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Secret Child

Reunion & Beyond

by Nancy Moore

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1: DESERTED

*We had all strayed like sheep,
each of us had gone his own way,
but the Lord laid upon Him (Jesus)
the guilt of us all.*

Isaiah 53:6 NEB

*I alone know My purpose for you, says the Lord:
prosperity and not misfortune and a long line of
children after you.*

Jeremiah 29:11 NEB

*For You did form my inward parts;
You did knit me together in my mother's womb.*

Psalms 139:13

"You are pregnant." The doctor's words, though spoken kindly, were like a slap in the face. They confirmed my gravest suspicions. I had gone to him expecting the worst. Now I knew it was true. I felt completely numb and sat there in his office, immobile. Terror rose up in me. This couldn't be. What was I to do? Where could I turn?

I was not yet 18 years old, living in a small town in Minnesota. My eagerly awaited nurse's training was to start in a few months, and would fulfill an ambition I had cherished for as long as I could remember.

Life was busy and interesting; life was fun. I didn't have problems at home and my parents were kind and loving.

Now my life was shattered and lying in pieces and I realized I didn't know how to pick them up and put them back together. What could I do? There was no one to talk to, no one that I dared share this with and I wept as my fears crystalized before me into a terrible reality. I knew it would be a crushing blow to my parents and they must not be told. They must be spared. I wanted to shield them from unnecessary hurt. My mother in particular had had some very painful experiences over the years and I didn't want to add to them.

How had I got into this situation, which now threatened my entire future? We had moved to this town a year before and since then I'd made many friends and was involved not only in school activities but also in those at church. Like many others I had a part time job after school.

Soon after our move I met and began to date one of the fellows, who seemed to be pleasant enough, involved with the activities I enjoyed. We became increasingly serious about each other and I cared deeply for him.

Under great emotional pressure I found myself a reluctant partner in sin. Now I was having to bear the consequences of my sin and another's. I believed sex outside of marriage wasn't right; so where did I go wrong? I wasn't perfect and yet had not set out

to live this way. Was I just searching for real love and affection and unable to resist a counterfeit of it?

I had, somehow, to go on living in the midst of my world falling apart, but how could I carry on in this appalling mess? What was to be done first? I went immediately to tell my boyfriend but even as I prepared to meet him I felt afraid. Did I sense what his reaction would be? Upon hearing that I was pregnant he left me and to make it more definite, he left town. The pain of betrayal was deep. I had been used and discarded.

Somehow I felt I could not inflict the shameful news upon my parents. I desperately wanted to say something, to share this burden with them but could not. It was so terrible and my lips seemed to be sealed. I was unable to tell them of my pregnancy. Since I had only lived in the town for a year I didn't feel close enough to my girl friends to say anything to them and of course couldn't trust them not to tell anyone. If they did tell it would find its way back to my parents. I knew the pain this would inflict and wanted to protect them. I was alone in this and somehow had to get through it without outside help, so I stubbornly refused to admit defeat.

I turned inward and bottled up my feelings of rejection, hurt and utter helplessness. My heart broke, bit by bit, as each day brought with it the deepening realization of how huge my problem was. I longed to know what to do, but the only ones who could help me, my parents, had to be protected at all cost from the shame of this, I thought. [NOTE See Reunion and Beyond for what I didn't know then.]

The disgrace of an out-of-wedlock pregnancy in 1956 was still immense and I felt the full weight of society's condemnation of someone "in trouble", as the saying then was. The future for a child, born to and cared for, by an unmarried girl was not easy; such a child would carry a stigma and face rejection, disapproval and scorn. My heart ached. I did not want this inflicted on my child so there was no way to keep one under these circumstances. I was overwhelmed by the social, financial and emotional pressure. There was no way to support a child on my own nor offer any hope of a normal life.

Should I get an abortion? That would get me out of the mess my life was in. The decisions were mine alone to make. There was no one I felt able to turn to for help or advice. Would an abortion really solve my problem? Could I get one? Where?

Some girls had them but it certainly was very uncommon then. I didn't know where to go to have this done, couldn't ask and deep down really knew I could not go through with it. I could not kill this life within me, this was my baby! I couldn't snuff out its life.

I lived through those days in crushing loneliness with no one to pour out my troubles to. Maybe, I thought, if I didn't think about being pregnant then it would all disappear. It just couldn't be real; this couldn't be happening to me. I felt dazed, in a nightmare. No one in our family had been pregnant and unmarried. The shame of it all was an overwhelming weight upon me. I could not bear to think about it and so it was suppressed; I ignored it all and hoped it would go away.

Perhaps this way of dealing with things on my own could be traced far back to my childhood. My own home was broken when my father left my mother and me shortly after my first birthday. I became aware when growing up that this rejection was a heavy weight my mother carried along with other emotional wounds. When our home broke up and she returned to university and then worked full time to support us, I was under the care of a number of different people and only saw her occasionally.

One of them who cared so lovingly for me was my father's sister, Aunt Aletia, who looked after me for several months at a time, and who came to think of me as her own daughter. She remained very dear to us as a family. Even when I was back with my mother others cared for me for long periods and so I was not with her very much.

There was really no one to trust my confidences to or to share with and so, in many respects, I was on my own emotionally. This caused me to be very independent, but strangely still sociable. Though all of this I learned to cope with my feelings and difficulties all on my own. Perhaps it was during these early years I also learned to repress them, when they were too difficult to bear as I knew no other way to handle them.

Surprisingly I turned out fairly normal. This was undoubtedly due to a good mother and others who cared for me in the best way they could. But through all this came the ability, out of necessity, to deal with my emotions on my own, rarely sharing my feelings with others.

When I was six my mother remarried and my stepfather formally adopted me a year later. Three years passed and a brother was born and at the age of nine I was old enough to enjoy him and to help with his care. My parents gave me consistent care and discipline but we were never close emotionally. Was there a part of me looking for real intimacy? I wanted someone to share my deepest feelings with.

Once more the familiar pattern of repressing my feelings emerged as I faced the most difficult circumstances of my life. I denied my boyfriend's rejection and attempted to escape the situation. It made me want to run, but where could I go? I denied the problem, pushed it down and didn't think about it. There settled over me a terrible numbness of spirit. I was trapped with no way to escape.

My senior year at school had to be finished, that I knew, so I maintained all my usual activities, school work, and student council activities as one of its officers. Underneath all this activity no one knew the distress I felt; no one knew what I was going through.

I cried inside, a silent weeping, but only rarely did I allow myself to shed any tears. Bottle it up and shove it down was the only way I knew how to cope with such an overpowering feeling of utter helplessness.

The nights were long, too long There was too much to think about. The uncertainties were enormous. What was I to do? Things were out of my control. Which way could I turn? I was trapped, encased in a leaden suit of distress and fear. It grew tighter every day. I hid my real feelings of desperation from everyone. Outwardly I was my usual self, but inside the burden of heartache and fear grew heavier.

Where was God? I knew He existed and I prayed on occasions but knew He certainly wouldn't want to be bothered with this situation. He would not be pleased with me; I had done wrong. I had involved myself in this so I must get myself through it somehow.

Towards the end of the school year things became even more hectic for those of us who were graduating in early June. I had been accepted into the school of nursing which began early in September and so just stubbornly ploughed ahead, determined to keep on somehow. If I stopped and admitted defeat I would come apart emotionally. My body was showing changes but not enough to offer people a confirmation of my pregnancy. Perhaps they were suspicious but I carried on as though everything was

normal. Graduation day come and the gowns we wore covered my shape when I had to go up on the stage in front of everyone, to receive my scholarship for nurse's training.

The next week I went away to a large city some distance from my home town. I had accepted a job there with a family helping with the cooking and light housework. This job was a life saver as I could be away from everyone I knew. My baby was due to be born in less than three months.

The people I worked for were a warm hearted Jewish couple and the work suited me. Life wasn't too strenuous in their home beside a lovely lake. This beautiful and peaceful setting was a real haven of calm and quiet for me. Did they suspect my condition? I don't know, but no one spoke of it and they seemed pleased with my work.

One night, lying in bed listening to the storm and the rain beating on the roof, I realized the full extent of the terrible mess I was in. I was desperate and cried out to God; a God I knew about, being a churchgoer, and yet didn't really know in a personal way. But I knew enough however, to bargain with Him.

"God, just get me through this and I'll follow You." I was starting to understand that He was the only one who could do anything for me, yet He seemed so distant, so far away. Did He really care about me? It didn't seem possible.

A few weeks later I realized that my pregnancy could no longer be ignored and I must get to a doctor as I had not been to one for many months. It had been so long since the doctor at home had first told me the shocking news. Tests were undertaken and I was recalled a week later for more.

"You are very ill," the doctor told me gently. "The tests indicate you have toxemia. In order to treat it and reduce your abnormally high blood pressure you must be hospitalized immediately."

Once again a doctor's words stunned me. What did this mean? How sick was I? Was my baby all right? It made me more frightened than ever. I went back and told the couple I worked for that I had a kidney condition and the doctor was admitting me to hospital right away.

Just a few days previously, the doctor had sent me to see a social worker to discuss my future and that of my baby. My recollections of our meeting are extremely vague. Was that due to the amnesia which is apparently very common among girls having to give up their babies? It is the only way one can cope with the pain of such a situation.

I was admitted to hospital and sedated heavily. The doctors were trying to stabilize my condition and get my blood pressure down and under control. They told me if they didn't do so there was the possibility I could have convulsions or other complications. They gave me so much medication I had to be awakened for meals and helped to eat.

This went on for several days, days which are almost a total blank. I was too ill and too sedated to be aware of much. Thankfully this spared me from being more aware of the anguish inside. I felt utterly helpless, stripped of all hope and already grieving for my child.

I cried when the woman in the bed next to me had her baby with her, distraught because there was no way I could keep mine. I couldn't care for my child and this crushed me.

Labour began and it seemed to on for ever. Morphine was given to sedate me still further. I felt so alone. No one stayed with me to comfort me or hold my hand and help me get through this.

Suddenly in the middle of labour, my parents appeared. The couple I'd worked for were concerned and found out from the hospital what was happening and called my parents to see if they knew.

The encounter with them was brief and I was in a haze of medication, pain and distress. It shocked me to see them suddenly appear and I was unable to say much except, "I'm sorry, I didn't want you to know. I didn't want to hurt you."

I wept realizing just how hard it was for them also. They didn't condemn me and I sensed their concern as they tried to comfort me but I was too ill to be able to respond. They were only allowed to stay a brief time, then they had to leave and again there was no one to be with me. The tears and pain came in a flood as I lay there fighting panic.

Shortly afterwards my son was born. The nurse held him up for me to see. "He's a beautiful baby boy, just perfect."

My eyes didn't seem to want to focus. Was he really all right? I could hardly tell. The heavy medication and the long hours of labour had taken their toll, I was numb. I pulled down the shutters of my heart.

My baby was taken away and I must have finally succumbed to the sedation and remembered nothing more. He was gone. My child was gone. A part of me died that day and lay like a cold, ugly stone, heavy upon my heart.

It sank home more fully over the next few days with growing pain; I couldn't keep my own child. He could not remain with me; I could not hope to care for a child on my own and I did not want him to grow up without a father. He must be given the chance of a good home and loving parents. Somehow, with what knowledge I had of God, I prayed, "Lord, please, please take care of him. He's yours. See that he has a good home."

A few days later I was discharged from the hospital to stay in an aftercare home before going back to my family. My one enduring memory of this whole time is of leaving the hospital. The scene is branded with tears deep in my heart, and remains as vivid today as when it happened.

I walked out of the hospital, down a long hallway, alone. It seemed to stretch out without ending; some way ahead of me, walked a social worker holding my baby. He was all bundled up and I couldn't get a glimpse of him. It was the longest walk of my life. We were both taken in the same car to the home. The social worker was in the back seat with my baby, and I in the front. We were both crying. It was the last time I would be near him but even then I was unable to see his face.

After a few days spent recovering I returned home to my parents. I was broken. My child was no longer mine. He would never know how hard it had been for me to relinquish him. If only he could know I loved him enough to give him a future but I would never know what had become of him.

I was in a state of shock and spent most of my time sleeping. I was aware of the distress of my parents over the situation but we didn't talk about it. A wall of silence came down around this whole episode. We never spoke about it. They tried to help me recover and were kind towards me as I attempted to pick up the pieces. After a few short days I left home and began my nurse's training. Somehow I had to go on with life.

2: Life Has to Go On

*Comfort, comfort, My people-
it is the voice of your God.
speak tenderly to Jerusalem
and tell her this,
that she has fulfilled her term of bondage,
that her penalty is paid.....*
Isaiah 40:1-2 NEB

*...but Christ died for us while we were yet sinners,
and that is God's own proof of His love towards us.*
Romans 5:8 NEB

"Life has to go on." How often had I heard that saying and now I realized the truth of it. I had to go on living in spite of my grief and brokenness.

The milestone following so close to the birth of my child was the beginning of nurses' training. This was a desire cherished since childhood and yet I had come so close to being unable to fulfill it. Now it was a longing muted by the trauma of the past months, but it kept me focused on something other than my inner anguish.

Sept 4th: up the flight of wide granite steps and through the huge front door of the nurses' dormitory I went. Here at Northwestern Hospital in Minneapolis, I would spend the next three years. We were welcomed and assigned to a room, with a new room-mate for the coming year. Outwardly, I was like the rest of my classmates--happy-go-lucky. Inwardly, things were drastically different.

Just over two weeks earlier my baby had been born. For my survival all the recent events were suppressed deep in my memory. Of course, nothing was forgotten; it was still there unresolved and merely out of my daily consciousness.

At times every painful detail would surface to torment me. I was living in shock, a state of semi-amnesia, and mercifully being numbed to a lot of the hurt. My emotions were blunted, grief was lessened but so was joy. This denial of the agony was necessary. It allowed me to hold myself together and be able to cope with life. The necessity of following the daily routine kept me functioning and slowly mending.

This was where I wanted to be and longed to do well, but was it possible? I felt so absolutely exhausted and drained both physically and emotionally.

