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down to earth



EVERY OTHER YEAR I GET TO make my favorite announcement: Writers, take your marks! Yes, it's time for our biennial Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest. Twelve finalists will be chosen to spend an all-expenses-paid week in Rye, New York, learning everything we editors know about inspirational storytelling. Believe it or not, we're as excited about this as you are. Workshoppers are the editorial lifeblood of our publications.

We need new voices, new cultural perspectives and a new generation of inspirational storytellers to show that sharing personal stories of faith in action help make the world a better place. Surely you've read a story in *Angels on Earth*, or in *Guideposts* or *Mysterious Ways* or *All Creatures*, and thought, "That reminds me of the time..." Go to your computer and tell us about it in a first-person narrative. Paint a picture with scenes and dialogue. Tell a story not a sermon. Put us in your shoes, or tell the story as a ghostwriter for someone else.

Your manuscript doesn't have to be perfect. We're looking for positive people who are engaged with their communities and who want to learn how to inspire others with great storytelling. We need eyes and ears all over the country, from big cities to small towns, to develop content that will help millions of readers in print and online.

Study the particulars on pages 43-44 and mark the deadline on your calendar: postmarked or timestamped by **June 10**. And please tell us more about yourself in a cover letter. I mean, besides the fact that, naturally, you believe in angels. Guess what, I believe in you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Colleen Hughes".

COLLEEN HUGHES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Follow Colleen's blog at guideposts.org/colleenblog



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WHAT'S NEW ONLINE

Summer Recipes

Planning a barbecue or picnic? We've got a bunch of fresh summer recipes using ingredients like berries, zucchini, peaches, basil, avocado and watermelon. Make a mouth-watering treat at angelsearth.org/summertimerrecipes.

Six Prayers for Sunny Skies

Guideposts' blogger Bob Hostetler has prayers for every reason and every season. Check out some of his favorites for when the days get longer, here: angelsearth.org/summerprayers.

Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest

In our video shot at Wainwright House in Rye, New York, Guideposts Editor-in-Chief Edward Grinnan offers tips on how you can win a spot at our Guideposts Writers Workshop in the fall. Watch at angelsearth.org/wwcontest and enter by **June 10, 2018**. We'd love to host you at this historic house on the banks of Long Island Sound.



An *Angel* Took the Light-Rail

I knew it was a sign, but of what?

BY STEPHANIE CARLETON, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

THE MINNEAPOLIS CITYSCAPE was a blur as the train rattled along the tracks. I usually loved watching the scenery go by, but it was hard to enjoy the family outing with our 16-month-old fussing so much. Leo sat in his stroller, chubby legs kicking. He wasn't himself.

"Is he okay?" Josh asked.

"I don't know," I said. "He's been like this all day. And he didn't eat much at dinner." I hoped the train ride would help calm him.

We were on the light-rail headed to Target Field to see the Minnesota Twins face off against the Detroit Tigers. I loved baseball—a love I hoped to pass down to our son. But

it was clear that Leo wasn't enjoying the experience so far.

I was wondering if we were going to be late, when I had the sudden sensation that someone was watching me. I turned my head. A white and golden light sparkled in a human shape. Was the sun playing tricks on me? I blinked hard.

The figure took a step toward me, offering an open hand. Almost like it was asking me to dance. I could feel the energy emanating from it, so powerful it made me feel small. Something about its posture was questioning. Like it was asking me if I understood. *Look at me, Stephanie,* the figure seemed to say. *Do you see*



that I'm standing here with you?

I nodded and the figure of light was gone. I looked around me to see if anyone else had noticed. Was it a sign? A warning? An angel? But why would an angel be interested in a baseball game?

The train doors opened. I checked the time. We were late. And we had to get to the stadium and find our seats. I'd try to process the experience later.

Part of me felt like something important would happen that night. Leo seemed to feel it too. He refused to settle down. Throughout the game, he squirmed in my arms, even head-butting me a few times. The game ran long because of rain delays. "Great game," Josh said sometime around the seventh inning. I just wanted it to be over.

That night, back at home, Leo vomited in his crib. The next morning, he vomited again. He couldn't keep anything down. I stayed home from work to look after him. He was breathing more heavily and he seemed tired. I still couldn't get him to eat. I took him to the pediatrician.

Leo's chest X-ray showed nothing. The doctor shrugged. "Your son's symptoms aren't consistent with one illness," he said. "Let's just watch him." He prescribed a steroid and an antibiotic. While it wasn't the definite

answer I'd hoped for, the doctor didn't seem worried, so neither was I. Leo had always been a healthy kid.

I even felt comfortable picking up a night shift at work. But when Josh called in the middle of it, I knew it was Leo. "I can't get him to take his medicine," he said. "And he's still not eating." I raced home. Leo was limp, his lips were blue. We went to the hospital. The ER doctors thought it was possibly a respiratory issue. They ran more tests. Leo got worse.

Around 3:00 in the morning, we received some disturbing news. "Your son's toxicity levels are off the charts," the doctor explained. "Usually that indicates he ate something he shouldn't have—*aspirin*, paint thinner, antifreeze.... If Leo got into something he shouldn't have, you need to tell us now."

I said, "We would tell you." The doctor took a step closer to me and held my gaze, as though trying to determine whether or not I was telling the truth. He moved Leo into the pediatric ICU.

Josh and I waited, hoping to get some answers soon. I looked at my husband. Something about his expression made me think of the angel I'd seen on the train, its offer of strength and peace. I'd told myself I'd think about the experience later, and maybe now was the time. Should I tell



Josh what I saw? Was an angel with us right now?

My thoughts were interrupted by an update from the doctor. Leo had to be intubated to help his breathing. He was sedated and put on dialysis to flush the toxins from his system. High levels of acid in his body had caused a stroke. No one knew what was at the bottom of it. Poisoning was ruled out because his acid levels increased, even after treatment.

With all the bad news, I couldn't hold it in anymore. "Josh," I said, "I saw an angel the night of the baseball game." As I explained myself, Josh

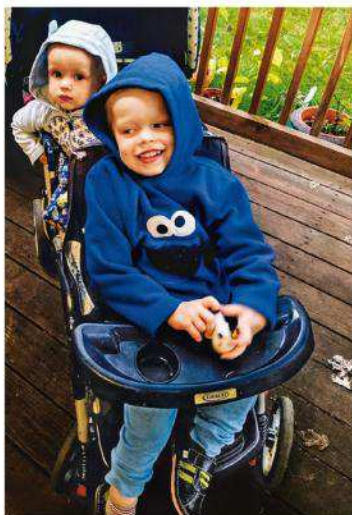
At the game with Josh, the night in 2015 that Stephanie realized Leo was sick.

didn't say a word. I could see that the data analyst in him didn't know what to make of me. But ever since I'd seen that sparkling angel, I knew that, in the end, everything was going to be okay. That's what got me through.

It took two months before the doctors could confirm their suspected diagnosis: methylmalonic acidemia, MMA, an inherited disorder in which the body is unable to process proteins and fats. The toxins had built up in Leo's body until he was in crisis. If

not properly managed the disease can be fatal. Each state determined what disorders are screened for at birth, but the year Leo was born Minnesota had changed its screening providers. The machines used hadn't been sensitive enough to flag his condition.

Thankfully Leo's form of MMA was one of the more manageable types and we would eventually be able to take him home. He'd have to be on a low protein diet, special formula and medication all his life. The stroke left Leo like a six-month-old, so he had to relearn how



Leo, age 3, with his sister, Georgia, 17 months, getting ready for a stroll

to swallow, roll over onto his stomach and even use his fingers to grasp his toys. All because his condition wasn't caught early on.

With the help of the Minnesota Department of Health, changes were made to our state's screening measures. And I understand that Michigan may follow suit. Once again, I thought of the spar-

klng angel I saw before the game. Minnesota Twins verses the Detroit Tigers. Minnesota verses Michigan. Only one team was victorious that night, but for a newborn baby both states are winners. ■

Afterglow

It's been three years since Leo's diagnosis. Now, with the aid of a wheelchair, he attends school and receives physical and speech therapies. With an early diagnosis, it's possible to avoid the complications Leo and his family experienced. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) recommends screening for 34 "core conditions" including MMA, but leaves the final decision on what to test for up to individual states. Minnesota currently screens for all 34 conditions—plus 26 others. "It's important to be aware of the regulations in your state and to talk to your pediatrician," says Stephanie. "When people are looking for more information on MMA or ways to support medical research, I always send them to www.angelsforalyssa.com."

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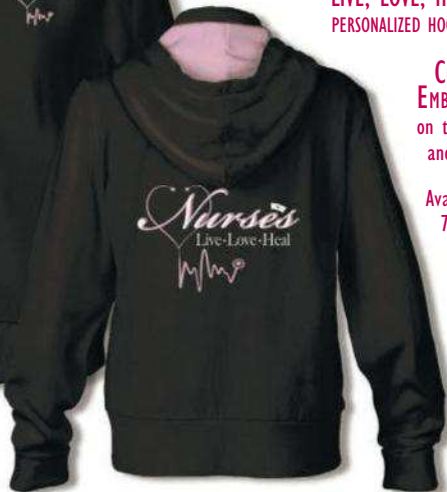
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Animal Angels

Whiskers, feathers
and fur—disguises
don't surprise us

Cat by Surprise

Our beloved cat Abby had died months ago, and finding another wouldn't be so easy. Abby came to us by way of the local dump, where she had been abandoned. The woman who rescued her was allergic to cats, so we ended up taking her in. Our cats had always been sent to us in unusual ways. *Maybe it's asking too much to have a cat appear out of the blue again,* I thought one day as I walked the hallway of the junior high school where I worked as a teacher's assistant.

A colleague passed me with a black cat in her arms. I stopped short. "Guess who jumped into the window of the girl's bathroom on the first floor?" she said.

"Well, aren't you cute." I scratched under the kitty's ears as he purred. He didn't have a collar, but he seemed way too friendly to be a stray. "My family is looking for another cat."

"If he lives in the neighborhood he'll go right back home after I put him out," the teacher said. "I think this one is taken."

I bent down so I could look the cat in the eyes. "If you *do*

need a home, meet me back here tomorrow.” My colleague laughed and we parted ways.

The next morning I walked from my car to the school entrance. No one else was around—except the black cat sitting on the sidewalk. “You came back!” I said. “I have to go to work now, but why don’t you come find me after the bell rings and I’ll take you home.”

