

*E*TERNAL *M*AKEOVERS



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K A I T E E L U S K



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## *Foreword and Acknowledgements*

*How* can I list the innumerable friends, relatives, and acquaintances that were a part of this incredible journey the Lord set me on? The truth is, I cannot. Yet, I would be totally remiss if I did not mention those directly associated with my literary career, without whom this first book would not have been possible.

Before I'd ever heard of Mt. Hermon and its annual Christian Writers Conference, I received an invitation to attend one in April or May of 1985, the funds miraculously coming from a totally unexpected source. Within one week, both Jerry Jenkins of Moody Press and Lori Sorenson of Decision Magazine said, "You need to write for the Lord." Two months later, at a singles conference in Anaheim, California Luci Swindoll reaffirmed their

statements with, “If you don’t take that talent out of the ground where you’ve buried it, I wouldn’t want to be in your shoes.”

Within a year that statement propelled me into Christian Courier Ministries, Inc. (a corporation formed by the insistence and assistance of a brother-in-Christ, Attorney Vance VanTassell.) My first article, “God, Where Are You?” and those that followed are evidence of His amazing love and miraculous miracles.

And it was that amazing love (as there were no funds) that poured over me by the ministry staff, Kent and Diane Sanctuary, Dave and Nancy Doty, and Jimmy White. Their countless and sometimes all night vigils to make deadlines gave me the courage to continue. I can also vividly recall the awe I felt as Senator Tim Leslie and Assemblyman Larry Bowler promoted *The Christian Courier*, *The Encourager* during their campaign trails throughout the Sacramento area. (Whoever heard of a politician promoting a Christian magazine during their campaigns? P.S. They both won!)

Could any of the above been accomplished without prayer? You have to pray and believe to receive, and you can’t receive unless you act upon what you believe. I had the most incredible prayer partners. I want to thank my family, especially my children, Mary, Nancy, and Heather and their husbands, Ralph, Richard, and Marc who stood by me through many a storm and discouragement, together with some very dear friends from Sacramento, Tom and Vivian

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Sarmento (who were also responsible for sending me on several of the missionary journeys referred to in these stories), Steve and Elva Burlingham, Tony and Rosemarie Pavelka, Trisha Wood, Maria Viviano, Tom and Lisa Hill, and Tom and Janis Mills.

In addition, I had prayer warriors – they are known as intercessors – who fight and fast against all odds, no matter what time of day or night, and who believe by faith that with God all things are possible, no matter what the circumstances. These acknowledgements are dedicated to the following: my chief warrior, Vincent Fry, who to this very day stands in the gap for me and this ministry on a daily basis, together with my VP and Editor in Chief, Allison Jones, and VP, Konny Garrett. The list is not short, but I with joy also mention Dave and Debbie Cronin, Gini and Barry Dower, the Daniels, Copelands, Larsons, Brenes, Gloria Lopez, and Rhea Padellford, my Truckee prayer trackers.

His ways are not our ways and I am, as usual, in awe of the Potter's plans to accomplish His purposes. He knew Maui was the place He wanted this journey to climax into the very first book of books to be published in witness of His eternal and unfathomable makeovers; makeovers in the lives of those who believed and received the amazing love He shed for them.

To that end, this first book is also in memory of a very dear friend, Jeri Jaques. The Lord took Jeri home (at her request) on my birthday last year, November 14, 2004. It was Jeri's amazing love for

the Lord that caused her to pursue me (and others) to “stop lingering at the gate” and finish the race He set before us. She pushed all of us nonstop. She gave me no rest until I took a loan, paid off my car, bought a computer, and set about getting the Lord’s work done.

When Jeri went home my book was not done, but my heavenly Father was well aware of that. He quickly brought Carol Dawson to the rescue. (Carol spent countless hours praying and nurturing me back to health following a serious medical emergency and surgery). Right along with Carol came Dean and Jan Erickson who provided my “Upper Room” Ohana where I could quietly write and worship the Lord. When computer snags and hang-ups tormented me, Kim Paulsen and Pastors Craig Englert and Kit Lauer came to the rescue. Janna Schlag, musician and photographer followed. (I lost track of the countless hours she has given in editing.) And, to my astonishment, then came Lisa Kim Bryant, my answer to prayer, my special angel, and computer geek as she calls herself.