Those early days were filled with many new things, such as dormitory life and getting acquainted with my room-mate, Myra. Uniforms had to be measured for. Stacks of books crammed with apparently endless, unfamiliar facts, formulae and ideas were lined up. Could there really be that much to learn and would it be possible to take it all in ?

The next week we had orientation to the college where we would have many of our first year academic classes. There, at Macalester's lovely tree-lined campus, we would take many hours of chemistry, anatomy and microbiology classes and the accompanying laboratory work.

Life was busy from the very beginning and in my exhaustion I was frequently forced to find a quiet corner and go to sleep. I slept even while on my feet, during some of our nursing arts practical classes as we stood around a bedside and watched demonstrations. Gradually, I did become stronger and entered into many activities with my classmates, yet no one was aware of anything amiss in my life.

Clinical classes were interesting as we learned practical nursing skills, although it was not particularly thrilling to learn how to make a bed with proper "hospital corners". We enjoyed lots of fun and laughter, learning to give injections by following the common method of using oranges for practice. Their texture is supposed to resemble that of flesh!

When we became proficient enough we were allowed to try our skills on each other and finally on real patients. There were many fascinating things to absorb as we learned to carry out increasingly complex tasks.

But I felt almost paralysed when encountering classes in which there was any memorising to do. Remembering relevant facts from these classes when at the same time I was trying to forget traumatic events was extremely difficult. The suppression of my grief caused great difficulty in doing any of this memory work.

"My child, my child, where are you?"

This question came to mind at intervals but I knew I should not think about him. Life should go on as though nothing has happened. Everything was normal. I was all right, or so I thought. How foolish I was.

There were seventy five of us in that freshman class and several became close friends. We enjoyed good times together but even with those closest to me I could not share everything. Somehow I felt those deep hurts were mine to carry alone.

"Come on, let's go out for a bite to eat," was often the cry that echoed down the dormitory hall. Nurses are always hungry! If we weren't eating we would probably be thinking about doing so. Later that term, as I gained strength, I began to work an occasional evening helping at a catering firm. This enabled me to earn spending money and enjoy even more good food---free.

Early that first autumn in training, I was invited by my room mate and other friends to attend a Bible Study which was held in our dorm. A lady came in to lead this each week and it was fascinating. This was the first time that I had seriously studied the Bible for myself.

My heart was receptive and I listened with new ears to things which I must have heard at church for years. The realization came, I needed Christ. My heart had been thoroughly prepared by the events of the past year and I was ready for this planting of the seed of the Word of God.

My strong self-will had been broken and my eyes were wide open to see that I personally needed to respond to what the Lord had done. It was necessary to do more than just see my need. I had seen that for some time.

It became clear just how independent and willful I really was. All my life I had gone my own way and done what was right in my own eyes. Now I saw Jesus was

showing me that my selfishness was what He called sin. The conviction came that for this He had come and for this He had died. It was for ME He died. How could I have been blind to this before? There was a real drawing of my heart towards the Lord.

Only a couple of months had passed since I came into nursing with merely a head knowledge of this. Now I wanted to know Jesus personally, like my friends. Exactly when I crossed this bridge to real life, to eternal life, wasn't clear but I knew I had done so.

My heart began to soften and unfold as I felt the great love that God had for me, personally, as He allowed His only Son to die on my behalf. I sensed this love and could no longer remain indifferent or it would be deliberate rejection of Jesus' love. And this love so touched my heart and began to bring healing.

Jesus loved me and died for me as I was, a sinner. I had nothing to offer, just a tired, messed up life. He gave Himself for me and I wanted to give Him my life, my love, in return. I now knew His forgiveness. He took my sinfulness and declared me forgiven, not for being good or doing anything but accepting His love and forgiveness. Jesus wrapped me in His righteousness, His love.

There was no need to strive to be good enough, Jesus set me free. Whatever good I had tried to do before this to earn God's favour was like "filthy rags" to Him. He covered me in His robes of righteousness, so I was clean, forgiven because of what He had done on my behalf.

How long had the Lord been standing knocking on the door of my life, wanting to be invited in? How long had I seen Him but did not know He needed my permission to enter my life and touch it? How long had the hunger for this wonderful love been there and not recognized? That void, for real love, was something only He could fill.

What a sense of peace and freedom this simple act brought, just to turn my life over to His care and control. These things came into focus during the period of a few months and by that Easter, for the first time, I really knew that Jesus was alive! He had brought me into His family. He gave me inner confidence, the liberating joy of knowing His total forgiveness and His deep love.

I still wasn't sure how to give Him all those deep wounds and grief of the past year. I tried to turn them over to Him and knew He understood and would help me to bear them. He began to give me real joy---a gentle joy stealing into my heart, quietly, unawares.

Thankfully, we were so busy with studies and work in the hospital that there was little time to think deeply about the past. Instead I tried to forget it in order to stop the inner pain and just concentrated on doing well.

Soon after this, when at home visiting my parents one weekend, I was out shopping and saw my former boyfriend. This was the first time I had seen him since he had walked out of my life more than a year before. Somehow over the past few months the Lord had, unknown to me, done such a work in my life that I didn't feel any distress at seeing the man who had rejected me. In spite of all that had happened I only felt sorry for him.

I went over and told him that my baby, a son, had been born but I had been forced to put him up for adoption. Since then God had enabled me to forgive him for all that had happened.

He listened without a word, then turned and walked away. That was the last time I ever saw him but no longer felt hurt by his actions. I was free. I don't remember working at forgiving, that was lost in all that happened over the past year. Jesus had truly set me free.

Several of us who were in the bible study group became linked with Nurses Christian Fellowship and we gathered with other nurses, from around the city, who were also developing a relationship with the living Christ. They were a delightful, happy group and we enjoyed lots of fun together. It was with their help that I began to establish a solid grounding in my new life in Christ. It was the beginning of a new life of adventure and certainly not dull or boring.

Our first year was finally over. We were "capped" which is to say that we received our proper nurses' caps which symbolized powerfully to us our progress towards becoming fully-fledged nurses. I had made it thus far through my first and most difficult year, keenly aware it was only because of the Lord's help. I was a changed person from when the year began.

Myra and I went to Colorado to a camp, high in the mountains, run by IVCF (InterVarsity Christian Fellowship) It was in a beautiful setting, 9000 feet up in the Rockies. It was the perfect place to come for a rest and to enjoy learning about the Lord with others from across the States. Hiking in the mountains and lots of good food, all were a part of refreshment after an exhausting year. He provides what we need, when we need it.

Those weeks were an enjoyable mixture; horseback rides, bar-b-qs, hiking and stimulating speakers each evening. There is nothing like being a part of a group on top of a mountain, with God's created beauty around us, singing "How Great Thou Art"!

All too soon, the holiday was over and we were back for our second year of training. Now the proportions of time between our clinical work and theory changed. Practical work in the hospital with patients took precedence over that of the classroom. Rotations, every three months, began. We would do three months each in Surgical, Medical, Pediatrics, Orthopedics and Obstetrics.

My first rotation was in the Operating Room. This was a challenge for me to be actively helping in many types of surgeries. What we had learned in anatomy classes was seen close up. I enjoyed it but decided I liked my patients awake!

Pharmacology, drugs and solutions with their grams, minims, drachmas, ounces and grains was a nightmare. How I ever did the calculations for these I'll never know. And for each patient we had to get it sorted out, obviously correctly.

Our off duty hours were full of fun, keeping us balanced and so able to deal with life and death situations while at work. Minneapolis, the City of Lakes, offered a variety of things to do; skating or swimming (depending on weather!). If I wasn't out in an activity, my head was probably in a cookbook. My love of food was a source of many jokes. I was either reading about it or eating it and still not gaining weight.

My life must have seemed normal to those around me during all of this time as I entered into life to the full. My friends introduced me to several men whom I dated occasionally. They were pleasant company but there was no one that was more than just a friend. I often wondered if I would ever find someone to love and trust enough to marry.

My son was now two years old. Where was he? Who did he look like? It hurt too much even to think about him. I had given him to the Lord to care for and could only trust he was being well looked after and bringing some family great joy. I would pray for him but tried not to dwell on this for long or the inner anguish would get too much. I schooled myself to forget or I'd not survive. Grief would threaten to eat me up.

Our second and third years of training continued busily for we spent considerable time in moving to different hospitals for further specialized training like in communicable disease (I even saw the rare case of diphtheria). Psychiatric work came next for me, at a large mental hospital where some of the patients had been for up to forty years. Why had they become ill? What had been the events in their lives with which they had been unable to cope? Had some gone through experiences like mine?

The work in hospital was enjoyable, but increasingly I came to see that my interest and abilities lay in the area of patient teaching and disease prevention not just treating illness. Important too was my long held desire to travel. Public Health Nursing appealed to me but I realized this meant further education, another three years at university. Could I do it? I wanted to try, so I applied and was accepted.

Our last few months in training passed quickly; our State Board exams were looming and studying for these was intense. The past three years had been eventful ones; very difficult but rewarding. I'd found new life and joy in the Lord. He had enabled me to cope with grief. My mind went back to the hard times at the start of nurses' training. How had I coped with it all?

The last few days came with rounds of celebrations including the party my friends and I gave to honour and thank our mothers for their help and encouragement. Graduation day came and that evening in one of the old churches in the city was the climax. Soft candlelight, the long line of graduates in white uniforms each carrying 2 dozed red roses made a very impressive sight. We each went forward to receive our nursing pin; a small gold star, symbolizing so much.

A chapter of my life was closing; it had been hard but also brought joy. In two weeks another chapter would begin as I started at the University of Minnesota. What was ahead?

3: University Days

*Cease to dwell on days gone by
and to brood over past history.
Here and now I will do a new thing....
I alone, I am He, who for his own sake
wipes out your transgressions,
who will remember your sins no more,
Isaiah 43: 18-19,25 NEB*

*....Christ Himself: in him
lie hidden all God's treasures of
wisdom and knowledge.
Colossians 2:2,3 NEB*

Twenty eight thousand students-- the University of Minnesota was huge-- fourteen times the population of my home town! I had never been part of such a large group. Would I ever find my way around or make any friends? It was exciting though as I adjusted to a new way of life and study. Public Health Nursing was going to require three years of very hard work.

It meant studies in disease prevention, child development, communicable disease and health education. There was also room to take some interesting electives. A course in Comparative Religions provided useful information but it was sad to see people groping around trying to find God purely by mental effort. They were looking for abstract truths to satisfy themselves but it seemed vague concepts were cold comfort compared to knowing the Living Lord, Truth Himself, in a personal way.

As well as carrying a full academic load I was working about twenty hours a week in a local hospital Emergency Room. I was stretched to the limit of my newly acquired nursing skills. What an amazing variety of ways people found to hurt themselves! People came in a steady stream, at all hours of the day and night with an assortment of cuts, bumps and bruises. Being located near several major highways gave us many seriously injured people from car accidents. I put two and two together and saw the value of prevention; I bought seat belts!

It was often two in the morning before I arrived home from work and began to write my essays and other assignments. No wonder my marks in English composition were not good.

Occasionally I had time to go out with friends or on a date but once again none of the men were very interesting. Would I ever meet a man to love and commit myself to? I often was discouraged, "Lord is there no one You have for me? You know how I long for someone to provide a deep stable love, someone kind and tender who loves you too."

Fortunately life was so busy there wasn't much time to dwell on the past but the dark memories remained. Grief would try and engulf me, where was my son now?

When I arrived at the University I became involved with IVCF. It was vital to make Christian friends and to have their support to go along with the academic challenges. Our group was large and lively with larger weekly meetings and also small Bible Study groups. Social activity including weekend retreats, was healing for me. I found many close friends in the group. We had good discussions and sometimes very intense deliberations. We could question and work through issues to see what God was saying; my mind was being stretched and my vision enlarged.

In all of this I came to see that everything and everyone needed to be evaluated in terms of the place accorded to the person of Christ. Was Jesus absolutely central and magnified as Saviour and Lord?

I see, in retrospect, how this was a time of putting down my roots within this caring, stimulating environment and setting the course of my life. I was building my faith on Jesus who would prove to be, in the years ahead, my ultimate foundation and safe dwelling place, just as He had promised in His Word.

I was continuing my search for that which alone would truly satisfy me. My heart delighted in the love Jesus offered me. I was getting to know in a deeper way the Person I'd given my life to three years earlier. This was a wonderful journey to know more fully the One who loved me and knew the way ahead.

Other campus activities claimed my time too. I took part in the Little Sister program in which I was a friend to newly arrived students from overseas. New friends and new food came with my friend Indra from India. Ushering for the local Symphony was a way to enjoy free concerts.

My first intense year at university ended and now I had three months free. I thought it would be good to spend it in a useful enjoyable way. Volunteering at Manitoba Pioneer Camp (run by IVCF) in Canada beckoned to me. I was thrilled to find the camp located in a remote area, reached by a ten mile drive on a dirt road, and then by boat to the island where it was located. It was on Lake of the Woods and only a few miles, across the water, to where I'd grown up in northern Minnesota.

This was in my much loved Canadian Shield country which spans this whole area on both sides of the border. Lakes and trees, rocks with marks of ancient glaciers which had scraped across them were the features of the landscape. Here like few other places, the summer evening sky displays its soft sky-blue pink colors. Its a fitting backdrop for the dark pines reflected in the water. It was especially enchanting when the loons were giving their haunting cry that touched something deep within me and was the epitome of the North.

Canoeing through the early morning mists possessed a beauty all its own. Some of us found it peaceful to get out early, paddle gently across the still waters of the bay and enjoy the quiet before the busy day. The lake's other character was often evident when violent storms churned the waters to a raging fury. Then it was a good to be on land.

During boys camp I was the camp nurse tending to the inevitable variety of cuts and bruises and sometimes a case of home sickness. During the next month at girls camp I was a counsellor, which meant I was responsible for a cabin of several young

teenage girls. We enjoyed doing many things together such as canoe trips, cookouts and Bible Study. Life was so enjoyable, I could have stayed there forever.

The pines towering above me were whispering softly as I sat on the scarred rock trying to absorb the fleeting sight of sunlight playing with water; light twinkled back at me from every wave, silver and blue washed at my feet. It was a quiet peace. Upon the water rode a golden leaf. There was till the warmth of summer yet it foreshadowed, in its color, the coming autumn and my return to university. I hated to leave, it had been a rewarding and healing summer for me. But the hurt lay still and deep inside. "Where are you, my child?" I sensed Jesus speak peace to me, "Its all right, I love you and your son. Just trust me."