I walked on through winding corridors, climbed stairs and pushed through two closed doors before I arrived at the reading lab. I plopped down on a giant floor cushion and started working with a student. A half hour later I heard soft purring and felt something brush up against my leg. The black cat! Before I knew what to think, he climbed up onto the cushion beside me and fell asleep.

I had my answer. It wasn’t too much for an angel to send me a cat to take home. Right out of the blue.

—JACQUELINE JOHNSON, CANANDAIGUA, NEW YORK

Deer to His Heart

“I just want to warn you,” said the aide outside Wesley’s care facility. “Your husband is a little grumpy today.”

“Really?” I said. “That’s not like him.” Wesley had maintained a positive attitude in the months since a stroke left him paralyzed and unable to speak.

“I know,” the aide said. “I’m not sure what has changed.”

When I went inside his room, there was no smile in Wesley’s eyes, like usual. He seemed far away. Then it hit me—it was September, when Wesley always went camping in Punxsutawney. His brief trips around the grounds in his wheelchair couldn’t compare. He used to love walking for miles, or riding his four-wheeler through the woods, the deer hiding between the trees.

“He used to live outdoors this time of year,” I told the aide when I left. “I’m sure that’s what’s wrong.” I looked up into the blue sky on the way to my car. *Lord, I prayed, Wesley misses this beautiful world you created, and I don’t know how to help.*

A few days later, I got a call from Wesley's aide. "On my way in this morning, I noticed two deer near the building. I ran into Wesley's room and propped him up by the big picture window. Those deer wandered over and pressed their noses up to the glass." When I saw my husband that afternoon, his eyes were smiling.

I believe those deer were really angels, sent to assure Wesley that if he couldn't go to nature, nature would come to him.

—MARIAN FOWLER, WAYNESBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

Two Nuts in Love

Squirrels are everywhere in New York. Watching them race up the tree trunks at the park near our apartment was one of my husband Michael's favorite pastimes. One afternoon not long after we got married, Michael and I were sitting on a bench talking about our finances. "I hope that extra part-time gig I'm doing lasts a few more months," I told him.

Just then a squirrel with a big, beautiful bushy tail scampered over to our bench. He had a nut clutched in his hands. "We're like the squirrels, Tanya," Michael said. "They always get their nut. They don't wake up worrying how they are going to feed themselves. Each day they get what they need."

I still felt anxious. Later we wound up in the kitchen having the same talk over dinner. "Remember that squirrel we saw in the park, Tanya," he said. "He knows how to live day to day, and not worry about what will happen tomorrow."

That evening before bed I was looking at one of the angel figurines on top of my dresser, and let my mind wander. *Can I trust like the squirrels do? Can I trust life, and trust God?*

Over the next few years Michael and I got better paying jobs and started saving. Any time I would worry about money, Michael would remind me of the squirrels. To this day, whenever I'm walking through a park and see a squirrel cross my path or race up a tree, I stop and think, *Every squirrel gets its nut.* And I give thanks for getting mine.

—TANYA RICHARDSON, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

lost & found

MEMORIAL DAY meant a cookout at my mom's house with no work on the agenda except for minding the barbecue pit. Of course, that didn't last long. Since Dad had passed away three years ago, there were always a few chores Mom needed a hand with. The hedges were in need of a trim, so after lunch my

husband, John, and I set off to find the shears. But they weren't in their usual place in the garage. And they weren't in Dad's old workshop, either.

"I'll take a look in the shed," I told John. We had searched everywhere else. Unlike Dad's workshop, which Mom and I still hadn't gotten around to cleaning out, his toolshed was practically empty. We rarely had any reason to go in there, but I wasn't giving up on finding those shears.

Something caught my eye immediately when I walked in. Not the shears. A jar, filled with...I reached my hand in. Letters. Letters Dad had written to Mom, postmarked 1955.

Together, Mom, John and I sat on the porch swing, the letters between us. Dad was away for a few weeks on assignment with the National Guard when he wrote Mom all about the food he had eaten, the sights he'd seen and, of course, how much he missed her. Each one was signed, "Love, your weekend soldier."

Without Dad's old hedge clippers, there was no working that Memorial Day. Just sweet memories.

KAREN KIMBELL, SANGER, TEXAS



Karen's newlywed parents, Patsy and Wilburn Bragg, in 1956

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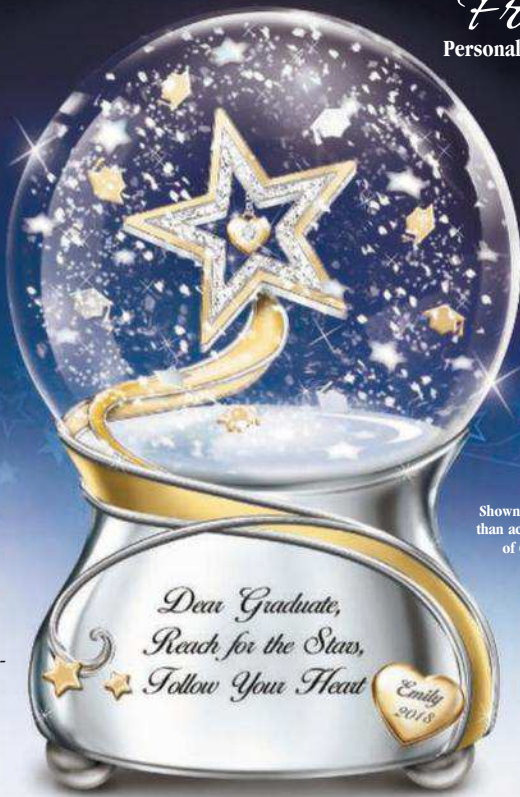
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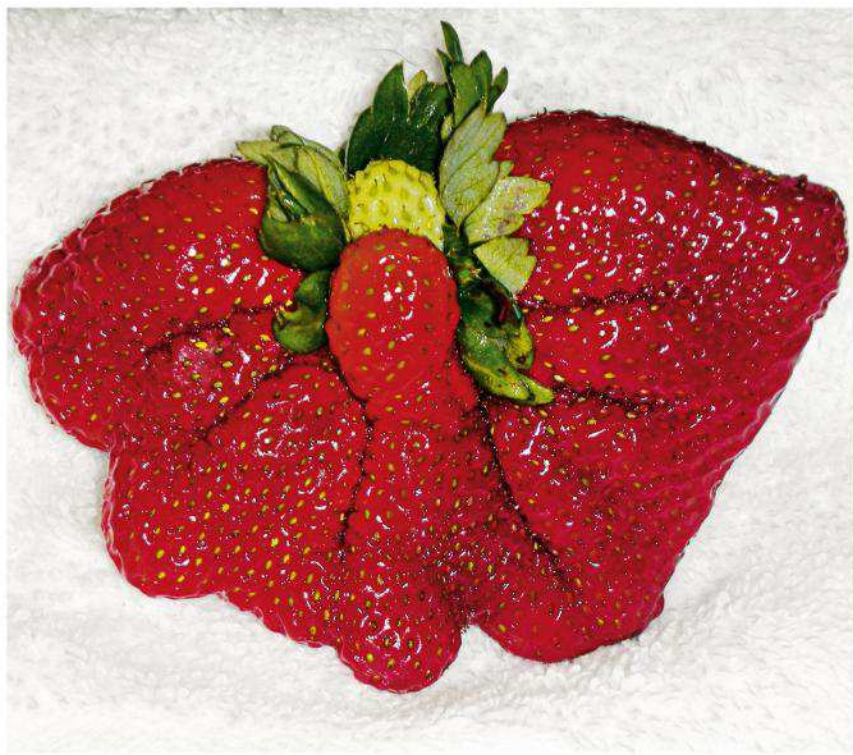
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angel sightings



WHEN HURRICANE KATRINA HIT the Gulf Coast on August 29, 2005, my husband and I lost everything. In the weeks that followed, I found myself craving normalcy—and sweet strawberries. So I bought a whole crate of plump red berries from a roadside stand, planning to share with my neighbors who were also still recovering from the disaster. I was washing the fruit when I noticed that one strawberry looked different from the rest. It was very large and oddly shaped. In fact, the more I stared at it, I realized it kind of looked like...an angel! Turned out I had more than fruit to share with my neighbors. I had hope.

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Just for Papa

My son wanted
one more
fishing trip with
his grandfather

BY CAROL SMEDLEY, SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH

This was a mistake. That's what I thought as my son, Daniel, and I helped my father to a folding chair by the half-frozen reservoir. I brought out the fishing rods, tackle and reels. Would Dad be able to enjoy any of it? For most of his life, he was a champion fisherman. Growing up, I'd seen his fishing rituals a hundred times. Stood by his side by the water as he gave me lessons. But now that he was 91, Dad's fishing days were over.

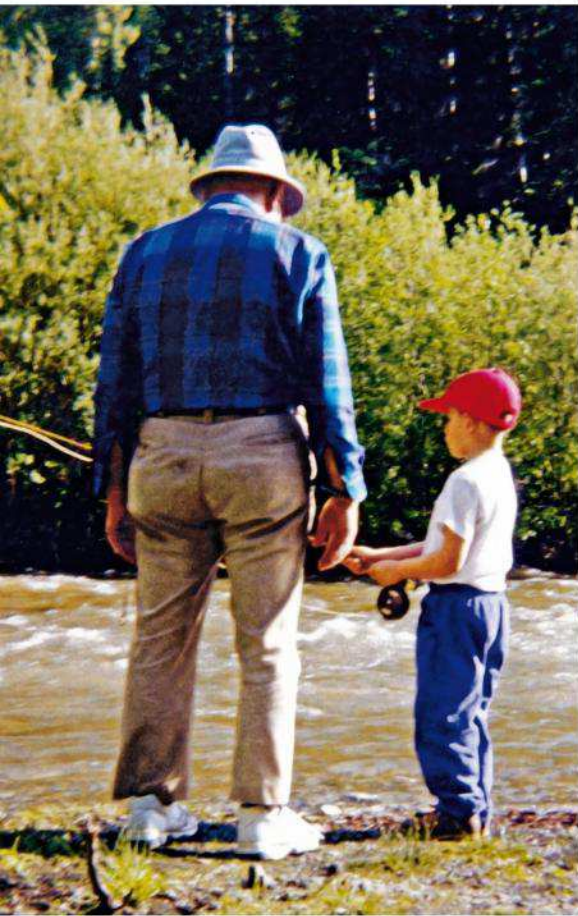
Neither Daniel nor I had inherited his talent for the sport. We'd always relied on his expertise. "You have to flick the fly just right," I remembered Dad saying. "Lay the line easily on top of the water, like it's floating downstream." The words stayed with me, but the skill didn't follow.

