them. Habakkuk’s response is initially disbelief, but he continues to seek God for how this evil can produce faith.

God tells Habakkuk to write down what he is about to hear, and what he writes is that “the righteous shall live by his faith,” a verse referenced three times by New Testament writers:

- Romans 1:17 is the key that opened up the Gospel to Martin Luther and became the basis of the Protestant reformation: man is made **just** by God’s grace through Christ when grace is received by **faith**, and not by works.
- Galatians 3:11 highlights the foundational confusion of the Galatians between **faith**, which produces **life**, and works of the law, which produce **death**.
- Hebrews 10:38 emphasizes the ability of the believer to endure by **faith** and the hope that God will complete His work.

The woes Habakkuk records give us hope for final justice. God proclaims five woes over the Chaldeans, Israel’s enemies. Even though God plans to use them to purify his people, they will not ultimately escape judgment for their evil deeds. These woes give substance to our faith that the “judge of all the earth will be just.” God demonstrates his concern about social justice issues in the pronouncement of woes on:

1. Those who take from the poor (Habakkuk 2:6-8)
2. Those who accumulate wealth with no thought for others (Habakkuk 2:9-11)
3. Leaders who build using methods that abuse others (Habakkuk 2:12-14)
4. Those who encourage others to abuse drugs and alcohol to take advantage of them (Habakkuk 2:15-18)
5. Those who encourage others to trust in the works of their hands rather than the living God (Habakkuk 2:19)

Habakkuk looks forward to the final consummation of history. Habakkuk’s prayer in Chapter 3 looks back at God’s mighty acts in the Exodus, but even more to his final victory over not just Egyptians or Chaldeans, but over the enemy of enemies, that old serpent, Satan. Habakkuk 3:13

speaks of crushing the head of the house of the wicked, echoing the words God spoke in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of the woman would bruise Satan's head.

Habakkuk gives us reason to sing. The final verses of Habakkuk's prayer (3:17-19) are a powerful and joyful expression of faith and hope that is not based on anything the eye can see.

As a watchman who has been called to pray, this hope in the unseen has been life-giving to me since often all I can be seen with the natural eye is destruction and sorrow. Still with Habakkuk, I can rejoice in the Lord and take joy in the God of our salvation.

A Glorious Finale for the 2010's

In the summer of 2018, Michael and I took a long dreamed of trip to Ireland. This was Michael's first international trip (other than Canada and Mexico) and we decided to go on an organized tour with a small group. Since we both had Irish ancestors, we especially enjoyed leaning about the history, visiting museums, and enjoying the beautiful countryside. I did, however, come to the realization that I had serious issues with arthritis in my knees (similar to my maternal birth grandmother!)

For me, most of 2019 was spent recovering from knee surgeries in March and July. During the first few weeks of recovery I wasn't able to concentrate on reading because of the effects of pain medication, so I listened to books. In March, I listened to all seven of the Chronicles of Narnia and fell in love with Aslan again. C. S. Lewis will always be one of my favorite authors and I drew deep consolation from the adventures in Narnia and the kindness of Aslan to his often failing followers.

During this decade, Rebekah explored several jobs. For a time, she lived locally and worked as an administrative assistant for the director of a private foundation. She also adopted a rescue dog named Windsor who became her constant companion.

Her life direction was changed by a trip through Colorado in August 2015 on the way to join Michael and I in New York. She fell in love with the mountains and the glorious vistas along the Colorado river. This led to a job at the Wild Animal Sanctuary in Keenesburg (near Denver), where she again excelled as an administrator.



When this season was over, she returned to Carpinteria to work as a contractor for her former employer. But her love of the mountains, hiking, and camping continued to draw her to the outdoors.

As she focused on this interest, she purchased a truck and had a custom camper shell built for it and began camping ventures by herself and with others.

Then her love of mountains, hiking, and camping drew her to a young man who had the same interests as she did; in fact, they owned the identical truck with a camper shell. Finding their hearts matched in many ways, they promised their love to each other on Dec. 7, 2019 in a small outdoor ceremony on the bluffs near our home.

God truly is faithful to do above and beyond what we can ask or think as we trust him and follow his ways. We were glad to welcome Seth Johnson and his dog Moose into our family.

When I think of the future, I hear the glad cry of the children of Narnia shouting, “Don’t stop! Further up and further in!” as they explore the truer and more real Narnia...the one without sin and death. And my heart says, “Yes, Lord, further up and further in.” May his Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

