

From the
PRISON *of* **PAIN**

to the
MOUNTAINTOP *of* **FREEDOM**

Living Life Again

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Introduction

My Dear Friends,

I wrote this book to share with you my heart-wrenching journey. In July of 1995, I lost my son and my husband in a fatal airplane accident.

I want to show you how God delivered me from wanting to kill myself to praising God and finding a joy and peace that I have never experienced before in my life. I hope I can give you encouragement and show you that, no matter what your circumstances, if you truly lean on our Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, you can survive.

I wasn't the only person on this journey, but at the time I felt like I was. My daughter, Nikki; Allison, my friend and my sister in Christ; and her daughter, Kris, took this journey with me.

On July 2, 1995, Allison and I awaited the arrival of our sons and our husbands who were flying back from a father-son fishing trip. My son, Scott, and Allison's son, Craig, were best friends and were eagerly looking forward to the next chapter in their lives, college. Scott played baseball and worked in the Texas Rangers' dugout. It was there that

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he met many players whom he admired and looked up to. He was headed to a junior college to play ball on a scholarship. Life was good. Craig had been accepted to Texas A&M and was planning to try out for the baseball team. They both were giving, kind, and gentle young men. They lived life to the fullest.

This was difficult to write, but I want you to see how by the grace of our Father in Heaven I was saved from the darkest day of my life. I pray that by telling you my story, you will see how gracious and loving our Father is. Only through his love and kindness did I find the strength to endure this pain. I sincerely hope that you will find it too.

The Day Tragedy Struck

It is 3:30 P.M. I keep looking at the phone expecting it to ring. Bill, my husband, and Scott, my son, should have landed around 1:00 P.M. Why hasn't Bill called?

The phone finally rings. It is Allison. She too is wondering where her husband, Doug, and her son, Craig, are. I reassure her that Bill probably had to divert the flight away from some thunderheads, and they would be home any minute.

I feel sick to my stomach and want to scream. Is my greatest fear coming true? I wish Bill would call.

I keep myself busy around the house, but I can't seem to concentrate on anything. For some odd reason, I break out into a cold sweat. What is wrong with me? Why do I feel anxious? I keep reassuring myself that Bill has flown the plane many times and would land if bad weather became a problem.

I begin to shake. I tell myself to stop thinking the worst. I know they will be here shortly, coming in the back door with smiling faces, wanting to know what's for dinner. I have been blessed with a precious son and daughter and a man I have loved for twenty-three years. God has been good,

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and we have much to look forward to. I am thankful that our family is close and that we love being together.

Time is moving slowly. It is now 4:30, and I am on the phone with Bill's friend from work. I ask, where are they? Why hasn't Bill called? He has no answers but tries to help me stay calm.

Someone is at the door. It's Chuck and Teresa, the owners of the plane, and they look like they have been crying. I don't want to answer the door.

Oh, my God, didn't anyone live? Doug and Craig have to be alive. I keep screaming, "No not the boys! They are still alive aren't they?" I can't lose both of the men in my life at the same time.

"Dear God, this isn't happening!" I feel like I have just left my body, and I am looking down at this lady who is trying to communicate but keeps screaming.

I think this is a nightmare and that Bill will tap me on the shoulder and say, "Pam, you are having a bad dream. Let me hold you until you calm down."

Help me, Lord. I am suffocating. I look around for my daughter, Nikki, and see her standing beside me crying. I wonder how we will ever survive this.

A few minutes pass; it seems a lifetime. God has totally picked me up, and now I can't feel anything. I have begun a journey that will take me to the deepest pit of darkness, and I fear I won't ever see light again. I am walking through the valley of the shadow of death. I wonder if I will ever come back to life again.

The Day After

I wake in the night and for an instant think the accident was a nightmare. Bill and Scott will walk through the door and say how much they have missed Nikki and me. Then the dreadful realization comes—this is not a dream. They will never walk through the door. I will never see their smiling faces again. My life will never be the same. I beg God to let me have my family back. I promise I will never take them for granted again. But I know that it's no use. All I can do is ask God to help me through this somehow.

As the day goes on, I go through the motions of life. I am in a state of shock. There are many people around me. Everyone is crying. I am drowning in a pool of my own tears. I don't feel like I will ever quit crying.

God, just let me drown, so I won't have to feel the pain.

Even now in my moment of unbearable pain, I have to be strong for the people around me. Nikki needs me now more than ever. I must help her through this. But how can I be there for her when I can't even be there for myself? I also have to be supportive of Scott and Craig's friends. They are young and need someone to lean on.

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God, where are you? You know how much I love my kids. A mother's love is deep and can never be replaced. Please, I beg of you, let me die. I can't stand the pain.

Laura my pastor's wife left this scripture on a piece of paper in my Bible, "Surely our griefs He Himself bore and our sorrows He carried" (Isaiah 53:4). I look up the verse, and it has already been highlighted in my Bible. I don't remember when I highlighted it. I wonder how I interpreted the verse before today because now it has new meaning.

July 4

I am in a whirlwind. Friends and family are constantly going in and out. No one knows what to say or do. But knowing they are here for us has comforted Nikki and me. My father, our pastor, and my husband's brother are trying to help me make decisions that have to be made. I wish Bill were here, so I could ask him what to do.

It is also July 4th, and for the first time in years, our family won't celebrate Independence Day with fireworks—in fact we won't ever be together again.