"There you go, Papa," Daniel said, laying a blanket over Dad's legs.

Today's trip had been his idea. He was 19, home for a week in March during his plebe year at West Point. More than anything during this break he wanted to go fishing with his Papa once more. "I'd love to," Dad had said when I suggested it. But with his dementia, he could become disagreeable quickly.

So far he was doing fine. He thanked Daniel for the blanket and breathed in the fresh air. I worried it was too chilly. It was a miracle the roads had been passable and we were able to find a spot by Deer Creek Reservoir in the Wasatch Mountains where the water wasn't still completely frozen. Not that it would give Dad back his ability to fish the way he did when he was younger. That was one obstacle we couldn't overcome.

"Looks like the ice is melting fast," Daniel said, pointing out at the



Daniel with his Papa on the Provo River in the Uinta Mountains

Now he was in an assisted living facility, much to his dismay. He was a mountain man, born and raised in rural Idaho, and a geologist who collected and catalogued fossils all around the country. He wasn't used to having to rely on others for help. Not at work, not outdoors, and certainly not when fishing. But as he picked through his tackle box, I could see he was having trouble.

"Am I doing it right?" Daniel asked me, working with his own rod.

"I could never do it as well as Dad," I admitted.

Daniel and I hadn't fished at all since the last outing we'd had with Dad four years ago. That day had been perfect: Dad out in the stream in the chair Daniel and I had

wedged between boulders for stability, Daniel a short way downstream, me on the shoreline between them. Summer sunlight filtered through the trees, dappling the water. Mayflies flitted on the surface, as if teasing the trout below. I'd felt like I was on the banks of the River Time, Dad in the twilight of his life, Daniel

reservoir that sparkled in the late morning sun.

"We'll have plenty of space to fish," Dad agreed.

"Great," I said, but I was still unsure. For more than a year he'd been declining physically and mentally. I'd cared for him at home as best I could, until a fall landed him in the ICU.

just reaching manhood. *Maybe that should have been our last fishing memory*, I thought as I watched my father struggle now. That's when I noticed a man in jeans and a jacket just past Dad, up on the bank. *Where did he come from?*

"Hi!" Daniel said. "Do you fish around here too?"

"I'm just here for the day," the man said. He didn't have a rod or tackle box, but he talked like a fisherman when he admired Dad's equipment, chatted with him about bait. "Need a hand with that line?" he asked Dad.

Once again, Dad declined. But the fisherman stayed by his side, casually giving advice without seeming to do so. Dad could accept his suggestions without admitting he couldn't do it himself. With no help from me or Daniel, Dad was able to rig and cast a

line. When Daniel got a bite, Dad sat up straighter in his chair. "Good job!" he said. "Now bring it in!" Dad expertly directed Daniel on exactly how to "play it." Our fisherman friend looked impressed. We talked about that catch all the way home. Dad passed away just weeks later.

I had worried that fishing trip would turn out to be a mistake. That our summer trip years earlier should have been our last. But now that Dad is gone from this world, I keep the memory of that chilly day in my heart. The day God melted every obstacle as surely as the sun melted the ice on the water. Dad's fishing days weren't over after all. When he got to the water, God had an angel waiting on the shore, just for him. Just like the angels who were waiting for him in heaven. ■



Afterglow

Daniel Smedley graduated from West Point in 2013. He's now a captain in the Army, stationed in Germany. "I hope to visit him and his wife soon," says Carol. This picture was taken on Ring Day. "West Point was the first college

to issue rings to their seniors," Carol explains. "The ceremony dates back to 1835." Families of deceased graduates often donate their rings, which are melted down and used to forge rings for current seniors, connecting past and present graduates in what West Point calls the Long Gray Line.

only human?

AS A REGIONAL SALES MANAGER, I spent a lot of time traveling. Today, despite a slight cough, I was headed to an afternoon meeting in Mobile, Alabama. It was business as usual until I realized I'd booked a flight for 7:00 P.M., not 7:00 A.M.

I went to the ticket agent. "Can I help you?" she asked.

I knew all the agents in the Charlotte, North Carolina, airport since I took the same flights so often. But I didn't recognize this woman. "I need to get to Mobile for a meeting," I said.

"All the flights to Alabama are oversold," she said. I'd have to cancel my meeting. "Now you have time to run over to the doctor about that cough," the agent said.

I didn't think I'd coughed once in front of this woman. But I took her advice. After I rescheduled my meeting I made a doctor's appointment for that afternoon. Come to find out I had a large mass on my left lung and several spots on my right. I had stage four lung cancer.

Months after my chemo treatment I was able to go back to

traveling. On my first flight after my diagnosis, I got caught up with my friends at the ticket counter. Naturally, I asked about the new ticket agent. I wanted to thank her. "It was uncanny the way she knew I needed to see a doctor," I told everyone.

"Who?" one of the agents asked, confused.

They assured me they hadn't hired anyone new. Sometimes we meet angels where we least expect them but need them most.

ANGEE LEE, MOORESVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA



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heaven's music

NOTHING TOOK ME BACK IN TIME like music. Scrolling through my digital music library over coffee that quiet day, the songs from my youth brought to mind all the nights I'd spent dancing...and one dance partner in particular.

Handsome, well-educated, he was the kind of man who opened doors and pulled out chairs for his dates. For a while we spent almost every weekend together. It was one of the happiest times of my life. Until the night he treated me unkindly in front of our friends, and I knew I'd never be able to trust him again. As we drove home, I was as silent as I was confused.

That guy hasn't crossed my mind in years, I thought as an ad popped up over my song list. Enticed by her sultry voice, I clicked on the link to Adele's new hit, "Hello."

The melody was beautiful. "Hello from the other side/I must've called a thousand times," sang Adele. After that night, I recalled, the young man and I had never spoken again. The lyrics had struck a chord even after all this time. I looked up my old dance

partner online and learned he'd passed away years before.

Adele sang about understanding, forgiveness. My onetime friend and I had missed the chance to talk in person, but listening to that song made me realize we were having a conversation long overdue. "To tell you I'm sorry for breaking your heart." A reconciliation was taking place, in heaven and here on earth.

MARILYN McFADDEN, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA



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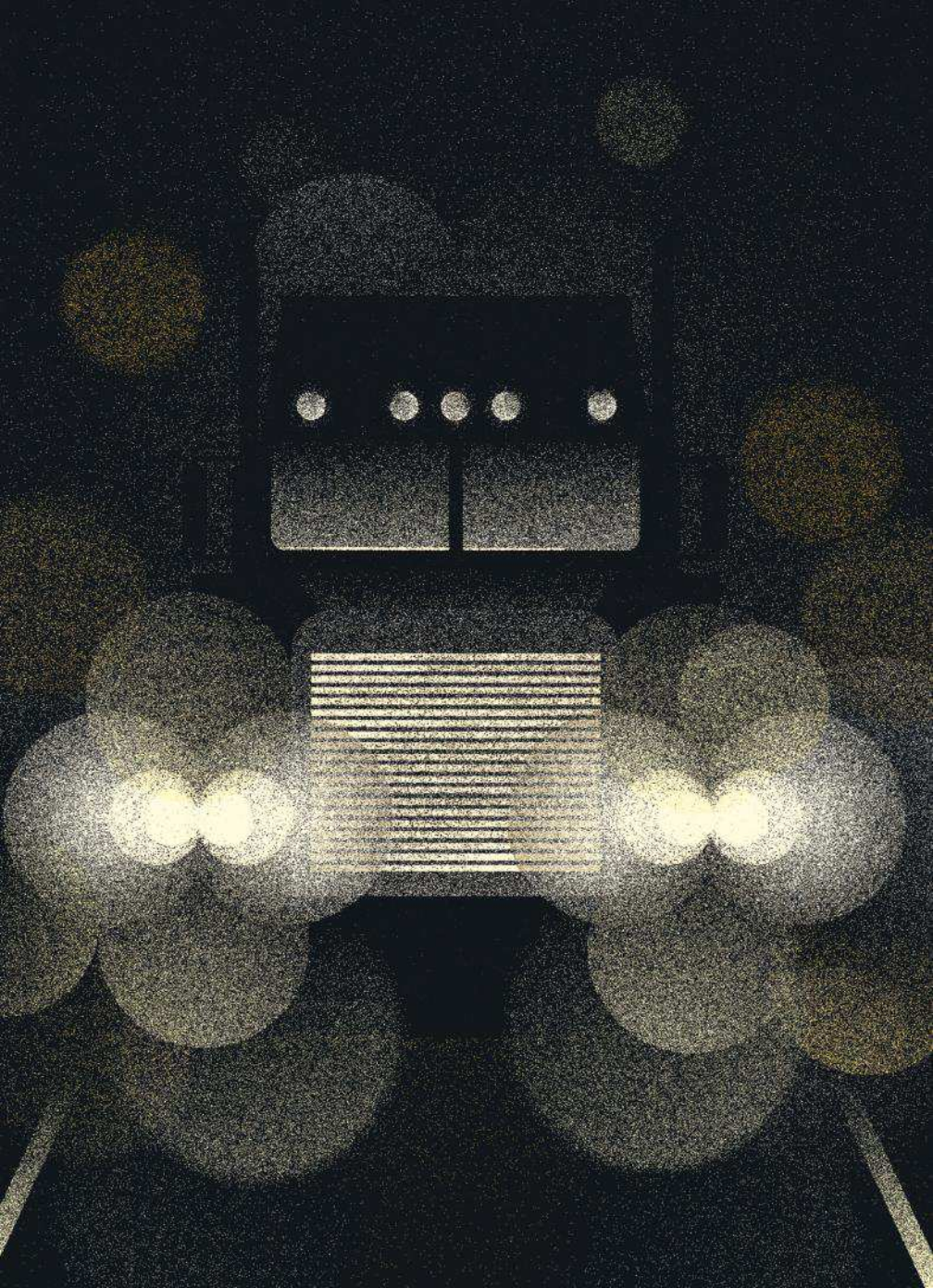
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65-69	\$20.50	\$16.00	\$33.50	\$26.00	\$66.00	\$51.00	\$163.50	\$126.00
70-74	\$27.40	\$21.40	\$45.00	\$35.00	\$89.00	\$69.00	\$221.00	\$171.00
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headlights in the night

How did I ever think we could
make this long, monotonous drive alone?