When Kevin and Nancy Boorman, Jacqueline Kelly, Joyce Spencer, and Kris Kozub appeared on the scene, I was truly in awe of the grace I was being given. Not one of them knew each other. Yet each came and said, “The Lord said to assist you in this work.” And assist they did. In ways I never expected.

Rick Defer and Jodi Kuhnmuensch (their stories are part of this book) came next, and then my

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brother, Eric Leiser, who I recall saying quite a way back, “Kaitee, I never knew you could write; keep up the good work.” It was this “good work” that caused my wonderful brother to believe. I never realized the impact all the stories I’d sent him in the past had made.

I cannot, in all conscience, close this foreword and its acknowledgements without thanking the Lord for all those who so freely and willingly gave permission for their stories to be shared so others can experience and realize what an eternal makeover can truly mean if they can but believe and receive.

Kaitee M. Lusk





## *Introduction*

The journeys you are about to take as you enter the very hearts of those who have so graciously permitted me to share their stories are phenomenal. You may find yourself living and experiencing some of their emotional, mental, financial, and even physical struggles. In some instances, you may even say to yourself, *That's me. That's what happened to me.*

Their stories are alive because they are experienced over and over again in the lives of people all over the world. Motion pictures are designed to draw their audiences into the very lives of the actors and actresses and the roles they are portraying, and the journeys in this book even more so because they are not fictitious. They actually happened and are continuing to happen.

Each story is different, yet similar. You may laugh with some, cry with others. You might identify with those who have lost a child, suffered broken bones, broken homes or hearts, or suffered seemingly unending pain.

They are the stories of the journey of life and each individual's struggle to find the answer to what lies beyond what they know will eventually come to an end. They are journeys that bring the priceless hope of an eternal home to the reality of their hearts.

The stories in this book are true. The people are real. Their lives have been extremely changed and made over spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and sometimes even physically. They attribute their phenomenal transformation to the miraculous power of God through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this book is dedicated to the Great Spirit of all heaven and earth, God the Father, and His only Son, Jesus Christ, without whom none of these stories would be possible.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE EXTRA 747 PILOT EXPLOSIVE DECOMPRESSIONS



*D*avid Cronin, a United Airlines 747 captain, experienced two explosive decompressions. One left a huge cavity in the cockpit of his heart; the other, a

gaping hole in the fuselage of his 747. One changed his life; the other made him a national hero. Both left an eternal impact!



I drove fast, flew fast, and lived fast. My goal was to be captain of my ship, master of my fate, and I was flying high until September 1988 when my second marriage blew up without warning. That explosive decompression tore the door off my reason for living. For the first time, my ship was sinking and my fate hung in the balance. It took the wind out of my sails, life from my spirit, and left me in a stunned and speechless vacuum in the shattering wake of its destruction. No earthly medication could dull the pain of the humiliation that slashed at my pride and reduced my self-esteem to mincemeat. Anger, hatred, and bitterness took control, and self-pity was close by. Where did I go wrong? I'd filled my heart with selfish treasures, leaving no room for God or anyone else. I had deceived myself into believing I had it made, and I began to search for answers. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure..."

Dad, who always took us to church, died when I was sixteen, and though we continued to go after his death, God was always very distant to me. With my sister in college, Mom and I were left to care for the chickens, goats, ducks, geese, and three acres of land at our Trumbull, Connecticut home. This

didn't leave much time for what I wanted to do. I'd always loved racing, adventure, and things that moved fast. So, just before my last year of college, I applied to the United States Air Force for pilot training. That dream came true in November 1951 when they gave me my class date – Class 53A. At graduation in 1953, I received my Silver Wings and Commission as 2nd Lieutenant. I couldn't wait to fly; my heart was heaven bound (but not for the Lord). I still visited God on Sundays, but during the week imitated most twenty-three year old single guys with lots of partying, girls, etc.

In December 1954, another dream came true when I was accepted as a pilot for United Airlines. My training was to begin December 10 and I was on top of the world, but just before that, I had another surprise! I was going to become a father. My dream seemed to disintegrate in mid-air. I'd been dating pretty heavily, but marriage and a family were not part of my physical and emotional “fuselage” at this time. My mental instruments went crazy over this threatening detour in my future, but I got married with the determination to make it in spite of the circumstances.