When I got back to studies in the autumn I wanted to encourage others to go and work at Pioneer Camps and be a part of the impact it had on camper's lives. So at one of our first IVCF meetings of the year I got up and made an announcement. I wanted peoples attention so I said..."I'm looking for a man!to serve next summer at Pioneer Camp."

I went on to describe the work involved, I'd hoped this way of announcing it would arouse interest. Indeed it did! I was told much later it had really caught one man's attention and he wondered who on earth this girl was.

One lovely, crisp, sunny October Sunday I walked into the International Bible study and saw several new faces. One in particular caught my eye. "Who could he be? He looks pleasant," I mused. "He looks different, a bit more mature, or perhaps it just because his hair is a nice salt and pepper mix."

At the end of the study, as we enjoyed our cups of coffee, introductions were made and I found William, for that was his name, to be very likeable. He had such a delightful English accent. There was a quiet thoughtfulness about him so different from anyone else I'd ever met. His eyes were gentle and he had a ready smile. I found myself liking him immediately and during our discussions it became obvious he was also a firm believer.

In the weeks ahead the group members became better acquainted and William and I often talked together. "How do you like Minnesota?"

"Oh, its very different, especially at this time of year. I have never seen such brilliant colored leaves but it certainly was cold a few nights ago. Its much colder than I've ever known and It's not even winter!"

"Well it'll get a whole lot colder yet," I replied, and the others around laughed knowingly.

"How long have you known Jesus, William?"

"Just over four years, and you?"

That's interesting, I have too. It must have been about the same time but on opposite sides of the ocean" and we went on to fill in some of the details.

"One of the things that made me think was when an old man stood up in our Christian Union meeting at University College in London, and described his years of "fellowship with the Risen Christ". I didn't know what he meant but a few months later I found out and began that same relationship with Christ."

"Well in my life, the Lord had to lead me through some very difficult times until I saw my own need of Him," I replied. What a wonderful thing it was to be able to share

with William, he was so easy to talk to. He told me that he was here doing some post doctoral research at the university.

It was not long before he was asked to join us on the executive committee as we led the group and his sense of humour endeared him to all of us.

Some months later, in the Spring of that year, the phone rang as I sat at supper with friends, one of whom went to answer it.

"It's for you Nancy".

"Who is it?"

"It's William," she replied with a smile. With surprise, I went to the phone.

"Would you like to come out for dinner with me sometime next week?", he asked.

I was stunned, this was so unexpected, but replied, "Yes..that would be nice." We had been friends for some months and I had not expected a date with him.

As I resumed my seat at the table five questioning faces were turned to me.

"What did he want?"

"Oh, he just invited me out for dinner," I tried to be casual. My friends smiled again!

Later that next week we went out for a lovely meal and spent an enjoyable evening talking together. But that was that. He didn't ask me out for another date although we went with a mutual friend to see my home town and met my parents.

The following November William returned to England after spending just over a year in Minnesota. I felt unhappy and sad, I was going to miss a dear friend. All of us had grown to deeply admire him. William wrote casually a few times and I was glad to keep up the friendly contact.

The rest of the year for me continued its frantic pace. I completed all my courses and my public health nursing field study. It was enjoyable to be out of doors as I did my rounds of home and clinic visits and put into practice what I'd learned. This was the life for me.

There was the incentive of planning a trip to Europe in the Spring with two girl friends. I had dreamed of doing this for many years. We would go after I graduated in June. There was a real wanderlust in me, fueled by many travel books.

"Ann, maybe we could get William to be our guide while we are in London. It would be useful to have a native show us around."

"Yes, why don't you write him and ask if he would mind doing that." So the letter was sent off and he accepted with pleasure.

4: Two Shall Be Born A Wide World Apart

Two shall be born a whole wide world apart,
and one day, out of darkness,
shall stand and read life's meaning
in each other's eyes.
Anon.

My university work was finished. I was itching to leave for my trip to Europe and see at last the places I'd only read about. Dreams were about to become reality.

First I needed to go to Germany and pick up my Volkswagen Bug from the factory. My two girls friends, Barb and Ann and I, would travel around Europe in it. Then I would have it shipped back for me to use in my new job. So began our trip which would take us from Italy to Scandinavia and all the places in between.

Everything was completely new and different and we found it all absolutely fascinating. The youth hostels we stayed in were an interesting mixture; they ranged from medieval castles to tiny houses. One we particularly loved was in Switzerland. We had puffy eiderdowns to snuggle warmly under in the small carved wooden beds set into the wall. We woke to the sound of church bells ringing all around us. One morning I walked to the window.

"Ann and Barb come see, the mountain has turned to gold!" The rising sun was touching the snow on the Matterhorn with a glittering finger.

"Oh, that's gorgeous! Let's hurry up and climb it."

"Well I'm not going to the top but we should get a good hike in as we have all day."

I stood there looking with fascination up the street from the hostel window. the buildings echoed the room's interior with the carved wooden designs and colourful flowers in window boxes. People were already bustling about their daily routines and the tinkling of cow bells came on the still, morning air.

I leaned on my elbows at the window watching the changing spectacle of the busy village life. This trip was just as I had imagined it would be. Fascination, excitement, interest; it was a dream being lived. Years of reading travel books had given me a hunger to see things for myself and I was drinking it in thirstily.

"Come on Nancy and get dressed, you can't stay there all day. We want to get going."

There were other vignettes of that summer; people carrying home their bread, the long loaves strapped to the backs of their bikes; sitting in an Austrian mountain meadow, surrounded by wild flowers; Michelangelo's Moses, in flowing marble robes, the dark horror of Belsen concentration camp; the quiet beauty of Amsterdam and its canals; the Swedish countryside, looking just like Minnesota. And of course all the delicious pastries, schnitzels, bouillabaisse, fondues...!

We spent ten glorious days in Norway with my friend, Else, who proudly showed us around her homeland. We had met the previous year when she had come to do a post graduate year at the University of Minnesota. What scenery! The fjords with the narrow roads bordering them; waterfalls around every corner; seeing Bergen in the twilight of the midnight sun. It all delighted us. Else's mountain cabin was a base for our long walks.

We left her reluctantly but after almost 8000 miles on the continent it was time to ship my car back to the States. It would await my arrival a month later after we toured England, Scotland and Ireland. We drove the car to Hamburg where it was shipped on its own journey.

William met us the next day in London and he became our guide and a rather exhausted one as we tried to see every last tourist attraction. It was so good to see him again; it was a pleasure just to be with him. We all enjoyed his delightful company.

Our few days in London were soon over and we bade our farewells to William and set off to see more of the country. I wanted to go and yet didn't. I felt restless. It was a grey, drizzly afternoon when we left. I felt a deep sadness and wished I could stay and see more of him. I'd miss my friend and didn't know when I would see him again.

Barb returned home and Ann and I were on our way to spend three weeks hitchhiking around the country. We tramped many miles around the small islands and met so many friendly people and grew to love the countryside.

"This can't be August. I cannot believe this weather. Its so cold! Ann I feel so damp and mouldy." I remarked as we stood by the roadside, shivering and waiting for a ride.

"Yes, me too," she replied, "we probably are with all this cold and constant rain. That last hostel in the castle, near Inverness must be the coldest place on earth. How do people survive here in the winter. And this is supposed to be summertime."

The last few days of our trip were not planned in detail, Ann was going to visit her long time pen-pal for four days and I had nothing special to do. Then I found out that my aunt and uncle would be in London. I didn't see them very often so thought I'd see them and see William again if that was possible. So I wrote him and asked if I could have my guide back again.

Our letters crossed in the mail, "Nancy, can I see you again before you fly home?"

So I returned to London and we visited my aunt and uncle and did more sightseeing. William took me to one of the famous Promenade concerts in the Royal Albert Hall. I was very surprised how noisy and enthusiastic the crowd was.

"William are they really English?"

"Of course," he laughed, "you don't really know the English...yet!"

After the concert we went for a stroll in Hyde Park. It was a lovely evening, soft and warm. We stopped for a rest on a convenient bench.

"I love you! Will you marry me?"

William's words left me absolutely stunned. His completely unexpected proposal was the last thing I imagined I'd hear. Were my ears deceiving me? How could this be? My feelings were completely mixed up. I liked William so much, but I was afraid; afraid to care deeply again for anyone. And yet I knew he was different. But William was just a friend.

“William you’re a wonderful man, a very dear friend but I don’t know if I love you,” I tried to explain this to him.

The tears came unprompted as I said, “I’m afraid to care again. I’m afraid of a close relationship as I was once very deeply hurt when I dared to love someone. I like you so much but just don’t know if what I feel towards you is love, yet.”

William didn’t pry or comment on my words but just held me close as we talked; I longed to be more specific, tell him why I was so afraid to trust and of all the pain of the past. If only I could tell him the whole story I was sure he would understand. But William’s words had been so unexpected, so sudden they caught me unawares and unprepared.

The next day passed by in a dream; we went to Kew Gardens, walked around St. James’ Park and I became aware that I really WAS in love with this delightful man! I was sure now William was the one the Lord had chosen for me. I became aware, in the space of those few hours, of my love for William and began to see the reason for the sadness which had characterized our previous partings. The Lord had been drawing my heart, unknowingly for some time.

God had allowed me to know William thoroughly, just as a friend, so that I was able to know his qualities in a detached way. Now I sensed the Lord saying, “Yes this is the one I have chosen. You can trust yourself to him.”

We had two more short days together before I flew home. There was so much to talk about and so much more that needed sharing but there wasn’t the right opportunity to do so. I longed to tell William of the birth and relinquishment of my child but was hesitant to do so. Was this the right time? Should I say anything at all? After all, those events belonged to a closed chapter of my life; the Lord had forgive and forgotten and so I must also.

I so wanted to tell him, but how could it be done and what should be said. The right moment never came in the next two days and then I had to leave. We had crammed so much into such a short time. What a difference those few days had made in my whole life. Our parting at Euston station was so difficult. My reluctance to leave William must have been apparent to my fellow travelers, one of whom remarked, “Never mind love, you’ll see him again soon.”

It was meant kindly but the lady who spoke could not possibly have understood what was going through my mind as I thought of other partings, of the baby I had had to leave. Now to leave the man I loved with no idea when we would be together again was immensely difficult.

We had no idea when we might see one another, neither of us had much money. I had to go back to a job. When could William get a visa to come to the States?. Things were so uncertain.

I was sure in my heart, William was the right one but told him that I must get back home and then give him my answer to his proposal. I needed a chance to think things through; just to be sure my decision was not taken on the spur of the moment and in a strange country. But I really knew what that answer would be! I felt he, too, knew what the answer was but things had happened so fast I must wait to give a definite “yes” until I returned home.

When I rejoined Ann, later that day for our flight home to New York she exclaimed, “Something happened. I think you’re in love with William.”

"How do you know?"

"Anyone can see that from the glow on your face!"

It still seemed like a dream. I felt absolutely thrilled even though it didn't seem possible all this had happened.

After an uneventful flight I picked up my car and began the long drive home from New York, alone, and 1500 miles ahead of me. I did it in two days so eager to tell my parents the good news.

"I'm getting married--- to William!", I just blurted it out I was so excited. They were pleased by my happiness and fortunately they had met him once so he was not a total stranger to them.

I sent off a telegram to William, "YES. SET THE DATE."

William's response was immediate, "AS SOON AS POSSIBLE PROV 19:14"

Love had burst in upon me but how I missed him. It was hard to be apart and only be able to share by letter, which we began immediately to do.

"Dearest William, It's only a few days since we were together and I can hardly believe it all happened! How wonderful it is to have your love. I don't deserve it but know, like God's love. Its a gift and I joyfully accept it. I will try to love you as I ought. Your love is deep and secure and a love I've never known before. It's so hard though to have you so far away.

It was not long before a blue envelope with a London postmark appeared in our mail box. I ripped it open quickly.

"Darling, life is so empty here with you gone, but we know this separation is really a time of preparation. It is hard, but He will prepare us through it for our life together. When two people in love are apart there will be pain but He will help us to bear it as we come to Him.. All my love, William"

A couple of weeks later I drove to Illinois to begin my new job. Once again life was busy and my mind was occupied as I was thrust into a new situation beginning as a Public Health Nurse. I had accepted this position just before I left on my European tour. I felt I owed it to my employer to work for at least a year and in any case we weren't sure when William could re-enter the States and we could get married.

My work was full of variety and so interesting. It involved me in home care, follow up on communicable diseases, and health teaching in the schools. There was a good team of experienced nurses to help me learn all this.

My deep loneliness at having William so far away was eased by friends I made at church and work. It was important to enter into community activities and not mope around so I began visiting in the local psychiatric hospital to be a friend in need. I also undertook a night class in Spanish to help me communicate with some of my patients who were migrant workers. It was an unequal task--like my previous attempts to learn German--I couldn't do it.

Our letters ; we wrote almost every day and they took only two or three days to and from England. "William do you realize only two months ago I didn't even know I was in love with you but now its deepening every day. You know my doubts and questions but I want to be yours. It will be worth it even to leave my home and friends, and independence! You know I've said that it will be a learning process to give myself to others. So often I have held back to protect myself from being hurt. You will have to be patient with me."

Many times I wondered about writing and telling William about my lost child and finally I made an appointment to talk about this with my pastor. I was apprehensive about the meeting. Would he tell me to share and could I bear to do that? So we met and the story was quickly told. No one else had heard me tell this and when I finished he spoke reassuring words.

“Nancy, It’s in the past and it’s forgiven. You must forget it and it serves no purpose at all to tell him.”

What relief those few minutes of conversation brought. But what else could he have said? I put him in a difficult situation. His decision might have caused the end of our engagement and would that be right? Rightly or wrongly I took his advice and said nothing to William and tried to live in the present and forget what was gone.

Memories. The hurt and grief ran like a silent river just under the surface of my awareness. I lived as normally as possible but the empty ache was there and surfaced at times. Where was my boy? He was growing up, now six years old. I was sure he must be in a good home and progressing normally. But where? I grieved for my child in secret; my practice over the years that had enabled me to hide this. To others nothing showed.