BY MINDY BEAUMONT, CALIMESA, CALIFORNIA

STARING OUT at the highway, I could barely keep my eyes open. Already I'd been driving for more than four hours. Now it was long past midnight and we still had hours to go to reach our home in a small town in the foothills of southeast California.

Please, God, help us get there safely. The thought, more reflex than prayer, jolted my consciousness for a split second. I looked over at my 16-year-old daughter, Katie, sleeping peacefully in the seat next to me. I hated to wake her. She was as exhausted as I was. She would have to take over for me at some point, but

not yet. If only there was a place to pull over. I could sleep for a while before going on. But in every direction there was only pitch-black darkness, not even a glimmer of a town in the distance, no sign of an exit anywhere. I couldn't remember the last time I had even seen another vehicle. I took a deep breath, trying to tamp down the sharp fear building inside of me. I felt so alone.

In the driver's side mirror I could barely make out the shadow of the 35-foot horse trailer behind our heavy-duty pickup. That was the reason I was in this fix. More specifically, Toby—our majestic, award-winning



Katie and champion show horse Toby around the time of the story

Paint—snug inside of it. We were coming home from the APHA World Championship Show in Fort Worth, Texas. Our first time to show outside California. We couldn't pass that up. Toby hadn't placed, but the experience was invaluable.

But we couldn't drive during the day, what with the desert heat topping 120 degrees. There was no way to keep the trailer cool. So we parked in the daytime at a campground, where we could find shade for Toby and get some shut-eye ourselves, then set off at night, hours after the sun set. This was our second night of driving. Katie had her license but wasn't experienced enough to drive a horse trailer for long. I knew when we started that the driving would be

on me. I hadn't counted on how hard the isolation and the accumulated stress of the last two days would be.

I fiddled with the radio dials, trying to find music to keep me awake. Nothing but static. I drummed against the steering wheel, but that couldn't keep my eyes from feeling heavy lidded—

I jerked my head up. That was too close! I looked around desperately for something—anything—to focus on. But there was only mile upon mile of asphalt. And the drone of the tires against it. Monotonous. Stupefying. Sleep inducing. I yawned, feeling helpless to keep us safe.

Just then a blinding light shone in my mirrors. A big 18-wheeler coming up fast. I was grateful for the momentary distraction, even if I knew the truck would blow past us in seconds. To my surprise, it settled behind me instead, practically riding on my bumper. The headlights glaring, impossible to ignore.

Go around, bozo! I thought. Nothing doing. It was as if the trucker was intentionally trying to irritate me. I slowed down. He did too. *Some answer to prayer this is!* "Can't you at least get him off my tail?" I muttered, though I was certain now that no one was listening.

Mile after mile we drove, for more than an hour, my heart pounding. I

thought again of how alone I was. If this trucker had some bad intention, there would be no one to save us.

Those kinds of worries kept me awake now. When I felt myself nodding off the headlights jerked me awake. They seemed to shine brighter, jarring me back to attention.

At last I saw a glimmer in the distance. A gas station on a hill to the left. *Thank you, Jesus!* The off ramp came into view and I put my blinker on to let the trucker know I was getting off. As I came up the exit lane I looked left to see the 18-wheeler go by. My eyes followed. Up ahead there was nothing but the road, desolate as ever. What had happened?

I pulled into the brightly lit gas station, parked the truck and slumped down in my seat. I just could not understand it. Katie stirred and I told her everything. About the

truck. The lights. The disappearing. “Well, that’s weird,” she said and went back to sleep.

I tilted my seat back, and the next thing I knew I awoke to the truck bouncing from Toby pawing impatiently in the trailer.

I felt refreshed, like I’d slept for eight hours, though it was less than two. I filled a bucket of water for Toby. Katie was ready to drive. Now that I was awake, I couldn’t stop thinking about those headlights. I was scared in the moment, but the more I thought about it the more the presence of that truck seemed reassuring, protective even. He’d appeared just when I needed him and stayed until I was safe, as if I’d been sent a 10-4 by God himself. ■

Afterglow

Toby’s now retired from horse shows, but Mindy (far right) and Katie have continued to compete. Their newest horse, Bobby, shown here, is only three years old and was born right on their property. “He was two weeks premature, and I worried he wouldn’t survive,” Mindy says. “But Bobby’s exceeded all our expectations. He’s grown into a champion.” Bobby’s won showmanship in his class even when competing against more experienced horses. Katie’s taking some time off from horse shows while she studies to become a certified registered nursing assistant, and plans to start showing Bobby again after she graduates.



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the collector

I SLICED THE TAPE sealing the cardboard box. It was a gift from a friend, but I wasn't sure for what occasion. I folded down the lid with the curiosity of a child at Christmas, reached inside and pulled out a quartz crystal cluster with one large point.

"Oh!" I said when I realized what it was. I was holding the same crystal I had been eyeing at an exhibition a few weeks prior. The one that had reminded me of a crystal my dad kept on his dresser for years.

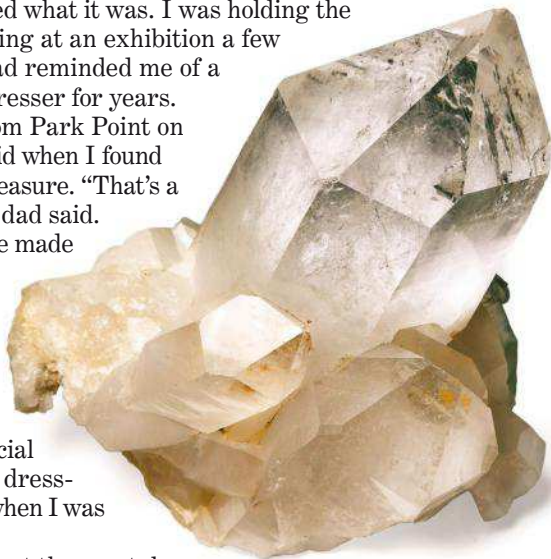
That crystal had come from Park Point on Lake Superior. I was just a kid when I found what I thought was hidden treasure. "That's a really nice agate, Susie," my dad said. "The waves and the sand have made it smooth. I'll keep it safe for you. I promise."

And keep it safe he did. Dad wasn't a rock guy. He didn't even collect souvenirs or keep many things for sentimental reasons, but my special agate never left the top of his dresser. Not until he passed away when I was only 19 years old.

I had told my friend all about the crystal that reminded me of my father. It turned out she decided to surprise me by purchasing it.

That quartz crystal became the start of a whole rock crystal collection. My living room shelves are now littered with crystals in all shapes and sizes. Six-sided quartz. Pale blue celestite. Glassy yellow citrine. Every one is different, but all of them help me keep the memory of my dad's love crystal clear.

SUSAN FAWCETT, SPRINGFIELD, MISSOURI



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someone's in the kitchen



GROWING UP IN A FAMILY WITH GERMANIC ROOTS, Mom made this sausage dinner all the time in her big cast-iron skillet. Now that I've inherited the recipe, and Mom's skillet, I use a smoked pork sausage called kielbasa, but any sausage (meat or meatless) will do. Easy prep, easy cleanup, easy leftover lunch the next day—if you're lucky!

CHRISTINE HENDERSON, CIBOLO, TEXAS

Kielbasa Skillet Supper

INGREDIENTS

- 4 to 6 red potatoes, cleaned and diced
- ¼ cup corn or canola oil
- 1 large kielbasa link, 14 to 16 ounces, or smoked turkey sausage
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 bell pepper, chopped (red or green, or ½ of each for more color)
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 15-ounce can black beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 15-ounce can corn, drained and rinsed
- ½ teaspoon curry powder
- ½ cup ketchup

RECIPE

Put the diced potatoes in a microwave-safe bowl and add ½ cup water. Cover



Christine's mom made everything in her cast-iron skillet, even potato chips!

and cook on high for six minutes. In the meantime, heat oil over medium-high heat in a large skillet. Cut sausage into half-inch rounds. Add onions, bell pepper, sausage, salt and pepper to pan. Stir frequently to prevent from sticking. Drain potatoes and add to skillet. After potatoes are slightly browned, add beans and corn to heat them—this should take no more than 15 minutes. Mix together the curry and ketchup in ¼ cup water, and pour into skillet. Stir until well blended. Makes 4 hearty servings.

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Lullaby and Good Night

Surrounded by lace pillows and eyelet sheets,
I didn't doubt angels were watching over me

BY ROBERTA MESSNER, HUNTINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA

AFTER A WEEK of waiting, I was finally going to pick up my new bed. My new bedroom—or rather, my college-bound brother's old bedroom—would finally be ready for me to move into. I'd saved up my money to buy a second-hand oak washstand. Now I'd have a bed to match for only twenty dollars.

"Hi, Roberta!" Helen called as I pulled up to her house. "The bed's all set to go."

I had spotted it at a tag sale the week before, its tall, oak turn-of-the-century headboard standing out amongst the surrounding kitchenware and appliances. The couple having the sale offered to help me

transport it home if I gave them a week. I couldn't wait to see the bed again. But when I did see it I gasped.

"Oh, Helen," I said. "It's beautiful!" She and her husband had refinished it to a golden sheen. The smooth wood was the color of summer sunshine. "I never imagined it could look like this."

"These come with the bed as well," Helen said. She handed me a bag of white ruffled eyelet bed linens and a gilded frame. Inside the frame was a needlework sampler: HOLY ANGELS GUARD THY BED.

"We've always hung it by the headboard," Helen explained, "so I thought we should send them off



together.” She gazed down at the sampler. “Beds are interesting things, if you think about it,” she said. “We’re born in them, love in them and die in them eventually.” She touched the pretty needlework angel that watched over the peaceful sleeper, and handed me the sampler.

I nodded politely, but I didn’t consider her words too closely. I hadn’t even graduated high school yet. I could hardly imagine a whole life just from looking at a bed!

Back home my mother helped me set up my new room. I hung the sampler near where I’d lay my head. From the first night I settled into that white eyelet bedding, surrounded by the strong oak frame, I knew there was something special about my new bed. The soft sheets made it easy to believe angels were watching over me, no matter what troubles I experienced during the day as an adolescent.

Occasionally, around town, I saw the couple who’d sold it to me. “Still believing in those angels?” Helen asked me one day when I ran into her in an antique store.

“I ask them to watch over me every night,” I said. “I’ve never slept so well as I do in that bed.”