Donna was only twenty and I was twenty-five. She was very naïve, and I was very macho and never once did I consider my share of the blame. I vented my anger on Donna and made life really tough for her. We spent Christmas in an \$85 a month motel room where she was so sentimental, she kept the Christmas tree up until there were no needles left on

it. We got rid of it around March and, three months later, on July 19, 1955, our first daughter, Kimberly, was born. When she was just about ten months old, Donna gave birth to our second girl, Kathy. In 1959 Kelly came along, and in 1961 Karen joined the family. Right after Karen's birth, I went to Europe for a year as a fighter pilot, came back in 1962 to fly with United and three years later our fifth daughter, Kris, was born.

On the surface, I was a model father who took the kids to church, provided a nice home, nice clothes, etc. but my tainted image was overlooked. In reality, I was an overly strict (and mostly absent) father who ran his family like a military organization. You just don't (or shouldn't) treat little girls that way. Whenever I'd come home from a trip with United, I'd jump into my National Guard outfit, drive one hundred miles to Massachusetts and fly for them. Then, I'd drive back home and get back into my United uniform to fly for them; it never ended. They had everything except me and my love. In fact, the love was replaced by fear. They were scared to see me come home from a trip because I'd go berserk if they left the lights on in the cellar and other trivial things like that. I was the macho fighter pilot and the macho father and disciplinarian. "Do as I say," was my motto. I was the wage earner and I was in charge! I made sure they got everything I wanted them to have but not what they needed, a husband and father. "Things" took the place where I should have been.

When UA promoted me to captain, I moved us into a new fifty-four hundred square foot house on the Trumbull waterfront (a very elite area). I think we were the beginning of the yuppie generation. Was I ever proud! The girls had their own sailboats, etc. and it was a great place to raise kids but I didn't know the meaning of the word; I'd left that job mostly to Donna. With all we had, things got worse and Donna began seeing a psychiatrist, but he couldn't give her what she needed from me. My selfish attitude built lots of resentment in Donna and the girls so that by the time they were teenagers, Donna couldn't handle it anymore. Finally, when I asked her if she still loved me and she didn't answer, I moved out and divorced her.

Within my new little condo I was quick to rationalize my behavior, convincing myself I had done the right thing. My out-of-sight, out-of-mind theory worked great and this deception took flight on a pleasure trip that lasted seven years. From 1974 to 1981 I thought I was the swingiest bachelor on earth with lots of time off, lots of women, parties, and money. I kept flying high with lots of skiing, sailing, bicycling, hiking, traveling, and scuba diving all over the world; I denied myself nothing. "What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

In 1981 I met my second wife and moved to Nevada, where we were entranced by the New Age movement and its fortune tellers, etc. (just like Babylon many years ago; same package but with a

different ribbon.) I even paid five hundred dollars to have her channeled to a spirit guide. In 1986 I began flying a route from Los Angeles, California to Auckland, New Zealand and Sydney, Australia. During the spring of that year, my co-pilot gave me a card that read, "If you want to be saved, you have to accept Jesus Christ as your Lord..." I put the card in my wallet and forgot about it until the night my marriage ended leaving that sudden huge cavity with no answers. That's when the heartaches I'd sown in my first marriage began to jet across the mirror of my mind. The Bible says, "A man reaps what he sows" (Gal. 6:7), and reap I did! But, unlike me who did not show compassion and ran away, God opened a door and I came across that card in my wallet. I read it over and over and over again, saying those words. I decided that if God could take control of my life, this was the time to do it. I prayed the prayer on the card asking Jesus to come into my life and forgive my sins. Then I took a long walk and meditated on what I had done.

Two days later, I woke up with a tremendous desire to go to church. It wouldn't go away, and on Sunday I found myself up at 7:00 A.M. heading for Truckee where I somehow found Calvary Chapel, a church I'd heard about from a friend. When I got there, they were praising and singing and at first I thought, *Wow! My New Age spirit guides led me here.* When Pastor Larson began talking about marriage and faithfulness, I began weeping in the back of the church. And, when I heard him say, "If the Lord

accepts you, He will remove the evil elements from your life,” my heart melted. I realized then that it was the Holy Spirit moving in my life and not some New Age spirit guide that had led me to this church. God had wanted me here after I received Christ as my Savior so I could learn more about Him. Two months later, in November 1988, I was baptized in a hot tub in the middle of a snowstorm on Dr. John Hejny’s back deck in Truckee. A few days later I purchased my first Bible and spent hours every day reading it. I even took it back and forth on my daily flights; I was so eager to learn everything in it.