William and I kept the mailmen busy with our frequent letters during the following months. We tried to pour out our feelings and hopes for the future and to get to know each other better. It proved an effective and valuable way of doing this.

“Nancy, I’m so lonesome but the Lord in His time will bring us together. Its amazing how we found each other from opposite sides of the world. Won’t we have a wonderful story to tell our children some day!”

I wrote back, “We certainly will. It is so much fun telling people here how the Lord brought us together, I want the whole world to know! I can’t stand being apart but if only I can keep my eyes on Christ and endure, knowing the joy He has in store for us. By the way, did I ever let you know my friends have often said I would never meet a man who could afford to feed me. Can you?”

Early in October I answered a knock at the door. There stood the mailman with a registered parcel for me. I hurriedly opened it and found to my great surprise a beautiful engagement ring and with it a note from William.

“I’ve chosen this ring especially; when you see its three diamonds you will know it signifies-me, you and our love united by Christ in the centre.”

It was lovely and so meaningful to me even though William couldn’t be there in person to put it on my finger. We had briefly discussed by letter about a ring, did I want one? I said I didn’t need one and left it at that. But how wonderful to wear this symbol of our love.

During those long months apart we found ourselves in a situation where we must practice what we preached. We had come over the years to know that Christ was the answer for every circumstance. Now we had continually to go to Him and let Him help us cope with our sadness at being apart. We often quoted 2 John 12 to each other, “I have much to write to you, but I don’t care to put it down in black and white. But I hope to visit you and talk with you face to face so that our joy may be complete.”

We set aside a time to pray together, although apart, William at 10pm in England and me at 4pm. That was second best to actually being face to face. In that long ago time

transatlantic phone calls were terribly expensive and so we had only three in the fourteen months we were apart.

How excited I was that June as I flew to London and we could see each other after almost a year apart. The three weeks together with friends and family flew by. My Englishman looked better than I'd remembered. This was also time to get to know my future mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

There was some difficulty; the language barrier. Supposedly we both spoke English but in the north of England it was different! The dialect was a strange new language which I could not understand. One day while at his mothers and with several friends (who came to meet this stranger) I heard the following.

"Neh, as it gid oer?"

It's not gi'd oer. It's bin agate aw neet."

"William," I whispered, "is it a different language?"

"No," he laughed, "It's only Lancashire dialect. You'll soon be able to understand it too. I'll translate. "Now, has it stopped?" "It hasn't stopped." "It's been at it (raining) all night."

I was a source of amusement when I couldn't follow a lot of the conversation but everyone was so warm and friendly. It didn't matter; William and I were together. But the three weeks were over far too quickly and we had to say goodbye again. This parting was softened because we know we would be married in a few months. October couldn't come soon enough. In the fourteen months apart we had this one visit and three phone calls.

Once again we were back to writing letters "the days drag by but the big day will soon be here and we will not have the hard goodbyes for a while. William these words from an article in His Magazine struck me as important...

' "...I am not simply to love my wife because I like her, I am to love her so that in and through this marriage she may find new depths to her being in response to others and to God. In the last analysis I am not to be pleased but she is to grow in the fullness of the nature God allowed her. I am to catch God's vision for her.' "

William wrote back, "with the Lord's help I hope to do that dearest."

We began to make our wedding plans in earnest; long distance plans-I was 500 miles from home and William 4500 miles in the other direction. In spite of this everything was planned without any real difficulties.

Of course the days and weeks did pass; summer finished, the leaves began their pageant of colour. I said my goodbyes to friends in Illinois, finished my job, loaded my VW beetle to the limit and went home for the last week before our wedding.

The travel arrangements were sorted out and the groom finally arrived three days before the wedding. His mother and sister had arrived a few days earlier having sailed over. What an eventful year this had been! So much had happened and my joy was full.

5: Where You Go, I Will Go

*Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ.
Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord;.....
Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the
church and gave himself up for it.....
In the same way men also are bound to love their
wives, as they love their own bodies.....
...a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be
joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.....
each of you must love his wife as his very own self;
and the woman must see to it she pays her husband
all respect.*

Ephesians 5:21-22,25,28,30-31,33 NEB

*.....'Where you go, I will go,
and where you stay, I will stay.
Your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.*

Ruth 1:16 NEB

An autumn wedding in Minnesota involves a risk with the weather. Extremes of heat or cold are possible. The humidity of summer, with its plagues of mosquitoes is definitely gone but the possibility of snow and really bad weather is there also. We knew we were taking a chance in this respect when we planned our wedding for the 19th of October. The days prior to that were fine, the forecast good and the long awaited day surpassed our expectations

The trees were still clothed in bright gold and flaming red and as the morning mist cleared the temperature climbed. By afternoon, the time of the wedding, the day was glorious with brilliant sunshine. We could not have asked for anything better.

I felt the same way inside as I prepared for the ceremony, thrilled and excited to think that at last we would be together. Sometimes it had seemed only a dream. But I WAS getting married, to the man I loved and knew, without a doubt, William was the one I wanted to spend the rest of my days with. My heart danced with gratefulness for all the Lord had given me.

It was a day of celebration, for the love we had for one another, uniquely given by God. It would be a celebration shared with family and friends who were gathered from far and near. We realized that many who could not be with us, scattered all over the world, would be thinking of us and praying for us. We were aware too that Christ was present, as He had been long ago at the wedding in Cana.

So many things raced through my mind as I dressed. Just a few short years ago my life seemed utterly and completely ruined. I was sure I'd never know happiness again. I had a jumbled mix of bittersweetness. There was still my wound of grief, being bathed now by joy so the pain was dulled. God was good, He was giving me hope and a future with the man I loved.

I felt relaxed, enjoying every minute of the wonderful day. My feet were almost skipping as I walked down the aisle on my father's arm and there at the front of the church was William. He was smiling and waiting for me. We stood side by side, holding hands and making our vows, "for better or for worse, till death do us part." We exchanged our rings which we had chosen together last summer. We had them inscribed inside with, "*love one another as I have loved you.*" (John 15:12)

One of the songs we had chosen for the service contained words from the book of Ruth which I felt echoed my heart, "*whither thou goest I will go, thy people shall be my people.*" I was happily doing what Ruth had done. I was leaving all that was familiar for a new country, with a new husband, new culture and family. However, even though I'd miss family and friends this is what I'd happily chosen.

After the reception we headed north in my VW beetle. Little did I know when I bought it that we would use it for our honeymoon. We chose to spend our first days together in the north, "canoe country" of lakes, rugged rocky shorelines and trees. It was just a few miles from the Canadian border. This was country we both loved.

Our small log cabin was set among the tall whispering pines beside a lake that was reflecting the last few coloured leaves. How delightful to be together at last and together enjoy all the beauty around us. We cherished every minute; we had been separated so long.

We returned to my parent's home for the next few days as there was still packing to be done. Most of the baggage had been shipped to New York to await the ship on which we would sail back to England. Some of the containers were antique trunks that had belonged to my grandparents.

On our last evening at home William and I went outside and stood by the river that ran in front of the house. In the dusk the reflections of the trees in the water mingled with the last of the sunset's colours. It was a view typical of the Minnesota I loved. Now viewing it, perhaps for the last time, I felt sad. "Maybe I'll never get to see this again. We might not be able to afford the trip back to see my parents, and as they get older..."

William held me close and tried to comfort me, "We can never tell but we will try to sometimes."

"I know It's worth it dear, just to be with you. The Lord will make it up in other areas." I was a bit sad but at peace as we turned and went back into the house to rejoin the others. Somehow I felt my ties were not just to the people I was leaving, but to the land itself.

Our journey back to England was quite an introduction to life at sea. The North Atlantic in early November is notorious and we experienced some of the worst of its wild weather. As we left New York harbour I was made aware that ships could move in many directions at the same time. Besides going forward on its journey it could also go up and down, (front to back, side to side) but also twisting. It made the most horrible groaning screeching of metal and heaving things about. Most of the decks were roped

off and not usable for most of the journey because of gale force winds. Honeymoon "cruise" it was not! Rather it was enduring ten days of violent weather. William, I found out, loves wild weather on the seas.

When we docked in Southampton the weather did not seem any better. Rain, dark and stormy skies. Everything was bleak and grey. This was England, my new home. The taxi pulled away as we stood surrounded by a mountain of baggage.

"Here we are Nan. Our home. It's lacked only you."

"Our apartment is on the top floor, I remember you told me that."

"It's called a flat dear."

"Another of the words I have to relearn, Think I'll manage?"

"I'll help you," he laughed "but we have to take the suitcases upstairs by hand as there is no lift."

"No what? I'll never learn," but I did.

We had arrived in Harrow and I was eager to begin to make our simple place into a comfortable home for us. Here we would begin to put together the dreams and plans for our lives. And put up the curtains!

The dark, rainy days could be depressing. It was such a contrast to the cold, but bright and sunny weather I was used to. I wrote to my parents and asked if the sun was still up in the sky, as I had not seen it for so long. They assured me it was still shining brightly. The sun never made its appearance in the London area until the end of March. That was almost five months!!

I was amazed as William and I settled into our new life together, that we encountered few problems adjusting to each other. This was surprising since I was very independent, strong willed and used to doing things my way for twenty five years. It came out of the need to be like that even as a very young child when there was no one there for me.

We did have our differences or disagreements, times of misunderstanding but they never lasted long. I wanted a good marriage and was determined to work at it and God gave a gentle but strong husband to help me. We were both determined to keep Christ central and He gave us grace and deep joy in each other. Our friendship and love were strengthened.

People were very curious to meet the foreign wife William had brought back and I was warmly welcomed. They were surprised that I wasn't too strange and we enjoyed learning new customs and recipes from each other. Of course we still laughed at each others accents. People's warm welcome made up in some way for the lack of sunshine. Whoever said the British were staid and unbending? I enjoyed getting to know William's friends and becoming acquainted with a new style of worship. Our local parish church services showed me a real sense of reverence as well as good preaching. But the buildings were so cold, although they claimed to be heated.

William was busy with his job as a research chemist in a local company and I found part time work nearby as a District Nurse, visiting people in their homes to give care. It was hard to find my way around Harrow on my bicycle. The streets didn't run straight like those I was used to, nor did they keep the same name for long. I got lost so many times. Then after I had a very nasty spill on the bike my concerned husband grounded me.

Fortunately the nursing agency's car was mine to use for a while; it was a very old Anglia, with a unique and not very efficient heater---a hot water bottle. The car could be very temperamental and on cold mornings it took at least three hands to run; one to steer, one to hold the choke out and one to reach over and knock down the sticking semaphore (flip up) turn signals. It was unlike any other car I had driven but it got me to the homes I needed to visit.

Language was not the same as so many other Americans have found to their amazement. After several blank looks I found it necessary to learn a whole new vocabulary to make myself understood by others, especially my patients.

"Lets see if we have all your things ready for when I've finished giving your bath. Where is your underwear?...Oh, I forgot, do you have your vest and knickers out? And where is your washcloth, bother, I mean your face flannel."

Will I ever learn the language? I ticked off in my mind some of the new words I had encountered; porridge, tea towel, cotton wool, jumpers, serviettes and the list went on and on. Friends had lots of fun teaching this ignorant foreigner how to talk properly.

Shopping for food proved another challenge with the different terms for food, and of course new money!

"Do you want a joint, love?"

"A what?" And once I had it how did I cook it? Roast, fry, boil?? My friends helped me and the shopkeepers were honest and helped me as I struggled with the coins to pay for things. It was hard to make sense of the handful of strange coins in my hand and to work out how much I would get back from a pound for 13s-4d worth of groceries. I did though enjoy finding things in the little shops ; ironmongers, bakery, greengrocer, chemists, haberdashery..

William adapted to the new kinds of food I cooked. Life was good and I often stopped to thank God for all I had. One thing that I found difficult however, was when I could not plan ahead, it made me feel trapped and hurt. Was this because of the need from the past to have something out ahead to hang on to; a future prospect to keep me going. And if I didn't have that, was it too difficult to live that way?

My inner pain lay undisturbed except on rare occasions when I would wonder what had happened to my child. It cut deep as the remembrance of my tiny crying baby came to me. Once more I felt myself walking down the long, long hall alone and the bitter anguish of my loss was overwhelming. My child was gone forever.

I tried to forget and not think about the past. Usually I was successful and thought it was gone but it was still there lying hidden but coming to mind when I least expected it.

William's gentle, loving ways helped immeasurably. He was a good husband but his slow, deliberate ways made me irritable. Then I realized how much more he had to deal with in me!

Long before the two of us met we had both wanted someday to work overseas. We were aware of the possibility with missionary societies but also felt drawn to "non professional" service abroad. An unexpected letter came in the mail that February. William opened it and read it through.

"Nan, this is hard to believe. We've been offered a job teaching in a high school in Kenya. It's the same place my school friend Jim teaches at."

"That sounds exciting, how did they find out about us.?"

"I suppose Jim told them. Do you remember last year I wrote and told you I was praying about going into teaching?"

"Yes I remember."

"Well, I had prayed that in two years I might know what to do next. Whether I should stay in research or go into teaching. It's almost two years to the day of that prayer!"

"It looks like the Lord is leading us to consider this and you have often spoken about wanting to go to East Africa."

"I know," he said, "but with you not well yet I'm not sure what we should do."

I was just home from hospital recovering from major surgery. I had not been well for months and they had finally found out what was the matter but it seemed to take me forever to feel right again after my operation.

We prayed about this for a couple of weeks and eventually wrote accepting their offer. A letter came back quickly, "We are sorry to say we have offered the job to someone else as we hadn't heard from you sooner."

Our disappointment was acute as we were by then convinced this was the place we should go to. But then a few weeks later we heard again from the school.

"The person we appointed has withdrawn. Are you still interested?"

We were! There was no delay in replying this time and so less than a year after my arrival in England the trunks were out and the packing began again. Just before our departure we were sent on a training weekend with forty others to learn how to live abroad. It was at centrally heated Farnham Castle. But what a waste of heat, it was 80° outside.

September 4th, 1964, found us at Heathrow Airport sitting in the BOAC terminal. It seemed like a dream; were we really going to live in Kenya?