“I knew you would,” she said. “That bed originally belonged to my aunt. She was born in it in the

nineteen twenties. Can you imagine that?” she said.

I remembered what Helen had said that day about the beds of our lifetimes. I always felt so protected in mine. A little like Helen’s newborn aunt must have felt snuggled in her mother’s arms way back when.

Over the next few years, as I struggled through college and nursing school, sometimes I’d crawl into my oak bed so exhausted I thought I’d never get up again. But after a night under my eyelet comforter I was ready to face my studies or resume my rounds as a nurse.

I traded my oak single for a king-size bed when I got married. But in time, not even a good night’s sleep could save that troubled union. I moved out and bought a new bed. When I climbed into it that first night in my new house, I glanced over at the angel sampler I’d held on to. “God, send your angels to surround me,” I whispered. I slipped between the sheets. Once more I felt the familiar comfort of being watched over. When I opened my eyes the next morning, I was ready to start anew.

I cared for many people, stood by many bedsides in my nursing career. All those years of hard work in school were definitely worth the effort. One afternoon at the hospital I was at the front desk when I was called to a



Roberta's sampler dates back to the Victorian era. "It's called a punch paper sampler," she says, "because it's stitched on perforated paper instead of canvas."

patient's room. "She doesn't have long to live," a coworker whispered in the hallway.

Forty years of nursing told me there was no hope for recovery in this case. I wasn't being called to help save this woman's life, only to oversee isolation measures to guard against further infection. I slipped into a sterile gown and gloves and walked into the room to find the patient lying in bed. Her husband sat beside her, stroking her hand. I recognized them right away. It was the couple who had sold me my bed so many years ago.

I adjusted Helen's pillows, elevated her head, straightened her oxygen tubing. "I'm Roberta," I said softly, leaning close to her ear. "Years ago you sold me the most wonderful bed at a yard sale."

Helen frowned. It was so long ago I wouldn't blame her for forgetting. Then she smiled. "I remember."

Helen's hospital bed was nothing like my big, comfy oak bed. There was no high headboard. No downy, white eyelet comforter or fluffy pillows. But Helen's husband was beside her, holding her hand. I was here, ready to tend to her needs and pray for her. And I had no doubt angels surrounded this bed just like the needlework angel in my sampler. For the first time I understood what Helen had said to me all those years ago.

"Beds are beautiful things," I reminded her.

"I remember," she said. Her breathing grew easier and she closed her eyes. She would rest now, I knew. And soon wake in paradise. ■

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The Workshop class of 2016 is already contributing to Guideposts publications.

Is this *your* year?



Enter the **Guideposts Writers Workshop Contest** and your dream could come true

I READ *Guideposts* as a teenager growing up in India. An American pastor and his wife lived in the apartment upstairs, and they shared their magazines with us. I loved the stories. I could so relate to the struggles people went through. We were a churchgoing family, but even if you weren't, these stories could help you.

"I'm going to have a story published in *Guideposts* someday," I told my sisters. The chances of that happening seemed unlikely. What stories

would a girl in India have for a magazine published in America? But dreams are dreams, and I trusted God with mine. I wanted to become a writer like the ones I read in *Guideposts*, people like Marion Bond West, Sue Monk Kidd and Roberta Messner.

Instead, I became a high school science teacher. I got married, had a child. One day I noticed a newspaper ad seeking science teachers to work in America.

I took a chance and got the job! Our young family moved to Pennsylvania,

and I taught in a high school. I noticed that Guideposts had a Writers Workshop Contest. Why not enter? I worked and worked on my story.

In June 2016, I sent it off. Two days later, I became a U.S. citizen, and in August I got a call. I was one of the winners of the Writers Workshop!

I have now had a story published in *Guideposts* ("The Perfect Flag," July 2017). Even better, I had the thrill of going through the same all-expenses-paid, weeklong workshop that taught Marion, Sue and Roberta to write true first-person stories of hope and inspiration. God answered my dream.

Have you ever dreamed of becoming a writer? Do you have a great,

uplifting story to tell? Enter the Writers Workshop Contest. It's your chance to see your dream come true.

—KAREN JASON



The Writers Workshop is sponsored by best-selling author **Debbie Macomber**. "I've kept journals all my life," she says. "Not long ago, I found a spiral notebook from 1977. On the first page, it said, 'Since the greatest desire of my life is to become a writer, I'll start with the pages of this journal.' Putting those words down was the beginning." Today there are some 200 million copies of Debbie's books in print.

Win a week with us in Rye, New York, at the Guideposts Writers Workshop (all expenses paid), and we'll share everything we know about inspirational storytelling. Your story could be read by millions in one of our magazines—*Guideposts*, *Angels on Earth*, *All Creatures* or *Mysterious Ways*. We're looking for true first-person stories, not sermons or essays. It can be your own story or something you've written for someone else. We'll

pick 12 candidates for the workshop held October 8–12, 2018, taught by the editors of *Guideposts*.

HOW TO ENTER: Submit an original, unpublished true first-person story of 2,000 words or less, typewritten and double-spaced, about an experience that changed your life. Show us how faith made a difference. You can also ghostwrite for someone you know. Either way, make sure to tell us about yourself and your life experience.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: **JUNE 10, 2018.** Entries must be postmarked or timestamped by June 10 and sent to Guideposts Writers Workshop, 110 William Street, Suite 901, New York, NY 10038. Submit online at guideposts.org/wwcontest, or e-mail to wwcontest@guideposts.org. Winners will be notified by mid-August 2018. We acknowledge winning entries only. Writers who've attended previous Guideposts workshops are not eligible.

Angel of Courage

Dona Gelsing

Let the grace and encouragement of this heavenly messenger fill you with the strength and fortitude to always carry on.

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-Deuteronomy 31:6*

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a leap of faith

I didn't have any other choice but to jump

BY ANYA TIKKA, POND EDDY, NEW YORK

I STOOD ON the window ledge trying to gather courage. In front of me was a two-story drop down to the street. If I jumped, I risked hitting one of the wrought-iron fence spikes. But the alternative was even worse.

My ex-boyfriend had somehow found my rented apartment. He'd burst inside, reeking of alcohol. I thought I had finally gotten free of him. I was trying to get my life back on track, trying to start fresh. But I felt damaged. Like no one would ever really love me. Like I didn't deserve a normal relationship.

He staggered around the room, his body off-balance, attempting desperately to stay upright. His big, menacing figure lunged toward me on the ledge.

"Come back here!" He had a knife! He wielded it like a sword. *He's going to stab me*, I thought desperately. He'd hit me before.

"You can't run from me," he slurred as I ducked.

Maybe he was right. Maybe I could never run far enough away from him. His arms swung wildly, the knife slicing the air near my head. I was trapped.

I looked down. It seemed so far. *I can't ever get away from him*, I thought. *He'll always find me, no matter what I do*. I had to make my decision. If I jumped, I'd have a chance, but if not, I didn't have a chance against him and that knife.

I closed my eyes and jumped. I landed hard on the concrete,



narrowly missing the fence. I clutched my wrist in pain. Picking myself up, I ran to neighboring doors, calling for help. Couldn't anybody hear me? I ran across the street, cradling my arm to my chest. "Please! Please help me!" I screamed, pounding on a locked door.

Finally, a woman cautiously cracked the door open, her eyes wide. For all I knew the monster was right behind me with his knife. I didn't turn around to check. The woman pulled me inside and shut the door.

The police arrived. Then a fire truck. Across the way, my room was on fire. As I left for the hospital, I saw a curtain of flames surrounding a figure in the window. He would stop at nothing. I was no match for his strength and resolve. I was powerless, hopeless.

At the hospital, the doctor told me my wrist was broken, but I was fine otherwise. Fine? I burst into tears, recalling why I was there in the first place. The doctor excused himself, and I turned to the wall. How could anyone understand what I was going through?

"It's going to be okay," someone said. "It really will be okay."

I turned. A woman stood at my



**Anya, a form of Anna,
is popular in Scandinavia.**

bedside. She had long, light brown hair, bright eyes and a warm smile. "I was once in your shoes," she told me. "I thought that I would never get away from the man who abused me. But I did. And you can too. God is

watching over you."

I started to cry. The woman put a reassuring hand on my shoulder. "Be strong," she said. "I'll see you in the morning." That was the last thing I heard before drifting off to sleep.

In the morning, the doctor came in with the police officers who wanted to interview me.

"Where is that nurse?" I asked. "The one who visited me last night?"

"No one visited your room last night," the doctor said. "We made sure you weren't disturbed." But I knew someone had been there. Someone who gave me hope that I could be free—and maybe even loved one day. I had seen her, heard her voice, felt her touch.

Though I never encountered the mysterious woman again, whenever I feel hopeless I remember that gentle hand on my shoulder. And her promise that I would be okay because God was watching over me. He kept me safe when I jumped out that window, and keeps me safe to this day. ■

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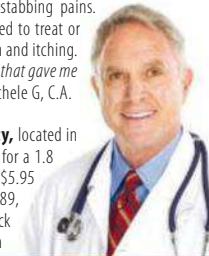
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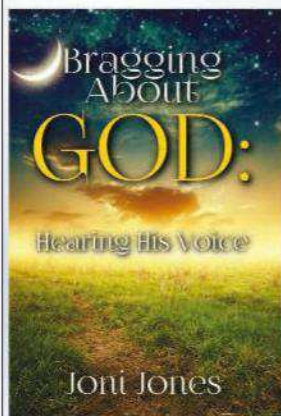
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Cyndi with her yarns before and after; the octopi ready for snuggles



Creature Comforts

CYNDI FONTAINE, SILSBEE, TEXAS

I love everything about the beach—the sand, the water, the sea creatures—so I chose a nautical theme for the knitting store I opened last year, In the Loop. I decided an octopus would be the perfect logo.

Then I read about the Danish Octo Project, in which volunteers crochet colorful octopi for premature babies. Snuggling an octopus with cozy tentacles could be an almost womb-like experience. My customers

could make these comforting creatures.

We held free how-to classes at the shop. Our crocheters, ranging in age from 8 to 92, gave about 75 octopi a month to the neonatal intensive care units at area hospitals.

A recent news story showed me how much our offerings helped. A woman had experienced an emergency early delivery of her first baby. She told the paper she was thankful “some sweet ladies gave my little one a beautiful octopus to comfort her in her crib.” I like thinking the crocheters at In the Loop had a hand in bringing the peace I feel at the beach to these babies in a hospital.