They are bringing Doug, Craig, and Scott's bodies back from Arkansas tonight. Bill, being the pilot of the plane, will come later because the doctors must perform an autopsy before his body can be released. I want to be there tonight, but I don't know how I will handle it. I will listen to my heart.

My brother-in-law and I ride in one car, and our friend and pastor follow us. It is around 2:00 A.M. We see the hearse drive up at the funeral home. I get out of the car and call for Scott, "Honey, I am here. I wanted to be here when you came home." I am thankful I came tonight. I'm not sure why; I just am.

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I am tired and emotionally drained when I get home. I wonder if the pain will ever go away. I feel as if I have fallen into a deep pit and I will never be able to come up for air again. I go to bed and pick up a book titled *Listening for God's Silent Language* by Don Osgood. I read the following passage:

See God in everything. We must learn to understand the things in life that aren't spelled out for us. We must learn to see what isn't readily apparent, to hear and interpret the language of another world. And to do that, we must first assume that we are always being spoken to, that in some manner God is always communicating with us, from His Heart.

July 5

Today I am going to the funeral home to make arrangements. I still can't believe this is real. Can I survive this pain? *Help me, God.*

At the funeral home, I'm told that I can't see Bill or Scott. I beg the funeral director to let me hold and pray with them one last time. The funeral director takes me to Bill first. They have a sheet over him and I can't see him. I am crying hard and want him to wake up and say that it's going to be okay. I hold his hand, put my arm around him, and pray: *Thank you, Lord, for a loving and wonderful man who did the best he knew how to love his family and who was always there for us no matter what.*

Next, I see Scott. I kiss him and tell me how much I love him. Again I pray: *Thank you, God, that I had a beautiful son, who gave his all to life. Thank you for the joy he brought to people and the love that he shared with his friends and his family.*

I wonder how I will be able to survive the loss of my child. Parents are supposed to die before their children. This is not what I expected out of life. I need to go home. This is just too much to handle.

July 12

I pick up my journal and begin to write again. We have had the funeral and now face reality—half of our family is gone. Nikki and I will continue to sojourn on this earth until our time has come.

I know, God, you did not cause this, and I have to trust that you will carry me through this tremendous pain.

The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it abundantly. (Jn. 10:10)

“For I know the plans that I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.” (Jer. 29:11–13)

July 16

The days seem like a blur. Am I really functioning, or am I just going through the motions? Will I survive?

I turn on the television and Pastor Harold O' Chester is preaching on how to handle troubles and trials through our Savior Jesus Christ. I will call him. Years ago, he lost his wife and two daughters in a car accident. Surely, he will know my pain. Maybe, he can give me some comforting words.

Thank you, Lord, for letting me listen to my heart.

July 17

Pastor Harold O' Chester calls and is very supportive. He recommends the book *When Heaven Is Silent* by Ron Dunn. I go out and get the book immediately hoping it will offer some sort of comfort. I read the following passages:

Life isn't fair. Injustice inhabits our world. p. 56 As the anesthesia of shock wore off, the reality of his death settled on me like a black fog until finally the suppressed anger and hurt erupted with "Why, God?" The Hebrew word for "why", used most frequently in the Psalms, is "both a cry of lament and protest. It places the issue of human suffering before and in front of God. p. 62 For one thing, an unanswered "why" disturbs the orderliness of life we believe in. We like to think we live in an ordered universe where everything makes sense. For everything that happens there is a logical explanation; every effect has some discernible cause. P. 63 [18]

My analytical mind needs answers to solve the problems. Will God ever be able to answer my "Why" question? Ron Dunn seems to read my mind:

There is no answer to the question “Why?” because that is not a legitimate question. P. 71 As our knowledge of and fellowship with God deepen, the more we will trust Him, and the more we trust Him, the less our need to understand. Once we recognize this, peace of mind lies within our reach. P. 73 The right question, the one put forth by Christ Himself, is “What now?” P. 78 Not only does “what now” save us from self-pity, but it also gives us something to look forward to. “What now?” means we are still moving, still growing. In short, we have a future. P. 80 [19]

Father, I hope Ron is right. At this point, I feel like I am alone and dying.

The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (Dt. 33:27)

July 19

My body is worn out and emotionally drained. I wonder if I will ever be normal again. What is normal? I thought I knew. Normal was the suburban life that I was living—graduate from college, marry the man of my dreams, have two beautiful children. We were a family who grew together spiritually for over eighteen years. If anyone looked at our life, they would say, “That is a family who has shared together, walked spiritually together, and has so much ahead of them.” But now what? What lies ahead of me now? How can I ever be normal again?

July 20

I pick up another book. That is all the energy I have left. Reading is giving me reassurance that there are others who experienced significant loss and they have moved forward through their journey of pain. I am now reading *Good Grief* by Granger Westberg. I highlight some inserts that reached out to my heart. One is “Faith plays a major role in grief of any kind.” P. 10. Well, that is good to know. I wonder if I will be able to keep my faith? *God, are you here to listen to me? Did you leave me?*

The righteous man perishes, and no man takes it to heart; and devout men are taken away, while no one understands. For the righteous man is taken away from evil, He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walked in his upright way. (Is. 57:1–2)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe, that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1 Thes. 4:13–14)

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Father, I know I will see my loved ones again. I still feel the pain, and I know you understand. You saw your Son lose his life for us. God, through your grace, I now know some of the pain you experienced and the unconditional love you extended to us. Eternally, we will be united again. That is my only hope.