I was reminded that eight years ago to the day I was entering nursing and feeling I would never recover from the grief at losing my child. God had indeed healed so much in me; the hurt was dulled but it was still there like a time bomb inside of me.

"Passengers for Nairobi board through Gate 4."

"Nan, that means us!"

We gathered our things together and made our way with the others to the plane. We felt excited as we boarded. The lights of London receded, we were on our way. There was no turning back now!"

Later that evening our plane touched down to refuel in Benghazi, Libya and we took the chance to get out and stand for the first time on African soil. Sand stretched out in all directions. Here and there we saw a few palm trees on this small oasis; their fronds barely moved in the heat. Inside the airport building the ceiling fans were slowly turning, keeping the hot night air moving. It all seemed unreal; just like a scene out of an old movie.

We were in Africa! What lay ahead of us here? How long would we stay?

6: Kenya- New Adventures

The Great Rift Valley

The ground dropped away in front of our feet as we peered over the edge of the escarpment. Down and down it fell, over 2000 feet, and out and across for 40 miles. The distant rim of the valley was indiscernible, lost in a dusty haze.

What mighty upheaval had formed this vast scar, thousands of miles long, across the face of Africa? What power still fueled its bubbling hot springs and the boiling lava of Ol Doinyo Lengai?

How slight the hand of man rested upon it. the narrow road snaked its curving path down the side and across its breadth, the tiny cars moving silently along. The sun glinted off the toy-like train far below beginning its labouring ascent of the steep incline.

Pools of silvery blue shone in the heavy light; Naivasha, Nakuru, Elementeita. Lakes still unexplored by us but with magic in their names; days of delight there still awaited us. Africa! Adventure unlimited!

We woke shortly after dawn and soon had our noses pressed against the window of the plane. Far below us was an immense river stretching out in all directions.

"This is the captain," the voice over the loudspeaker announced. "We are now over the Sudan. The river you see now is the Nile, which is in flood. We will soon be over Ethiopia and in another hour over Northern Kenya."

The land we flew over soon became drier and more rugged. There were sharp valleys and flat plateaus but everything was barren.

"William how can anyone exist in such inhospitable looking country? It does not look like anything would ever grow there."

"Well they must somehow Nan, but it does look like a harsh land. I don't think Kenya is like this."

The terrain gradually began to change; first just tinges of green and then extensive cultivated areas stretching out everywhere. This was the central part of Kenya, we would soon be landing in Nairobi. Our excitement grew.

As our plane descended we could see the land dotted with trees, then the buildings came into view, revealing a city bigger and more modern than we had expected. With a gentle bump we touched down and were in a new country, a new continent. We were eager to see with our own eyes what the books had already told us about this fascinating land.

Customs and immigration were cleared smoothly, we found everyone friendly and helpful. Jim, William's friend was there to meet us. "Welcome to Kenya, it's great to see you. Come on I'll take you to Alliance; Judy and the others are eager to see you."

We looked around like excited children. Everything was different from any previous experience. Those first few hours and days were filled with wonder as we saw so much that was new. We saw smiling faces of every shade; palest brown to blackest ebony. How anaemic we Europeans looked by contrast. God gives man such an interesting variety of colours.

The grey drizzly morning was quite unlike the sunny tropical one we had pictured. "Is it always like this?", William asked.

"No, the sun does shine most of the time but we can have cloudy days too."

Our journey to the school took us past a profusion of flowers of every shape and colour; along the centre median of the highway, cascading down the sides of buildings, and spilling out of gardens. The bougainvillea especially caught our eye. Its vivid shades of pink, red and purple painted the houses and gardens with its glory.

The city was soon left behind and we started the climb to the village of Kikuyu, near where the school was located. It was fifteen miles from Nairobi and 1500 feet higher. We passed circular thatched huts and saw young boys tending flocks of goats. The unusual red-brown earth caught our eye as it formed many steep sided hills and valleys, typical of this area, Kikuyu country. It took us a good half hour to cover the distance up to the school; around yet another corner and there was Alliance High School.

It was famous all over East Africa but we didn't realize yet the full extent of its influence. The name was magic to hundreds of schoolboys who dreamed of being among the "elect", the chosen few who gained entrance to the school after competitive examinations. From its doors had emerged men of authority and influence in government, business and the civil service as well as those who were doing the unsung but vital day to day work all over the country.

It was founded in 1926 by a group of protestant missions and had for years been the only school in East Africa open to Africans who wanted a secondary education. To Alliance came students from over forty different tribes; here they learned to appreciate one another and work together. They were also challenged to reach the highest academic standards and to follow Christ.

Carey Francis, who had been its headmaster for over twenty years, had left a brilliant career at Cambridge to devote his life to the men and boys at this school. This tradition was now being carried on by another dynamic headmaster, Laurie Campbell.

He and his wife kindly invited us to stay with them for several days before we moved into our own house which seemed so huge for the two of us. I had a deep longing for children to fill its rooms with laughter, yet fear hid among the expectations. Maybe I couldn't have another child. There was that ache as I thought of my growing son---somewhere, halfway around the world from me. It left such an empty void; an

invisible wound of longing for what I had lost forever. Determinedly I pushed down these painful memories. Today, I must live for today, the past cannot be changed.

We stood on our large front verandah and looked at the view stretching out across the lawn with its flowers and poinsettia trees. We could see across the miles of plains to a range of hills in the far distance. From there came the wind, the unceasing wind. William held me close, it was chilly.

“Well Nan, this is the tropics!”

“I didn’t think it would be this cold. And we are only 70 miles from the equator.”

Close by we saw steep, grassy hills with grazing cows. This was where our milk came from. It was fresh, delivered to our doorstep each morning. We walked up the road past our house and were shown the spot from which, on a clear day, we could see snow capped Mt. Kenya a hundred miles to the north.

I soon realized why the other staff had local people to work for them in their homes. I too needed someone to help me with the daily cleaning and polishing of cement floors. All the washing was done by hand in the bathtub and hung out to dry. All our drinking water needed to be boiled so all these chores took time and energy. Another good reason to hire someone was to help the local economy, for there were few jobs.

Lucas, a Luo from western Kenya, came to help and was with us for the seven years we remained in Kenya. He became a close and trusted part of the family. James, a local Kikuyu man came to look after the acre of garden. This was especially hard during the rainy season when, with a push lawn-mower, it was continuous grass cutting. He also cut our firewood for we needed a fire every evening, and during the rainy season had one burning all day too.

Alliance was a boarding school and life was very busy for the staff, early morning to evening. The school with all the staff living around the school grounds was a close knit community of 20 European and African staff. William began to learn to teach and this was made easier with students who were bright and eager to learn. Even though it was very challenging he knew this was what he wanted to do.

He was also involved in many other activities since this was a boarding school with its games, societies and the supervision of dormitory life. I was occupied with our home, garden and part time work at the local mission hospital, where I taught the student nurses and helped in the operating room.

The rusty brown dust on the road sifted into my sandals as I walked the mile to the hospital, it meant a walk up steep hills. Nothing was on the level here. I passed several of the local Kikuyu women bent low under their burdens of wood or large drums of water. I felt hot and tired, and wondered how they must have felt under their heavy loads. They were very slightly built but proud to be so strong.

“Wimwega.” I said.

“Aaa nikwega, muno,” they replied.

I had learned to greet them in Kikuyu thus and received their polite response.

“How are your?”

“All is well.”

Working at this local hospital was a new experience. I was amazed at what the dedicated doctors and nurses did with very little resources. In later years with the help of overseas aid a lovely new operating room and wards were built. Tropical diseases

were not very common, but pneumonia was! The chilly damp climate at certain times of the year saw to that.

The wives of staff at the school were involved in most school activities, some taught, some made costumes for the yearly Shakespeare school play. We all helped provide food for the school teas after the soccer matches. I loved this experience and the deep friendships we formed. It helped keep me occupied so there was no time to brood about the past. But the thoughts would often come to me when I least expected it.

“How could you have given up your child, your own flesh and blood? You never loved him if you did that,” said an inner tormenting voice.

How discouraged these thoughts would make me feel. Over and over and round and round, deeper in condemnation; then would come the realization, those thoughts aren't from God!

How cunning satan is, how subtle in discouraging us. The Bible had taught me the importance of controlling what I thought about, “we take every thought captive and make it obey Christ”. Our wandering minds need to be brought back to focus on truth. I had to reject the fears and condemnation and declare afresh, God loves me. There is now no condemnation in Christ Jesus. The Lord had taken my failure and had forgiven me and I knew He loved my son and would watch over him.

The loss of my son with its hurt and grief was buried deep but I knew many others carried scars of various kinds and was able to avoid the poor me attitude. The happiness William and I shared was healing.

Moreover I had never dared to expect that I'd be living in Africa married to a wonderful loving husband. I was blessed. Without even asking I'd been given the desires of my heart to travel and have loving relationships. I was largely unaware of how He had been guiding, providing and protecting me over the years.

It was also good to interact with the students in an informal way. Some came to a Bible study in our home. Through this we became aware of their backgrounds and saw some of the great sacrifices their families made to send them to school. Most of them had a very meagre income and struggled to get the modest school fees. A few were able to receive scholarships through the school. A son privileged enough to have a good education faced high family expectations, including providing money for schooling for younger children and the needs of the extended family.

During our years in Kenya I tried to learn Swahili and encountered the same difficulty that I had experienced with languages before. English and Swahili, were the official languages in the country. Almost all of the students knew both as well as their own tribal tongue. All the teaching at the school was done in English.

I only learned a minimal number of words in Swahili but that allowed me to do a good job of bartering. A lot of shopping for vegetables was done at the back door when the local vegetable men came around with their baskets of fresh produce or chickens. Live of course! A lot of the meat we ate came from the local village at one of the local 'dukas'. The price was the same for any cut of meat, therefore I tried to get there early to get the whole tenderloin. That was also cut up for stew or ground for hamburgers.

Once a week we went into Nairobi to do other shopping and there almost anything one wished for was for sale. But if it was imported, like corn flakes, it would be too expensive except as a treat. Haggling or bargaining was expected and I soon

became quite expert at it. The array of local fruit and vegetables was vast; pineapples, mangoes, oranges, bananas, avocados, pawpaw.

"The memsahib like this mango? Very good."

"How much?"

"Shillingi tatu (3 shillings). It's very sweet.

"That's too much, its kidogo (small)," I said. So might a typical shopping trip go, everyone enjoyed the proceedings.

Like thousands before us, we fell in love with Kenya and its people. The country was endowed with a rich array of natural wonders, beautiful countryside and many wild animals. We were close enough to the Nairobi game park and other areas to allow us to see all the usual big and small game animals. It was almost as though they were on a huge stage with the panorama of the dry dusty plains dotted with acacia and fever trees as backdrop. We felt fortunate to have this so close when people came from thousands of miles away to see this land with its amazing variety of scenery and animals.

Often we would see animals while just driving along the highway or even in our own garden. Dik-dik, only 16 inches tall, wandered in and enjoyed eating our roses. During the dry season the monkeys might put in an appearance. The last of the local leopards left a year before we got there. The mission nurse going to a late night delivery had met them more than once.

It was also a place to see huge numbers of exotic birds. We would often sit on our verandah and see beautiful birds all around us. The mewing sound of the big kites flying overhead quickly caught our attention. The sunbirds were like jewels, almost like hummingbirds, visiting the flowers in the garden. At breakfast the grey and yellow bulbils came to give us their song to start our day.

We were warned shortly after our arrival about a frightening night-time noise which came from the tiny innocent looking tree hyrax. They were hardly ever seen but after dark one could hear the sudden sound of a creaking door followed by a blood curdling scream. This was aptly described as the shriek of someone being strangled. We were so glad we were forewarned.

I expected to find lots of mosquitoes or snakes in Africa but saw few in all our years there. It was mainly because we were living at the high altitude of 7000 feet. We only had to take antimalarial medication when we visited the coast, since we were too high to be bothered by mosquitos. We had thousands of sausage flies which our cat loved to catch and eat. Flying ants and termites were prevalent. The termites built huge mounds, nests, and killed many trees. Our cement house with its wood trim was not immune from them.

We loved to watch the rains come, the large rolling mass of dark clouds moving ever closer. The trees stood etched against its darkness and the hush fell as everything waited for the storm to break. When the dark grey curtain of rain was just beyond the nearby hill it was a sign to take cover. When the deluge hit us it became impossible to hear much as it beat upon our corrugated iron roof. It also turned the unpaved roads to deep seas of mud. The rains were always welcomed by the small farmers as they were the life blood for the crops on their "shambas".

Most of the year we enjoyed warm sunshine in the day and cool evenings when we appreciated the warmth from our big fireplace. During the rainy season our usual summer wear was replaced by slacks and wool sweaters.

We went once a year to the coast for a holiday, and found Indian Ocean waters were very warm and inviting. We sometimes rented a cottage, ourselves or with friends and enjoyed mostly empty miles of beach. A busy day would have a dozen other people around. But the 300 mile drive to Mombasa could be a challenge with half of the road still unpaved.

After two eventful years in Kenya we had our first leave.. As a couple we had learned better how to live together in harmony. There were the ordinary days full of enjoyment; there were also days of irritation and impatience. These, fortunately, were not so common. It was an ongoing adaptation and adjustment when two very different personalities were brought together. But we had lots of shared interests.

Now we had our first 'leave' and were going back to England to see family and friends. It would be good to have a rest. We got together with long time friends there, an Anglican vicar and his wife and saw an amazing change in their lives. They said it was because they learned to allow the Holy Spirit to fill them. We had not really heard about this but saw what a positive thing it was for our friends. These ordinary people clearly had a new found joy and peace which gave me a new desire in my life. I wanted to know the Lord in this living and dynamic way which I saw in them. I felt so dry.

"Lord I want to see your face. I want to know you in a deeper way," was the cry of my heart.

For some time at our staff Bible Study at school there had been a friendly disagreement between myself and one of the other teachers. He said we must just "grit our teeth and plug on" in our walk with Christ and I objected to this even though I did not see anything other than that in my own life. I remarked that the Bible showed a different way of living. Early Christians had a power and love I didn't have.