No Soldier Left Behind

CHRIS MATHIS, JUNCTION CITY, KANSAS

In the early days of Jack and Dick's Pawn Shop, started in 1958 by my grandpa and uncle, a bus brought soldiers from nearby Fort Riley so they could make a little extra money. These days they drive themselves to hock all sorts of items.

Including savings bonds. I found stacks of them while cleaning out my grandpa's desk. In honor of the shop's sixtieth anniversary, I decided to return them to their rightful owners.

One of those owners, Woodrow Wilson, Jr., seemed impossible to track down. His bonds, pawned in 1981, had matured to approximately \$3,000. Searching the internet didn't help. I hired a private investigator, who found an address for a homeless shelter in Chicago. This man could use some cash. But he had moved on.

A call to the *Chicago Sun-Times* did the trick. Readers sent in tips—the man was a fixture in the city's financial district. A reporter gave him the news. Happy anniversary, indeed.



Chris and wife, Manuela



Lynn on her chariot with her entourage

Climb Every Mountain

LYNN ELLIS, MARYSVILLE, WASHINGTON

The sermon that spring morning was about how life was like climbing a mountain. I have multiple sclerosis, and at that point I'd been using a wheelchair for 20 years. So I asked my friend John, an avid hiker, what it was like to be on top of a mountain. "Being high above the tree line has to be experienced firsthand," he said.

John and some fellow hikers devised a contraption to carry me up Mount Pilchuck. We met at the parking lot about halfway up the 5,327-foot-high peak. I sat in a chair attached to padded poles. About a dozen people took turns holding the chariot during our seven-hour ascent. Near the top of the mountain, where there were boulders, I was strapped to a gentle giant named Seth.

I picked up a rock at the peak, a reminder that with faith and great friends, I can conquer any mountain.

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How To: Reduce Deep Belly Fat

Researchers have announced a radical technique that not only fights potentially deadly belly fat, but can also lead to slimmer waists and, perhaps, improved health.

The only catch? The establishment wants to spend 5 years – and \$65 million – testing this technology.

But one doctor thinks that the technology is so effective, it is immoral to make people wait.

So he's offering a version of the technique...now.

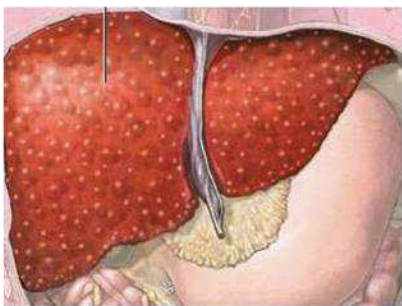
"The science has already been tested, and it's effective," says Dr. Rand McClain, Chief Medical Officer at Live Cell Research. "I can't make people wait 5 years for something that could be helping them today."

McClain is referring to a field of health research that is said to activate a "master switch" inside your body's cells.

This switch controls when your cells store fat, and when they convert the fat into energy. Control the "master switch," the theory goes, and you also control fat.

To researchers, this is far more than just an appearance issue. It could be even more important to Americans who mistakenly believe that small amounts of exercise can radically change their bodies.

According to Dr. Todd Miller, professor in the Department of Exercise Science at George Washington University, "People don't understand that it is very difficult to exercise enough to lose weight. If that is why you are doing it, you are going to fail."



So a way to battle belly fat could be the breakthrough the health community has been waiting for. McClain believes the technique works best for people over 30, particularly those who may be experiencing fatigue, weaker bodies and even "foggy" thinking.

Best of all, McClain announced that he is making his method available – and affordable – to virtually all Americans.

With demand already high for his stunning technique, McClain created an Online presentation detailing how the health breakthrough works.

You can watch the presentation here at www.NoFat90.com

In this video, Rand is telling it like it is...we need more doctors like this! People should be advised to watch the entire video report before committing to such an unconventional method.

Watch the video at www.NoFat90.com

he makes winds his messengers

PSALM 104:4

THE FIRST LITTLE LEAGUE GAME that season might have been just like any other: the T-ball players wearing new gloves that didn't quite fit, the squeaky-clean uniforms, the smell of barbecue in the air and the chatter of the crowd. But for me everything was different. Our son Daniel had died in a car accident one month earlier. He was 19. Now his dad and I were waiting on the sidelines to accept the Sonny Gold Award on his behalf, to honor all the years he devoted to community baseball. I swallowed hard. *Lord, how can we ever do this without Daniel? Give me strength.*

When the time came, my husband and I walked to home plate. The director of the recreation program put her stack of papers down on the ground so her hands were free to present us with the award. Over the applause, I heard the distinct sound of rustling paper. The stack of papers rose up from home plate and floated into the air. A hush fell over the crowd. The dust didn't stir, the flags around the field hung limp and unmoved. But the papers swirled higher and higher into the sky, forming a perfect spiral before finally blowing away. How could that be when there was not a breath of wind?

"I hope Daniel left me my agenda," the director joked.

Sure enough, resting on home plate was a single sheet of paper: her agenda. How could we ever do this without Daniel? The Lord showed us that we didn't have to.

CARMEN POLHEMUS, WIMBERLEY, TEXAS



SAMSON'S DESTINY

THIS SUPERHERO PREDATES COMIC BOOKS

BY RICK HAMLIN, SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

AN ANGEL appearing to announce the birth of a special child is familiar to all Bible readers, especially the incident we refer to as the Annunciation, when Gabriel told Mary she would bear a son named Jesus. But that story has some antecedents in the Hebrew Scriptures, one of my favorites in the book of Judges.

It was not a good time for the Israelites. The Philistines had overtaken their land and the people were suffering. There was a man named Manoah from the town of Zorah in the low country of Judah. His wife had not been able to give birth (reminiscent of the aged and barren Sarah). One day the angel of the Lord appeared to her and told her that though she'd been unable to get pregnant, she was now, and she would soon bear a son,

but there were some particulars that had to be observed.

First she had to be careful not to drink any wine or brandy or eat anything impure. Then she was to make sure that no razor ever touched her boy's head, because he would be a Nazirite—one pledged to the Lord—and someday he would rescue the Israelites from the Philistines. (Note that detail about the boy's hair.)

As always an appearance of the angel of the Lord could be unsettling. The woman ran to her husband, Manoah, told him that something scary had happened to her, very scary, and an angel of the Lord had a message for them but she had neglected to ask where he was from or what his name was (questions I

The dramatic *Death of Samson*, an engraving by Gustave Doré, 1866



can't imagine asking any angel).

Manoah was evidently not convinced that it was an angel and prayed that this “man of God”—as he called him—make a return visit. Indeed the angel did come back, appearing to the woman in a field. She raced to get her husband. (Did she say to the angel, “Don't go away now, I'll be right back?”) Manoah came and saw the “man” for himself.

Sounding a bit like a prosecutor examining a witness, Manoah asked the angel, “Are you the man who spoke to this woman?”

“I am,” said the angel.

“Now when your words come true, what should the rules for the boy be and how should he act?”

Then God's messenger repeated himself. Manoah's wife should not drink anything that comes from the grape, neither wine nor brandy, or eat anything ritually unclean, and they should raise the child up as they were told.

Being the good host, Manoah tried to persuade the “man” to stay and suggested preparing a young goat for him to eat.

“Even if you persuaded me to stay, I wouldn't eat your food,” said the angel. “But you could make the goat your offering to the Lord.”

“What's your name?” Manoah said.



“Why do you ask my name? You couldn't understand it.” Even angels can get a bit testy.

Manoah took a young goat and a grain offering and put them on a rock-like altar, building a fire beneath (in my imagination I picture it looking like an outdoor barbecue). The next thing that happened floored them both, literally. The flame from the altar shot up to the sky and the angel rose right up on that pillar of fire, disappearing completely. Manoah and his wife fell face down on the ground, trembling in fear and awe.



An Angel Appearing to the Wife of Manoah, Carlo Saraceni, 1610. She remains nameless in the Bible story.

fabled long hair and the enormous strength, who could kill a lion with his bare hands and knock off a thousand Philistines with a donkey's jawbone. But he met his match with the temptress Delilah, who discovered the secret of his strength—that long hair—and when he fell asleep one day she called a man to shave it off. His hair gone, the Lord left him. The Philistines blinded him, bound him in chains and took him as prisoner. They didn't seem to notice that his hair started growing back.

That gave him his chance for revenge. The Philistines were having a celebration in their temple and they wanted Samson to appear. After being hauled out, he positioned himself between two pillars. The place was packed with some three thousand spectators, people even huddled on the roof.

Samson prayed to God, then pushed the pillars in one mighty shove and the temple collapsed, killing all his enemies as well as himself. A self-sacrificial act from a Biblical superhero. He was buried in the family tomb in Zorah, not far from where the angel had foretold his birth. ■

Finally Manoah grasped the truth. They had been visited by an angel. But if that was true, then hadn't they actually seen God, and if you saw the face of God, didn't that mean you would die immediately? His good wife, who was clearly the more faith-filled of the two, reassured him that this was simply God's messenger bearing good news and they would surely live to see all that the angel had promised come to pass. Indeed they did. She came to full term and delivered a son, Samson.

Yes, that Samson, the one with the



message *of the* CROW

A story to prove that not all
angel feathers are white

BY DANELLE WILLIAMS, LYNNWOOD, WASHINGTON

“UGH, A DEAD BIRD.” Sitting on the front steps of my home, I pulled the laces tight on my walking shoes, then gestured toward a carcass in the driveway. The bird’s black feathers glistened, iridescent in the sunshine.

“It’s just a crow.” My husband, Dave, touched it with the toe of his shoe while waiting for me to join him on a walk around the neighborhood. It was a bright May morning and the new leaves on the maple tree in the driveway trembled in a gentle breeze. Spring was well established in the Pacific Northwest, and normally I would have felt expectant, knowing God had good things in store—no matter what my immediate challenges. Instead, a feeling of dread threatened to smother me, along with the last shred of my faith.

“I’ll deal with the bird when we get back,” Dave said. “We need a walk.”

That was an understatement. Our life together was hanging by a

thread. We were in financial straits, made dire by my ongoing treatments for ovarian cancer, treatments our insurance didn’t cover and that left me working temp jobs in accounting while my ambition to become a certified public accountant was put on hold. Some days it was a chore to function, and my marriage suffered under the stress of it all.