Six months later on February 24, 1989, I encountered my second unexpected explosive decompression as my 747, Flight 811 traveled from Honolulu to Auckland, New Zealand. This is where my new faith in God was tested and the Lord revealed His awesome power proving that though I might be captain of my ship, I was definitely not master of my fate. John 15:5 says, “Apart from Me, you can do nothing,” and in Matthew 19:26, “With God all things are possible.” As we took off on that incredible journey with 230,000 pounds of fuel, 336 passengers and 15 flight attendants, we found ourselves in the middle of a severe thunderstorm with lots of lightening. At 10,000 feet I normally turn off the seat belt sign so passengers can move around, but something inside said, *Remember the storm—leave it on!* I was glad I did because between 22,000 and 23,000 feet I felt a bump followed by a tremendous explosion and decompression that left a huge ten

by twenty-one foot hole in the fuselage. Nine passengers and some luggage were instantly blown out. One stewardess miraculously escaped the same fate; she had been thrown to the floor by the explosion as she was coming down the aisle and was being helplessly drawn to the opening when she latched onto the steel bottom of one of the passenger seats just a few feet from the gaping hole and held fast until the plane landed.

In addition to the missing passengers and luggage, the blast sucked out all our oxygen bottles and left number three engine inoperative but, incredibly, the plane held together. I said a quick prayer and then concentrated on what to do. My next thought was to drop the landing gear and get into some breathable air, but again, a still small voice within said, *Wait!* which later turned out to be a wise decision because number four engine went on fire and had to be shut down. This left us with only two engines as we descended 1500 feet a minute with no way of being able to arrest the rate of descent. It was like being in a 400 mile an hour tornado. I didn't think about it at the time, but knew later that we had an extra pilot on board. God had been with us. He'd been in the cockpit guiding me and was the one who enabled us to remain calm and who directed the incredible teamwork.

The flight attendants were fantastic. Taking no regard for their own lives, they made sure all passengers had life preservers on, as we didn't know if we were coming down on water or land. When we

finally did land twenty-two minutes later, we were able to evacuate everyone in less than forty-five seconds with no broken bones. Yes, God had been in charge and we made it because our extra pilot, Jesus Christ, was right there with us saying, “Never will I leave you. Never will I forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). His goals are now my goals and I’ve given Him complete charge of my life. I’m no longer Dave Cronin, captain of my ship, master of my fate but Dave Cronin, Christ’s co-pilot. “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint” (Is. 40:31).



In the Bible, the Lord often revealed His plans before they came into being. After the accident, the following vision was revealed and confirmed: A Christian woman who started a prayer group about one and a half years prior to the explosion (and who prayed daily for the planes that flew over her house), woke up at 6:46 A.M. on February 11 after experiencing a terrible nightmare. (It was thirteen days prior to the accident. The nightmare was so intense it took her one and a half hours to compose herself before she could call her friend on the telephone. The vision was incredibly vivid—shortly after take-off a charter jet was in desperate trouble and in need of emergency assistance. She saw fire on the right side of the aircraft; the pilot was having a very difficult

time getting the airplane back to the field. She next saw herself on the roof of a high building; a man was standing to her right with his left hand on her right shoulder. He was telling her that the pilot will get the airplane back and he will be OK. Could this “man” have been the extra pilot?

Coincidence? The woman’s name happens to be Theresa Cronin Cook. She is no relation to our pilot, Captain Cronin, but was definitely heard and answered by God because of her prayers.

How about you? Is the Lord in control of your life, or are you flying on a course bound for destruction and an explosive decompression that will blow you out of eternity? Will you let Christ into the cockpit of your heart and give Him the controls? He’ll help you fly a new course to eternal destinations if you’ll let Him be the pilot in charge of your life. Jesus said, “I stand at the door and knock, if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Rev. 3:20). If you want to become a Christian and fly with Jesus, with all your heart, and by faith, pray the following prayer: Dear Jesus, I open the door of my life. Please come in, forgive my sins, and take control of my life. I receive you as my Savior and Lord and ask you to fill me with your Holy Spirit and accept me as your child.