I felt a great longing to know God more intimately and change my dry and ordinary walk with Him. There must be a better way than I was experiencing. I believe God takes us at our word. He knows the deep desire of our heart and then sees to it that we are stimulated in our search for Him, if we really mean it.

As soon as we were back in Kenya from our leave, one of my friends lent me some books she had found interesting. I wept as I read them, for I sensed the touch of the Lord in the experiences described in these books. How they fed my hungry searching heart. Here were ordinary people who had seen the realities of God at work in their own lives. I found this confirmed in the Bible and I wanted all that Christ had to offer me. I was hungry and thirsty for more.

Over the next few years I searched in earnest. A lot intervened as our family grew and difficulties came and life went on. And as He promises to those who diligently search, "you shall find Me". I did, but not just yet.

7: Two Gifts

*Sons are a gift from the Lord
and children a reward from him.*
Psalm 127:3 NEB

"You are pregnant." The doctor sat down across from me and said those words which reached back over almost nine years but this time unspeakable delight accompanied them.

We had been living in Kenya for a couple of months when I became aware there was new life within me. Before we were married William and I talked about our desire for a family, we looked forward to having children so we were overjoyed to find our hopes being fulfilled.

The small school community in which we lived was made up of many young families and we were only one of several couples who were expecting at that time. William had no idea of that intense longing I had for a child. Now I had a stable home with a loving husband, a caring environment in which to raise a child in love and security.

But a flood of memories come tumbling into consciousness with the news I was pregnant. There was the mingling of sadness and joy as that secret sorrow surfaced again. Then the grief over the child I did not have was intermingled with the great happiness at the prospect of a child of our own. I was not the same person now. Searing grief and healing joy had moulded me.

I longed to tell William about the past but if I told him now, it might be a terrible blow and hurt him deeply. I could not bring myself to do that, so the Lord had to continue to help me deal with it alone.

William was the typical expectant father and showed great concern for my well being. We were both so happy that there was a little one on the way; yet I had my fears. Was this child developing properly and would everything go easily with the birth? A threatened miscarriage only fueled this fear but soon everything settled down and it looked as though there would be no more problems. This time I would receive proper medical care throughout the pregnancy.

My normal voracious appetite was disturbed by bouts of nausea but ended after three months. It was well timed as we had our first holiday in Kenya at the famous Outspan Hotel in Nyeri. We did justice to their wonderful six course dinners.

William went to the window and looked out. "Well Nan, there is something unusual. Snow on the equator."

I came over and stood beside him and saw the beauty of Mount Kenya with the setting sun's rays catching the snow and making it shimmer.

"How lovely but hard to believe. It's so warm down here and yet cold enough for snow up there."

“ I wonder if the others from school have reached the summit yet.” Many of the staff and students climbed the mountain during the school break.

“Maybe we’ll do it too someday, but I don’t feel up to it just now.”

The early days sped by with the care of the house and my work at the local hospital. I grew steadily and noticeably larger and our altitude of 7000 feet, combined with the ever present hilly terrain, kept me puffing.

My mind was preoccupied as I drove into Nairobi on one of my early visits to the doctor; I knew she must be told of any previous pregnancy. As a nurse I knew there could be problems with a second child as I was Rh negative. I didn’t want to tell her since William didn’t know but medically it was imperative. The doctor must know.

I noticed how lovely it all looked as I drove along, the first of the rains had refreshed everything. The jacaranda trees were wreathed in a purple haze of blossoms, all around glistened, clean and fresh. But I felt heavy. If only William could have been told about my child during those hurried few day back in London after his proposal. Then I would not have to bear this alone. But it hadn’t been possible and so my loneliness in this area was inevitable.

I sat in the doctor’s office and told the story again to only the second person to hear it. She understood why William had not been told and reassured me by saying that my secret would be respected.

She told me the baby was growing right on schedule and she would keep watch on me. How different this pregnancy was from the earlier one. Now there was joy instead of sadness; hope instead of despair and I was surrounded by friends. They were full of loving, encouraging concern and I could openly and proudly let my pregnancy be known.

William was so delighted at the approaching birth of our child; but for me, there was always that thread of grief because a part of me -- my lost child ---was missing. I tried not to think of this but only delight in what I had. I could not live in the past, I told myself, and the past could not be changed.

Less than a year after we came to Kenya our son Ernest was born, but not exactly as expected. At the last minute he had to be delivered by caesarean section. As I came out of the anesthesia I asked to see my baby.

“Can I see him, is he all right?” I groggily asked the nurse.

“No, not now, you can see him later.”

My heart contracted in terror. Something must be wrong or they would bring him to me. In my nursing we had always let mothers see their babies right away unless something was wrong with the child.

Finally after several hours of fighting my way in and out of consciousness and begging to see him they finally brought him to me. At last, I could see for myself and be reassured, he was a beautiful baby and looked perfect in every way. Now I could sleep in peace.

William came to visit the next day full of excitement, “It’s great to see you awake. Are you feeling OK now?” he leaned down looking concerned. He gave me a kiss and a bouquet of flowers.

“It was awful to see you yesterday when you were still unconscious. You looked so white like in the hospital last year in Harrow. I hate to see you like that.”

“I’m all right dear but I can’t laugh or the stitches hurt, so no jokes for a while.

"Did you see Ernest? Isn't he wonderful."

"Yes, they finally brought him after I begged for a long time. I don't know why they didn't let me see him right away, I was so worried something was wrong with him, because they gave me such a heavy dose of anesthesia I wasn't really awake for so long. I was so groggy I don't remember what he looks like."

"He looks perfect! But he was protesting loudly when I first saw him yesterday. I think he looks a bit like me, a high forehead."

"Hope he has your brains too dear," I said.

"You would have enjoyed being at school for the announcement of Ernest's arrival."

"Why, what happened?"

"I got back just as the boys were going into the dining hall for supper and the announcement was made. The place just erupted with cheers. I thought they would never stop."

"Well of course a son does mean a lot; this is Kenya you know."

"They won't let me have him to feed until tomorrow, because he was a caesarean he has to be 'cot nursed'. I can't even hold him until then. I miss him."

"Well that's not long to wait, Nan."

But he didn't know it was an eternity for me because I didn't have that contact with my other baby.

Real contentment only came, when after two long days, I could actually hold my son close and study his tiny hands, ears and look into his eyes. How precious he was to me!

As I held Ernest in my arms and looked at him I wondered what my other son looked like. Did he look anything like this when he was a baby? If only I could have really seen him. But I could not dwell on the past. Life had to go on now. The joy of holding Ernest poured over the pain as a soothing ointment.

After many days I was able to go home and be together with our new son. Ernest was a delightful baby, bright, bouncy and alert. He was interested in everything around him from his very first days. No little detail escaped his interest. Our son captured our hearts and brought us untold joy, especially as I thought I'd never have a child to care for. No one to watch grow and develop. Here was a child to whom I could give my love unreservedly. Ernest learned to smile very early and never seemed to stop. What a delight! He was always so full of fun, and we were sure no one enjoyed their child more than we did.

My mind often went back to another child, branded on my heart and not forgotten. "Lord where is he?" I longed to know but could not, my other son was lost to me. He was gone forever.

Our joy soon became tempered by concern when Ernest became very ill at seven months, with gastroenteritis and had to be hospitalized. It was heartbreaking to take him there and then have to leave him. There was no allowance then for parents to stay with their children, they had to be left. I had to leave my little one, to turn and go out of the hospital room and leave him there all alone. It tore me apart. I wept as it awoke in me those buried hurts and memories of leaving another child.

Every day found me there with him for as long as possible and a week later we finally had him back with us and we felt complete again as a family. It was as though a big hole had been ripped out of our lives when our son was not there at home with us.

The months went by and we saw Ernest become sick frequently and not gain weight as he should. The doctor felt that he would improve if he had his tonsils removed. So once more he was admitted to hospital when he was only two and a half. My heart ached as I had to leave my son once more alone in a strange hospital room. A terrible emptiness filled me.

“It’s all right Nan, he’s in good hands and will soon be home.”

“Yes, but it is so hard to leave him.” And I could say no more as to why it was so difficult.

Ernest looked so forlorn and sad sitting there in the bed all alone. He was in for ten days and again I spent as much time as I was allowed with him. We rejoiced when at last he came home; now he will be healthy.

A few months before this, when Ernest turned two, we welcomed his sister Elizabeth into our hearts and home. Again William and I were thrilled by the pregnancy; it was wonderful to have our family increased. We had hoped for a girl this time and were absolutely delighted with our beautiful, dainty daughter. My heart’s desire was satisfied.

Just before Elizabeth was born I felt concerned about my ability to love this new baby as much as I loved Ernest. Of course my fears proved absolutely groundless. She immediately and completely won her special place in our hearts. We didn’t love her brother any the less but our hearts were enlarged to love more. It’s always amazing when it happens but love does that. We are given a special love for each one brought into our lives and our daughter certainly proved easy to love.

As I stood there watching her sleeping peacefully in her basket I felt such wonder. She was so lovely; her tiny fingers curled around mine as I stroked them. My daughter! I was so blessed, God had given me so much.

It was pleasing to see the attention and love which Ernest expressed towards his sister. Right from the beginning he seemed to enjoy her and we never saw any jealousy, only care and consideration. Elizabeth’s big brother obviously loved her and he liked to hold her. As the months passed they spent many happy hours playing together. They would go on rides around the house, Elizabeth in her baby walker, holding on to the back of Ernest’s trike as he pulled her along. The sounds of their laughter filled our home just as I dreamed it would.

The large house and garden gave them lots of space to play. There were many other teachers’ children around for them to play with also. It was an ideal place in which to raise our children. The students loved them and liked to play with them whenever they were around. Africans love their own children and anyone else’s. Our two stood out because of their blond hair and often were the centre of attention. Whenever we went into Nairobi their smiles would charm the fruit stall owners and they’d be given an orange or banana.

One afternoon, as usual, we had gone to watch a school soccer match. Ernest and Elizabeth went off immediately to join the other staff children. Ernest at five was a happy fellow, slightly built but a quick runner. Elizabeth, two years younger, followed eagerly, her long blond hair flowing behind as she ran trying to keep up with her big

brother. The group of children began to play together; sometimes watching the game, climbing trees or investigating the herd of goats watched over by one of the local boys.

The late afternoon sun shone down on us. It was hot now but soon it would be chilly, when the sun went behind the trees. Then the sweaters we brought would feel good. We sat watching the game and chatting with the other staff.

“William, aren’t you glad we had our children out here? They have so many good things to do and lots of friends to enjoy and space to do it in. I’m so grateful.”

“Yes, they certainly are never at a loss for things to see or do. They can burn off their energy in all the space they have.”

It was not many months until Ernest was sick again. Every six weeks he would develop a chest infection which then produced asthmatic bronchitis. This caused many hurried visits to the doctor or into the Emergency Room for the medication so he could breathe once again. Several times he had to be admitted into hospital when he was especially bad. In spite of this, between illnesses he was on the go constantly, always bright and cheerful.

And then with his battle with sickness came my battles with fear and relinquishment of him. Each time I had to learn to let go of him and place him into the hands of Jesus, into His care and protection.

“He is yours Jesus, You gave him to us, now take care of him, heal him.”

Each time it was a whole new battle to trust God. I had lost one child, I feared to lose another. Could I trust Him? Yes but each time I went through the issue of trust all over again. Ernest was the Lord’s gift to us and I knew He loved him more than we ever could and yet it was so hard to trust. There seemed to be a permanent knot of fear which slowly unwound, only to knot up again when sickness came a few weeks later. I spent years holding my breath wondering when would he be sick again. Would we get him to the doctor soon enough? These were years of battle to trust; of victory and of failure to trust.

Whether I was victorious or failed in trusting I knew God loved me. I wanted to trust and I believe He looked at the intent of our hearts. I seemed to walk through dark valleys and climb out and then down again. But there were many times of fun interspersed between worry over our son’s health. He and Elizabeth were such a delight to us. I was content, thankful for what I did have and tried not to think about what was missing.

They were tiring days as they were both on the go the whole time. Ernest especially must have felt he would miss out on something if he slept, so he didn’t. He didn’t seem to require much sleep, at least a lot less than his parents did. Elizabeth’s arrival persuaded us, at last, that some children require a normal amount of sleep and they could sit still long enough to be cuddled. How nice to have a cuddler after a wriggler! She loved to be held and would snuggle close to me, what a blessing this child was. Often they would both climb up on my lap and we would read a book together. Bed time stories were an important part of the day. Certain books were favourites, read over and over. If we happened to skip a page they let us know that was not to be done.

“William, remember you wrote and told me, before we were married, the best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. I just wanted to tell you, you are being a good father.”

We had such joy as we watched these two grow. I remained amazed that such lovely children were mine. Elizabeth was tiny and dainty, quite unlike me as a child. They didn't resemble me at all, as they both looked so much like William. It made me wonder what my other child looked like. Did he look like me at all?

Once more I would close my mind to the hurt I felt and go on with the daily tasks and deliberately wall off my grief. Sometimes the walls would crumble and the stab of pain would pierce deep. Put up the barrier. Don't think about it, It's not there. Fool I was to think that it was so.

The children loved our time in Kenya, with its many pleasant memories. They especially loved going into the Nairobi Game Park and the nearby Animal Orphanage. It was there, where young animal orphans were cared for, that Elizabeth had a race with a cheetah. She was running on the outside of the large cage and the sleek animal on the inside. We always saw a huge variety of animals in the park; lions, giraffe, wildebeest, buffalo and always the smaller Tommies- -Thompson gazelles.

Our life during this period was busy but satisfying. We had no thoughts that anything unusual was about to happen that day in April on the weekly drive into Nairobi. Exceptionally heavy rain overnight had washed out part of the shorter road into town. So we took the longer route and when halfway to town the peaceful trip was dramatically interrupted.

Events happened so fast there was no time to avoid hitting the approaching land rover as it turned across our path. Its heavy construction and our speed made the collision equivalent to hitting a tank broadside. The land rover was tipped over and our car a write off.