As Dave and I walked in silence I tried to dredge up the gratitude I knew I should feel just to be alive. Even if a crow lay dead in the middle of my driveway like a bad omen. For some reason I couldn’t shake the image from my mind.

When we returned from our walk, the carcass had mysteriously disappeared, not a feather in sight. “At least that’s taken care of,” Dave said, and went inside to shower.

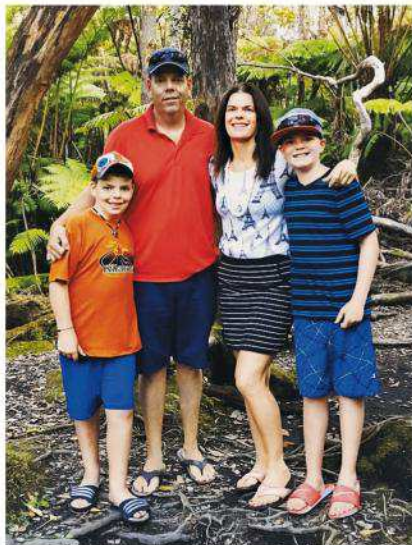
I sat down at the kitchen table with my laptop and punched “crow sightings” into Google. Scrolling through

pages of information, I discovered that various cultures believed various things about the birds, and much was left to personal interpretation.

“Seeing a crow is a reminder that where there is dark, there is also light,” one article suggested. That was certainly true of the crow in the driveway, its feathers a deep purple black that revealed gemstone colors in the bright sunlight. I reread the line, reminded of the darkness in my own life. *God, I desperately need to find your light again*, I prayed. I needed the comfort that came from knowing he was there for me no matter what.

In the coming weeks I felt his presence less and less. But crows were a different story. I noticed them everywhere—flying low over my windshield on the freeway, chattering in the trees when I walked by, clustering in my backyard. Like they were following me. For my current temp job, I rode the bus into downtown Seattle and walked 15 minutes to the office. I enjoyed the wind on my face and the birds overhead. Even if they were mostly crows.

One day a neighbor walked by while I stood on the front lawn, mesmerized by yet another crow visitor. “Did you know that crows are so intelligent they recognize human faces?” my neighbor said. “A study



Danelle and husband, Dave, on vacation in Hawaii with sons, Ryan and Jack

was done at the University of Washington. I read about it in *The New York Times*.”

“What an amazing creature,” I said, and just then remembered a story I’d learned as a child, a Bible story involving some very crow-like birds. Elijah, a great Old Testament prophet, was hiding out in the wilderness, scared for his life. He would have died if God hadn’t sent ravens to feed him daily. It struck me, even as a girl, that in this instance God had chosen the black-feathered bird as his angelic messenger. Not a dove, but a raven. It had made a lasting impression.

That night in bed, I reread the story. I closed my Bible and stared up at

the ceiling while Dave slept beside me. Was God trying to tell me something with all these black-feathered crows? They always seemed near. Though I would never have dared to tell anyone, as spring turned to summer I had begun to believe they recognized me. The more depressed I felt, the more crows clustered into my environment. Just watching them glide on a breezy current, or at rest on a city bench, gave me an odd relief. The crows never lacked anything, even though a major city was far from their natural habitat.

One fall morning after Dave and I had said a chilly goodbye, I stopped under a stand of oak trees on my way in to work. *God, where are you?* I shouted in my mind.

I was sick of short-term jobs that barely paid the bills, sick of cancer treatments even if they were working, sick of worrying about my marriage, of grasping for hope that things would ever get better.

Dry leaves crackled underfoot as downtown traffic maintained a steady din in the background. A rustle overhead grabbed my attention and a chunk of bread dropped directly in front of me. I looked up into the tangled tree branches. The dark, intelligent eyes of a crow peered back at me. I stared down at what looked like a piece of bagel. To feed me? Like Elijah...

The crow cawed, then flew off. I almost waved at the feathered friend who had restored my faith. I walked on to my job, a temporary job until I found something full-time and could continue to strive for my CPA. Meanwhile I would take long walks with my husband, believing God had good things in store, for my marriage and my health and even my finances. It was time for me to trust in the hand of God, the one whose provisions come in unusual ways, whether that's in the wilderness in biblical times or in downtown Seattle today. ■

Afterglow

Danelle Williams continues treatment for her cancer, but she's improving every day. And she and Dave are enjoying a fresh start. "We're much stronger now," she says. They recently moved to another Seattle suburb, closer to Danelle's new full-time job at a CPA firm. "I work as a tax accountant while studying for my CPA license," she reports. Best of all, the office is close enough to her new home that she can walk to work every day. Of course, she never fails to watch for crows along the way.

miracle#

Hope worked
its way into
my heart, despite
doctor's orders

BY ANGIE ATKINSON
SPEARFISH, SOUTH DAKOTA

“WE’RE ALL FINISHED,” said the doctor. “But you’ll have to lie there another twenty minutes or so before you can go.”

I felt my body relax. The hard part was over, now I just had to wait. I was used to waiting. After all, infertility itself was a waiting game.

Beside me sat my husband, Eli. He’d been there throughout the procedure, his comforting presence giving me strength. Once the doctor had left the room, Eli took my hand. “How do you feel?” he asked.

“Okay,” I said. “It didn’t hurt at all.” I’d read as much when I did my own research on IUI—intrauterine

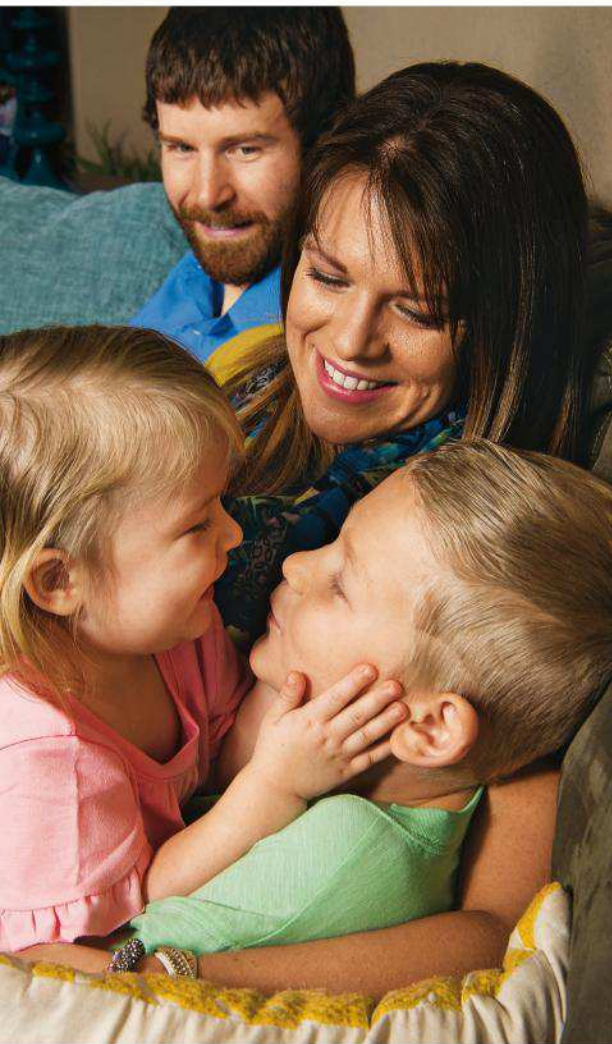
insemination—in the weeks since the doctor had suggested the procedure.

After several years of trying for a baby with no results, Eli and I made an appointment to see a fertility specialist. There was no obvious reason why we couldn’t conceive, especially since we’d done it before.

Our son, Colin, had just turned four and almost every day he asked us for a sibling—a brother or sister, it didn’t matter. He wasn’t picky. Neither was I. Eli and I had always intended to have another child. But every time I got my hopes up, I was disappointed. At this point, hope itself was becoming painful.

The specialist finally found the problem when she asked Eli for a





PHOTOS BY JOHNNY AND EMMY SUNDBY

sample. The likelihood of us conceiving on our own was less than half of one percent. Even if this procedure went off without a hitch, our chances only increased to two percent. Colin had been no small miracle. I knew we

The gang is (finally) all here! Eli and Angie with Colin and his little sister Quinn

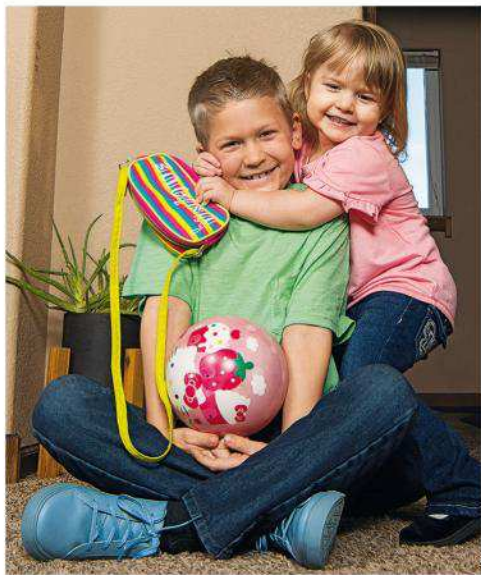
couldn't count on receiving another one.

"You can get up now, Angie," the doctor said when she re-entered the room. *Please, God, I prayed as I slipped out of the cotton hospital gown and back into my clothes. I would love just one more miracle.*

Before we left, the doctor stopped us. "We'll know in a couple of weeks," she said. "But I'm going to be honest with you. You shouldn't get your hopes up."

I'd told myself that 100 times. But it was like telling me not to pray. What else did I have? Eli and I went home, spirits dim. We tried not to say aloud what I was sure we were both thinking: This was never going to work.

The next morning, I put on a happy face for Colin. We hadn't told him about the doctor's appointment and what it could mean. The last thing we wanted was for him to get his hopes up. Dealing with my own struggles to



Colin's angel: Quinn, now almost three, holds on tight to her brother.

stay realistic seemed like enough.

Colin and I were driving across town to the library to return some books when he piped up from the back seat. "Mom, when I get my sister, she's going to sit right here," he said. *Sister?* I glanced in the rear-view mirror as he pointed to the spot next to him.

My voice caught in my throat. "Oh, yeah, buddy?" I finally said, trying hard to keep my tone cheerful. "You think so?" But Colin didn't let up. He continued to talk about his "sister" as if she were already on the way. It was hard to dismiss his enthusiasm, his certainty. Hope was a dangerous emotion to indulge in, yet there it was, working its way into my heart, despite the doctor's orders.