Fortunately we were all in seat belts, even the children in the back seat. I was the only one with any injuries; my neck and back were hurt and very painful. This was the third whiplash for me in the space of ten years and this time the damage was extensive. In spite of months of physiotherapy the pain didn't stop. Medication didn't touch the pain. For the next two years pain became my constant, unwanted companion until the Lord intervened. It was a discouraging time and I often grumbled." Why did it have to happen to me, why so much pain?"

We enjoyed our years in Kenya and were enriched by the experience of having lived there. What a heritage we gained from the people there as we learned from them about real hospitality and generosity. This was evident to us especially when we went to visit students at their homes. These people were living a marginal existence as the land was poor in many areas and the rain not sufficient for their crops. In spite of this, they who had so little in a material sense, gave generously to us when we came as their guests. It was often a real sacrifice yet they treated us kindly and fed us well while in their homes. We were sent on our way with gifts of pineapples, chickens or eggs. They were delighted to be able to do this. In return we took sugar and tea and other things considered luxuries.

William also noted this same generous attitude in those students under his charge who went out weekly to teach Sunday School classes at the local primary schools. For some this meant walking many miles each way, which they did cheerfully. We had a lot to learn from them about how to serve others There was no prestige attached to that work which was purely voluntary but it put into practice the school's motto, "Strong to Serve".

The cost of following Christ was also lived out before us when in 1968 the problem of taking oaths came up once again among the Kikuyu. Death or severe beatings awaited Christians who would not participate. Still they rejoiced that they were worthy to bear this for their Lord. The cost of their love for Him was high and a challenge to our own faith.

During our third, two year, tour of service we found ourselves faced with the decision about our future. Should we stay in Kenya indefinitely or were we to return to England? It was not an easy choice for we had grown to love the people and the country and really felt it was our home. But increasingly we knew that we should go back to England, partly because of William's need to establish himself as a teacher in a system where he could work long term. It was also for the sake of schooling for our children. Thus we came to the end of a very significant period in our lives, difficult in some ways but which held for us such fond memories.

With the ease of hindsight, it is clear that God used this time to generate in me a deeper hunger to know more of Himself. He wanted to prepare us for new experiences through which we would be able to receive more of the blessings He intended for us.

Those last few weeks were busy ones as we rushed to complete the necessary arrangements for leaving, packing and moving to a new job in England. Early on a grey, drizzly, typical Kikuyu morning we drove out of Alliance for the last time. We headed for the airport with very mixed feelings. It was hard to leave behind the many friends we had grown to love and yet we knew it was right to go.

8: So Much More

“..(some) lives are marked by a growing hunger after God Himself. They are eager for spiritual realities and will not be put off with words, nor will they be content with correct ‘interpretations’ of truth. They are athirst for God, and they will not be satisfied till they have drunk deep at the Fountain of Living Water.”

A.W. Tozer, p.7 *The Pursuit of God* © 2009 Martino Publishing

I’m thirsty Lord, fill me.

Oh, why had we ever come back? Row upon row of houses, millions of cars and crowds of people everywhere were overpowering and made me feel hemmed in. I longed for the sun and wide open spaces we had grown to love in Kenya.

Someone remarked to me, “Aren’t you glad to be back in civilization again?”

“I’m not sure. Now I have to teach my children to fear, to be cautious of people and in Kenya we had no concern for their safety. There, children are highly valued.”

This move unsettled me; I missed our friends but there seemed to be a deeper feeling of need. Was it the longing for the child I’d lost? Would I ever get over this? Some days I could forget but then the sorrow would engulf me once again. I knew enough to turn to the Lord and each time Jesus would hold me close and ease the pain and I could smile and laugh again. Life went on.

In a couple of weeks we were able to locate a suitable house in Bristol and after a few more weeks we moved in. With a lot of paint and elbow grease we transformed our roomy semi into a bright and comfortable home. The main drawback for Ernest and Elizabeth was getting used to the small garden which was so confining after the acres of space they had in Kenya. They helped get our garden planted that spring and were interested in all the different birds. But no sunbirds--no sun.

It was good to be within visiting distance of William’s mother and sister. While abroad we were able to see them only every two years. Family ties were important to us and we took every opportunity to be together. We were now close enough so their grandmother could spoil the children, enjoy them and watch them grow up so fast.

I had forgotten how lovely the English spring could be as we had not experienced one for seven years. Flowers were everywhere and their fragrance hung in the fresh spring air. “Oh, to be in England now that April’s there,” are familiar lines and now I experienced the same beauty of which the poet spoke. April in Minnesota was very different, flowers might have to push through a foot of snow.

We soon became involved in numerous activities at our local Anglican church. There was a gap left by the close community we left behind at Alliance but we found an echo of the community in the smaller home meetings and weekly Bible study with friends.

Mollie and Harry, more than anyone else, were used by the Father to make us feel at home in England. They, like several others at church, had experienced the Lord's touch of renewal in their own lives. We had many encouraging times of fellowship as we met regularly with them and others.

When God gave me the desire for more of Himself He also brought me into contact with the right people. By now I knew I wanted the Holy Spirit to be released more fully into my life; yet I put off doing anything about it. Our friends were kind but persistent as they saw the effects of the pain I had from my back. Since the car accident the pain had never left. I went once again to the doctor and for physiotherapy but nothing helped at all.

"Nancy, let's ask God to heal your back?"

"Maybe later Mollie, its not serious. I guess I will have to learn to put up with the pain. I don't think that I should bother Him with such a minor thing."

How often do we believe that lie? Didn't I know, deep down that He loved me and cared about all the details of my life? Then why did I procrastinate about asking for healing? Soon afterwards, one cold Sunday evening in February when we were discussing divine healing, another friend from the church walked in. Martin was often involved in bringing the Lord's healing.

Mollie turned to me and said, "Now is a good time to pray for your healing Nancy. May we lay hands on you?"

Further delay and excuses were useless, "Yes I want to be free of the pain." I was more than tired of the burden of it.

Our friends gathered round and prayed, quietly and confidently asking Jesus to touch my back and completely heal it. Suddenly I knew that I would be healed; I was given the gift of faith at that point. Several times during that night I woke and expected the pain to have gone. I felt impatient. The pain was still there.

Morning came and when I opened my eyes I realized the pain was completely gone! Jesus had healed me! In two days even the aching had left too. Here was thrilling evidence of God's specific love for me. How lovingly He had answered the longing of my heart for the reality of His Presence.

Now that I was free from the bondage of pain I immediately set to work making a big rock garden. I used a sledgehammer to remove the old fireplaces in our house and hauled wheelbarrow loads of rubble. This was hard physical labour and all of this without pain. It was a delight to be able to tell others Jesus had healed me. Amazing. Wonderful. Yet some denied it was from Him, I would have got better anyway they said. But I hadn't in over two years with the best of medical attention.

Mollie continued her gentle persuasion, "Nancy, ask the Father for the fullness of the Holy Spirit in your life. You know He delights to give His children good gifts."

So shortly after the healing of my back we invited these friends over for an evening. I wanted the Holy Spirit to be released fully into my life, that same Spirit which had taken up residence when I became a Christian. God just needed my permission to carry out His promise and pour His Spirit like water on a dry and thirsty life. He did in a quiet way as our friends laid hands on me and prayed. No bells rang, no fireworks lit up the room but I sensed His Presence and love in a new and living way. I'd known Jesus all these years but now in a new way the Father and Holy Spirit became real.

In the weeks that followed He made the Bible come alive and I understood more clearly things I'd not see before. If Jesus, who was God made flesh, needed to be baptised by the Holy Spirit when He was at the River Jordan, how much more did I. It was not a second blessing but an essential part of the fullness Christ desired to give. "In Christ dwell all the riches of glory".

It was an increased dimension and experience of the Lord Jesus that the Father wanted me to have but he needed my permission to do this. I found a new ability to relax in Jesus and let Him be my patience rather than trying to be patient myself. It freed me from trying to DO what He wanted and so I could BE what He wanted.

The Spirit's job is to reveal Jesus and lead us into truth and He began to do this in wonderful ways. Now I began to see the riches of the word salvation. It wasn't just forgiveness of sin, but health and wholeness for every area of life. What a big task He had in store to do this in me. He began to nudge me to open areas so He could touch deep areas with healing and wholeness. This stubborn, self-willed, strong minded proud lady had a lot that needed changing.

Still I knew God loved me as I was, not as I might manage to make myself. He saw me already complete in Him. He knew my failures but also my potential. He knew my weaknesses could become strengths. It was a continuing deep work that would go on all my life. He wanted me to abide in Him and His victory. Those deep longings of my heart for "more" were being met.

I longed for William to experience this too, "Dear, why don't you ask for the Holy Spirit to fill you?"

"Nan, I'm glad to see the change in you but none of the fine Christians who influenced me had this. So why do I need it?"

So my dear husband watched from afar, not against what was happening but apparently having no desire for more himself. Then one by one, he heard that those whose lives he so admired had received the fullness of the Spirit. The 'Hound of Heaven' was on his trail.

At that time Elizabeth's small hands were covered by warts and one night when she was asleep I prayed for healing for her and then forgot about it. A couple of weeks later William noted with surprise that her hands were completely clear. We praised God for another confirmation, even in this small way, of His care as a loving Father for one of His little children. Later He healed her of a high temperature in a matter of minutes as she sat on my lap and we prayed.

Other times He didn't heal when we asked just as trustingly. We didn't know why but knew we must keep our eyes on Jesus, the Healer, not on the healing. We needed to focus on the Giver not the gift.

One day when I was very ill with an infection and high temperature we prayed but saw no improvement. So we called our friends to come and pray with us. They did and I was healed right away, the pain and fever gone. We puzzled over this.

We questioned our friends, "Why didn't the healing come when we prayed ourselves?" Their answer made sense, "I think perhaps God wants us all to remain dependent on others within the body of Christ. You shouldn't be all on your own; some things we can deal with ourselves but other burdens and needs are meant to be shared."

It has been evident in the years since just how vulnerable isolated groups or individuals can be. It is vital to remain part of a living church fellowship and be

dependent on one another. That also helps keep pride in check thinking we can do it all ourselves.

Shortly after this I found myself depressed . This was something foreign to me even at the lowest points of my life. I would wake in the morning and feel under a black cloud and terrible heaviness. So after a few days of this I met with friends to pray about this. They laid hands on me and asked Jesus to minister to me. The heaviness left immediately and, to our wonder, God had done a unique thing for me.

The Lord had left a perfume, a lovely fragrance, on my head where my friends had placed their hands. They were as amazed as I was and assured me they had not put anything there. It was the Lord's doing it came while they prayed.

I went home with a tremendous sense of wonder and found William could smell the perfume as well. The fragrance stayed with me for several days, over that Easter season. Other friends also caught the lovely aroma. How and why He did this was a mystery but knew it was a loving gift from a God who wants to give us more than we can ask or think. The Scripture came to mind, *"your God has anointed you.....with oil, the token of joy."* Psalm 45:7 NEB

After a few months of watching from a distance William asked for the fullness of the Holy Spirit in his own life. While we were attending a Fountain's Trust conference at Ashburnham, he stayed behind after one of the meetings and asked for prayer. He returned from there shining with joy. The following days showed a beautiful deepening of his relationship with Jesus.

At this conference we also learned about the gift of inner healing, how the Father wants to touch those areas of our life that have been hurt or damaged. For the previous few years Ernest had shown some anxiety when both of us went out for the evening. In one of the teaching sessions we talked about healing of memories, especially those related to early childhood. I realized his anxiety was due to having been left alone in hospital, as an infant and several times as a young child. We were shown how to pray for children. When they were sleeping we prayed quietly but out loud.

That evening as Ernest slept, William and I knelt by our sleeping son and asked the Lord to heal him. "Ernest, you were never left alone there in the hospital. Jesus was always with you, even though you did not know it. Jesus was with you, you were never alone."

From that time, and with that simple prayer, there was no more trace of anxiety in his life. But we learned for some others it might need to be done every day for several months until complete healing was evident.

Did my other son need this inner healing to heal the effects of our separation? My thoughts often turned to him and I was aware of that ache, like a black hole, in my heart. It was an emptiness, a numbness, a death that could never be properly mourned since I had to act as though nothing had happened. Inside I wept over the loss.

No one else, of course, knew this and mercifully I was not outwardly affected to a greater extent by this grief. I realized that the Lord knew about it, understood it and helped me to cope. I had to be vigilant and not dwell on it but give it to Him. My son was a teenager now. What was he like? Was he having difficulties? I could only ask Jesus to keep him safe.

We began to pray regularly over both Ernest and Elizabeth while they were sleeping at night. We would ask for forgiveness for where we had failed as parents. We

asked Him to wipe out the effect our mistakes might have produced in them. We also would ask their forgiveness on a regular basis when we had been angry or impatient with them. We tried, over the years, to teach them by example the delights of knowing God in a personal way and they came to trust in Christ while still young.

We invested time and energy in their lives as God had entrusted them into our care. The house echoed to the sounds of their laughter and play. We had many good times together camping, walks in the nearby woods and visiting different parts of the country. Our friends laughingly called us "Moore's Tours and Hotels". Either we were seeing friends elsewhere or they came to us. It was a normal humdrum sort of life with its daily tasks. The garment of my life was a bit drab but brightened by many patches of joy.

I continued nursing in a small way. I worked two nights a week at a small maternity hospital and was surprised it wasn't painful to be in this setting with new babies.

We had been in England for three years when William applied for a teaching job in Canada. We had long wanted to move there but had been told there were no openings for teachers, like William who had no formal teacher training. We had looked for jobs there for some months but nothing was available until this opportunity came quite unexpectedly. He got an interview and we anxiously awaited his return.

We all three met him at the door, "Did you get it? Are we going?"

"I'm being rushed and pushed to make a snap decision and I can't accept the job in such a hurry. You know I've always said, God may do things quickly but not in a rush. If we are meant to go, another job will turn up."

I felt crushed. We were all so disappointed but after a while were able to accept his decision. For years I really worked at being content in whatever situation I found myself.

A couple of weeks later the phrase, "*the Lord will give you the desires of your heart*" came to mind. I wasn't even sure it was in the Bible but after a search I found it was Psalm 37:4 NEB "*Depend upon the Lord, and He will grant you your heart's desire.*" This brought real peace; we longed to go to Canada but could safely leave it in His hand's and He would open the way. That is if we were meant to go. In spite of the sparse job market we were at peace.