I couldn't wait out the month. I broke down and bought an

over-the-counter pregnancy test. I kept telling myself it would be negative. I had to be prepared for the worst. But when there was one line instead of two, it still felt like a punch to the gut. I'd been hoping for a miracle in spite of myself. In vitro fertilization was the next step, but it was out of our budget. This was our last chance. The time for hope was truly over. My prayer now was for acceptance. Colin

would grow out of his imaginary sister. How could I?

By month's end, though, there was still no sign of my period. Since the pregnancy test I'd bought came in a pack of two, I tore open the second. *Why do you want to torture yourself like this?* I thought. Of course it was negative again. Or was it? Was there a faint second line? My heart raced. The longer the test sat, the clearer the second line became. I took a picture with my phone and sent it to my husband to make sure I wasn't hallucinating, that I wasn't just getting my hopes up again to have them come crashing back down.

I wasn't. A blood test at the doctor's office confirmed it. I was pregnant! And eight months later, I gave birth to the little sister Colin had already saved a seat for. ■

New Pill Reverses Memory Loss in an Amazing Way

Developed by top Israeli doctor; study shows key ingredient reverses years of mental decline and may also prevent dementia; initial users in America report improvements in memory, concentration, and thinking power

Daniel Ward, Sr.

Associated Health Press

AHP – It is not often that another country beats the US to a medical breakthrough. So when it happens, you know it's something special. That's why doctors and patients are so excited that Israel's new memory pill is now available in America.

Sold under the brand name *Lipogen PS Plus*, the new pill contains a key ingredient that regrows cells in the part of the brain that stores memories, which improves memory, concentration, and thinking power.

The phenomenon of growing new brain cells is known medically as neurogenesis. American scientists believed it was impossible to experience after a certain age. It may now be achieved at any age with *Lipogen PS Plus*.

"With daily use, *Lipogen PS Plus* will help replenish your natural brain's "building blocks" and develop healthy cells, which restore memory functions, enhance cognition, and prevent further mental decline" explains David Rutenburg, President of the parent company behind the *Lipogen* pill.

"This is what the clinical studies have shown and is why so many U.S. doctors are now recommending it to patients," he added.

WHY SO MUCH EXCITEMENT?

Since hitting the US market, sales for *Lipogen PS Plus* have soared and there are some very good reasons why.

To begin with, the clinical studies have been impressive. Participants taking the active ingredient in *Lipogen PS Plus* saw a 44% improvement in mental function. They also enjoyed a stronger memory, better recall, and were notably more upbeat and happy.

Lipogen's active ingredient is made of a natural compound. It is both safe and healthy. There are also no known side effects and it can be taken safely alongside any other medications.

Scientists believe that it helps to stimulate the growth of new brain cells in the hippocampus. The hippocampus is the part of the brain that's responsible for forming and storing long and short term memories.

Research has shown that as we get older, brain cells in this area of the brain become

dysfunctional. This is what causes lapses in concentration, forgetfulness, and mental decline and why *Lipogen PS Plus* seems to be so effective. "I no longer have the memory lapses I experienced before, and my recall and focus are once again effortless!" says Raymond H of Oregon.

IMPRESSIVE CLINICAL RESULTS

Groundbreaking research published by major health organizations, like PubMed, reveal that the leading ingredient in *Lipogen PS Plus* can improve your memory significantly.

In a double-blinded study, 149 men and women with age associated memory loss took the key ingredient in *Lipogen PS Plus* for a duration of three months.

The results were stunning. The participants who took the pill as directed reversed their mental age by nearly 12 years according to researchers conducting the study.

They were also able remember names, faces, and recall events faster and with great clarity.

With results like these, it's easy to see why sales of *Lipogen PS Plus* are booming.

HOW IT WORKS

Lipogen PS Plus is a memory pill that is taken just once daily. It does not require a prescription.

The active ingredient is a compound known as phosphatidylserine. *Lipogen PS Plus* contains phosphatidylserine in a clinical dose, which is why it's so effective.

Research has shown that as we get older, brain cells become dysfunctional especially in an area of the brain called the hippocampus. The hippocampus is where long and short term memories are stored. If brain cells in this region fail, so does your memory.

Some people experience this is the form of lapses in concentration, forgetfulness, and the inability to recall important dates, names, and facts.

This would explain why so many users are experiencing impressive results so quickly.

"After about two or three weeks of taking the recommended dose, I noticed that I was remembering things, regardless of the degree of importance. Also, I noticed I was more alert and able to concentrate. Hooray!" Linda R, West Virginia



POPULAR PILL: Doctors are now recommending new *Lipogen PS Plus* to seniors suffering from symptoms of memory loss and mental decline.

REDUCES STRESS AND ANXIETY

Published, clinical reports show daily dosing with phosphatidylserine not only helps sharpen your mind but also helps "perk you up" and put you in a better mood.

PS helps to manage everyday stress and elevate your mood by lowering your body's production of the hormone cortisol. When cortisol levels are too high for too long you experience fatigue, bad moods and weakness.

This drug-free brain-boosting formula enters your bloodstream fast (in as little as thirty minutes).

Officially reviewed by the FDA, phosphatidylserine is only nonprescription ingredient that has a qualified health claim for both cognitive dysfunction and dementia.

HOW TO GET LIPOGEN PS PLUS

This is the official release of *Lipogen PS Plus* in the US. As such, the company is offering a special discounted supply to any memory loss sufferer who calls.

A special hotline number and discounted pricing has been created for our readers. Discounts will be available now and will automatically be applied to all callers.

Your Toll-Free Hotline number is 1-800-375-9197 and will only be open while supplies last.

Consumers who miss out on our current product inventory will have to wait until more becomes available and that could take weeks. Experience the guaranteed *Lipogen PS Plus* relief already enjoyed by thousands of consumers. The company advises not to wait. Call 1-800-375-9197 today.

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letters & messages



We see the family resemblance! Peg and Gail Vermander today

GAIL VERMANDER LEONARD, MICHIGAN

In 1986, my sister, Peg, and I set off on a road trip together. Our route took us from our home state of Michigan through Canada, and then back down into New York and Pennsylvania before finally landing in New Jersey. We whiled away the time, telling stories of all kinds, but the conversation always came around to other trips we wanted to take as this was a trial run. We were carefree travelers, just like our late grandmother. We never made reservations in advance, finding a hotel in whatever town we wanted to stay in. That was Grandma's way.

Then our luck ran out. As I flipped

through our trusty AAA guidebook and fed Peg quarters for a pay phone so we could call hotels in the area, I suddenly felt an unnatural calm and pointed to a town on the map. "Here," I said. "We have to try here." Peg looked skeptical, but soon we were

checking into our room. Even now, when Peg and I travel, we know Grandma and the angels are still looking out for us.

JOSEPH WHALEN OCEAN ISLE BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA

After my wife, Janet, passed away, I kept looking for a sign that she was okay. "Please," I prayed one night, holding a picture of her, "let me know."

The next morning I went golfing with my son and grandson. We'd just finished the tenth hole and were headed back to the golf cart when I noticed a butterfly sitting on the steering wheel. It was beautiful, the black wings enhanced by a brilliant

yellow, Jan's favorite color. We piled into the cart and set off. The butterfly left the wheel...and alighted on my shoulder!

It stayed there as we played. At the fifteenth hole, it left my shoulder and took off, but not before brushing against my cheek and lips. Jan had sent me butterfly kisses.

ALEXIS ROWLAND
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

The "Down to Earth" editor's note in the Jan/Feb issue touched me. Like Colleen, Jergens hand lotion evokes memories of my own grandmother. I always



The smell of Jergens is heaven to Alexis.

keep a bottle around but was using it sparingly. But after reading the editor's note, I use my Jergens liberally and often, savoring memories of my sweet-smelling Mammy.

MARIAN RIECK
SOUTH MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

I had to use a cane to get around when my knee starting giving me trouble. My favorite was a hand-me-down from my husband. I liked the way its

smooth wooden handle felt in my grip...until it went missing. I turned the house upside down, but couldn't find the cane anywhere. It had vanished, and I resorted to the spare I liked much less.

I made due with it, leaning on it while I cleaned out the front hall closet. I noticed something in the back, wedged in the corner. A cane I had never seen before. Like the one I'd lost, it felt like it belonged in my hand. Cleaning could wait, I decided. It was a beautiful day and I was going to take a walk.

GRETCHEN PARSONS
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

I had never heard of *Angels on Earth* until a card advertising the magazine showed up in my mailbox shortly after my father's death. I can't help but wonder if Dad had a hand in me subscribing. Now I know I can count on angels to comfort me no matter what the future holds.



Marian gets ready for a walk.



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from your lips...

BIG IDEAS FILLED MY HEAD as I left the house. “Lord, use me in amazing ways,” I said. I always talked to God during my walk. Today I felt ready to move mountains with my prayers.

What sort of mountains, I couldn’t say for sure. Reunite long-lost family members? Reconcile enemies? Save someone from a burning building? I laughed over my dramatic imagination, but my request for something monumental was sincere.

Up ahead, an elderly man walked with a cane. It slipped out of his hand and he bent to retrieve it. “Let me,” I said. I handed it back and hurried on in search of mountains to move.

After my walk, I had a day of chores. But I knew God could use me anywhere, so at the Laundromat I kept my eyes open. I was folding my clothes when a woman pushed open the door, struggling with her unwieldy load of laundry. I grabbed the door for her. “Thank you!” she said. *Where’s my mountain?* I thought.

At the grocery store, I got in line behind a teenager. The clerk rang up her bread, milk and orange juice. “Oh, no!” the girl said, counting the change in her palm. “I’m a quarter short.”

The clerk shrugged. “Allow me,” I said, handing over a quarter.

“Thank you!” the girl cried. From her expression, you would think I’d saved her life.

“It’s just a quarter,” I said.

“A quarter that would have meant no orange juice for breakfast,” the girl said. “I think I love you!”

What seemed like small things to me—picking up a cane, opening a door, donating a quarter—meant a lot to others. With prayer, there was no mountain that couldn’t be moved.

MARY WHITNEY, LEAVITTSBURG, OHIO

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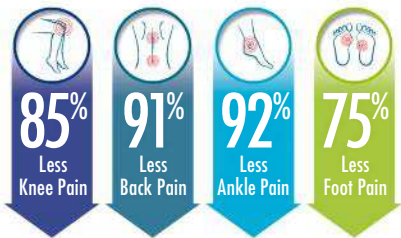
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