Within a few weeks we had another offer of a job with the same school and this time we were not pushed or rushed to make a decision. William wrote and accepted the job and we prepared once again to pull up roots and resettle. This, like leaving Kenya, meant leaving dear friends and this made us sad. In some ways we wanted to stay where we were but the longing to go was stronger.

The children were eager with the thought of new adventures. The previous year we had been in Minnesota to see my parents. While there we had taken a very enjoyable canoe trip with my brother which whetted our appetite for more. I knew I personally missed the lovely North Country, the Canadian Shield country, which covers not just Canada but the northern United States. Now we would be within commuting distance of my family--only 1000 miles away.

The Canadian High Commission informed us it would take many months for us to become landed immigrants so we could come to Canada. But we went ahead and put our house up for sale and just two months later we had all the necessary documents. In

the frustrations of transatlantic moving we proved the value of good friends and neighbours, as they helped us squash the last items into the crates.

Once again we were at Heathrow Airport. There had been many times of coming and going through here since that memorable time we first flew to Africa.

So much had happened in the past three and a half years. I never dreamed the Lord would do so much in our lives. My eyes rested on our two children and saw the excitement in their faces and sensed it in myself also but it was masked by exhaustion. William looked a bit harried having just dealt with a problem about our excess baggage but I knew he would soon be his usual calm self.

What lay ahead of us in Canada? We didn't know the future but we knew the One who was going with us and He was faithful and worthy to be trusted.

9: God Will Carry Us

*Trust in the Lord and do good;
settle in the land and find safe pasture.
Depend upon the Lord,
and he will grant you your heart's desire.
Commit your life to the Lord;
trust in him and he will act.
Wait quietly for the Lord,
be patient till he comes;*

Psalm 37: 3-5,7 NEB

May the peace of Christ profoundly disturb us
to change us into what He wants us to be. (Anon)

The December dusk was falling as our plane touched down at Toronto International Airport; we were at last in Canada. Here to welcome us, strangely enough, was Jim, that same friend of William's who ten years earlier greeted us at Nairobi Airport. He was now teaching in Toronto.

We squeezed ourselves and the mountain of luggage into his car and drove along the highway thronged with traffic and ringed with Christmas lights. This was very different from that other drive in Nairobi. This time there were no bright flowers and there was snow about. For me this move was almost a coming home, back on this side of the Atlantic.

The Lord used others to help us find an apartment to rent as our Bristol house was not yet sold. In this large city of over two and a half million one main task was to find Christian fellowship. Some friends in England had recommended a couple of churches so we went to check them out, to see what was the right one for us. We quickly found one where we felt comfortable and where Jesus was exalted. We realized we would never find the perfect church, since none exist! It was important for our children also find good teaching and friends.

William began his teaching and it was challenging with a new curriculum and finding his way around a new school Teaching girls for the first time was also a new experience. Ernest and Elizabeth settled down in their local school and found new friends and began new activities, such as hockey, ballet and swimming.

We knew there would be new challenges and difficulties with a move especially in a material sense. Living in Toronto was very expensive and the pay was very low. But we had "our foot in the door" for starting to teach in Canada. It became a real challenge to see how far the money would stretch and we proved the saying--'necessity is the mother of invention'. We made furniture and clothes and we never lacked. God saw that we had all we needed.

We guarded our closeness as a family and because of the upheaval of a move I made it a point to be at home when the children came in from school. I only did a bit of night duty nursing so I was around for the family. If our faith was true it had to be seen in practical terms around the house; it had to work out in the context of everyday life. The joy and peace and patience has to work at home with the pressures there if it is to work at all. We failed but asked forgiveness and went on. It meant being as honest as possible, seeing where we went wrong but not concentrating on failures. We had to accept ourselves as we were but also have a desire to be more Christlike.

The most basic thing is to remember God sees exactly what we are like and still loves us! It meant respecting myself in spite of all my faults. God wasn't finished with me yet. *"...forgetting what is behind me, and reaching for that which lies ahead..."*

Philippians 3:13 NEB This truth was especially pertinent for me because I wanted to enjoy our two children and forget the hurt from the past. My faith was no escape from life's difficulties but a means of working through them with joy and humour.

Within the large city we found lots to interest us as a family; walks on the many trails, bike rides, and then in the winter cross country skiing, skating and tobogganing. We took advantage of a park system that stretched for miles right at our door step. Here in the heart of the city we had raccoons, rabbits, foxes and the occasional coyote or deer.

We especially enjoyed the times we spent camping in the abundance of Ontario parks, especially Algonquin Park about 180 miles north. Here was the typical Shield country of rock, lakes and large pines. One autumn we went with friends to camp there. Gone was the summer warmth but so too the mosquitoes! The air was clear and crisp and the scent of wood smoke from our campfire mixed with the clean scent of the pines.

That evening, as we sat around the campfire, we heard, faintly at first a distant howling unlike anything we had heard before.

"What's that?" Ernest asked, sitting up excitedly; his beloved fire-tending momentarily forgotten.

"It's the wolf pack", our friends informed us, "they are calling to each other. Let's try and imitate them and see if they will respond to us."

We tried to howl and were soon rewarded with mournful howls in return. We really felt then we were in the true North. Later in the evening, when I was putting away the things from supper, a young wolf paid us a visit. He came up and grabbed a bag of garbage and ran off. For a moment I thought it was a dog. It was exciting too be so close to such beautiful, wild creatures.

Those times we spent out of doors were times of healing for me. I was not consciously aware that this was happening but over the years knew how much I needed just to be out in the beauty of nature. It was health for my soul and the Father used it to touch me and also heal the emotional scars.

Often in the city when I saw problem teenagers I thought of my own, now almost out of his teens. "Lord spare him from the difficulties these young people have." I prayed for him to have the home life necessary to cause him to grow into a strong, productive man, and that he might come to know Jesus personally. Some days I was more acutely aware of my hurt and would beg Him to take away the pain at the depths of my being. And it would soon lessen. Life would go on, no one knowing the agony I went through at times.

I read articles from time to time about reunions between children and their birth parents and felt afraid that my son might turn up on my doorstep some day. I was fearful of the distress this might produce as neither William nor my family knew of his existence.

“Lord, protect me from that. Somehow and someday, when I’m face to face with you in heaven, I know you will work out everything.” I felt William would know and understand and I would see my son. How wonderful that would be! It gave me a great sense of peace to know it was in God’s hands. Being with other believers was also healing for me.

One such group was a monthly ladies meeting in Betty M’s home. This group supported me to believe the Lord for healing when the doctor said I should have major surgery. I asked to wait a while, as it wasn’t life threatening, and was convinced this would be a spiritual healing. God heals through medicine and I had been a part of that side of things for a long time. After several months the healing was complete and the doctor said the surgery was no longer needed. I was very grateful.

Slowly over these years the Lord taught me to be alert, to listen. This was hard and I am often unwilling to listen to others. It is so often in the “still small voice” that we hear. His directives for us. It often happened as people were just talking when something that was said was highlighted for me. “Jesus, is that for me? Did I need that word of rebuke?”

Gently, He placed a finger on the area. He wanted changed and made it clear I needed to deal with it. Slowly, I noticed my critical biting comments came less frequently and there was change in other areas also. He didn’t point an accusing finger at me, but brought me an awareness of what grieved Him. But His deep love was always there.

In Toronto, as in England, our lives were enriched by the fellowship we had with a wide variety of believers. We have learned so much from others. We took some Bible studies from the Catholic Charismatics and found them to have a powerful love for Jesus. One time the speaker shared that he recognized at a point in his life all he had to offer God was his anger!

We knew that we needed to come to the Lord with our real feelings and not put on a ‘mask’ and pretend to feel fine. Do we pray what we think He wants to hear or how we really feel?. There is such a security in being accepted by God, as I was, without pretence. He certainly knew all that was wrong with me but loved me into change.

During one of our usual Sunday afternoon walks William and I were strolling hand in hand, the dry autumn leaves scrunched underfoot. It was my favorite season, one that touches all the senses. Red, gold, and brown leaves released their familiar woodsy scent and I reflected on the peace I enjoyed.

William’s words interrupted my thoughts. “It’s a good weekend for the retreat.”

Ernest and Elizabeth were at an Inter Schools Christian Fellowship (the high school section of IVCF) meeting all day. They would gather with hundreds of other high school students. .

“They’ll have a great time catching up on all the news from their friends from camp. There will be lots of food and lots of laughter. Isn’t it good they get to know so many others from all over Ontario”, I replied.

He squeezed my hand and said, "It's interesting both our children are involved like we were in the group. That is where I met you, the girl who announced she was looking for a man!" What memories we had to look back on and laugh over together.

"Did I tell you we had a new fellow at our meetings on Thursday?"

"No you didn't. Who was it?" William was the staff sponsor of the Christian group at his school, one of the leading private schools in the city.

We had become involved with Ontario Pioneer Camp north of Toronto. Hundreds of children and teens came to it during the year and once again I helped as camp nurse. Our own children were there as campers and then as counsellors. They went on several of the canoe trips which were a part of the camp challenges. Ernest, age fifteen, went on a 400 mile trip into northern Ontario. What a challenge and learning experience. Both of them seemed to enjoy white water canoeing but I liked my water flat and still.

At the beginning of our time in Canada the Lord allowed me to go through an extended 'wilderness' experience. This lasted a few years and was a very hard time with no sense of His Presence. I knew the Lord was with me even though He seemed so distant and I hung on to His promise "*I will never leave you or desert you*". Hebrews 13:5 NEB

This required frequent dealing with wrong attitudes in my life as they cropped up. The lack of any feeling forced me to live "knowing" He was there. It forced me to trust Him not my feelings. He taught me the difficult lesson of walking the path of praise and choosing to do so when I felt least like it. Filling the house with praise music helped keep me protected from discouragement; that and meditation on His Word allowed me to go through those years in victory. God gave it. I didn't earn it.

We enjoyed many things about Toronto but I still didn't like being there. It was so huge, so much traffic and so many people. I longed to live elsewhere and tantalizing offers of jobs for William, outside the city, came and went. Friends also moved away and I felt so alone at times but didn't want William to know the full extent of this. I didn't want to influence his decision about jobs. The Lord had me in a corner.

Finally I was able to relinquish my will and was willing to stay if this was where He wanted us to be. Surprisingly it wasn't long before I was no longer resentful of the huge city. William found a much better teaching job here and friends moved back. I'm so glad my foundations were laid carefully over the years, I was solid on Jesus, the Rock, even when the big waves poured over us.

About this time I came across an article in Renewal Magazine. It said we often resist the touch of God in our lives and try to escape from difficult or uncomfortable circumstances which are meant to make us turn to God. Instead we become busy, put on the radio or TV, run to friends to talk, overwork or resort to alcohol or drugs. We try anything to stop the hard and uncomfortable feelings. We need to acknowledge, especially to ourselves, that we are angry or hurting. He especially wants to use those difficult things to make Himself more real to us. That's what He did for me.

Externally, life went on as normal, even though there were internal struggles. In some ways the hurt was more intense but I had no depression. It was usually brief and I knew Jesus kept His loving arms around me. I learned so much during these hard years that I might not have been able to learn in any other way.

There were times over a period of several years when, with great clarity, a sense of desolation would sweep over me and for a few moments it would be almost overwhelming. It was like being on the edge of an abyss of grief.

It seemed in the very hard times that some of these feelings of desolation were probably related to my childhood, or to the grief of relinquishing my child. Whatever the source I knew that these inner hurts could be healed just as physical ones had been. [NOTE see Reunion and Beyond for details on this.]

Since Jesus is Lord of all time He can touch and heal the events of our past. This may not happen quickly as the roots are often deep. William did pray with me but I was never able to share with him about my lost son. This grief was locked away. Telling him would cause him pain so I said nothing.

In spite of all this Jesus enabled me to have joy, to be a happy person; the grief only ran through like a minor chord. William was a wonderful husband (although not perfect!). I could relax as I knew I didn't have to earn his love. Our family had a great sense of humour and our life in almost all its respects was one of joy. Laughter truly is like good medicine.

I enjoyed my family, the rewarding work at Huntley Street and my interesting part time job as an occupational health nurse. My work places varied from heavy industrial plants to the offices of the large banks. This job gave me time to talk with those who came in and help them with immediate needs or to evaluate their lifestyles. Nursing in an occupational setting was different every day. It was not uncommon to see heart attacks, unexpected labour pains, or an emotional breakdown.

In our marriage the mutual commitment to love each other smoothed the meshing of two strong willed individuals. We knew that one personality in a marriage should not be squashed. We must remain true to who we were, each of us developing to our fullest but within guidelines set up by a loving Father. We had to treasure each other and be faithful and loving. We didn't ever want to play a role, that of "wife" or "husband" who could only do certain tasks etc. A fulfilling, happy marriage couldn't happen by following a formula such as; 'Five Steps to a Better Marriage'. It only happened by each of us drawing closer to Christ.

I was not one who could play a role as a subservient, "yes dear, anything you say" kind of wife. Only the Lord could ask for submission. I chose to freely give it. But in my heart, long ago, realized I must submit to William's final decisions. We would fully air our views, fears and objections. We would thoroughly discuss it and my opinions mattered. We had open intense discussions at times but came to a clear decision.

William had tried to be the husband the Lord wanted, not focusing on being the ruler in the home. He too failed, but I found him to be a reliable shelter for me. He was the strength, stability and protection for the whole family. His vocal, visible love made me deeply grateful.

In spite of all this we had times of hurt and insensitivity on the part of both of us. It was easy to drift into taking each other for granted and this was painful when it happened. We needed constantly to re-establish our closeness and one of the means we used was Marriage Encounter. That weekend away helped us focus on effective communication and new style of dialogue with each other. It takes a lot of time and effort to keep love alive.

During the weekend one question on the paper leaped out at me and released a flood of emotions. "What is your most painful memory that you are unable to share? How does that make you feel?" This gave me the intense desire to tell William. Here was a safe opportunity to let my husband know about my lost child. I hesitated but could not go through with it and risk hurting him. So I missed the chance to get rid of this secret in the safe atmosphere of this weekend.

I have often looked back and realized that God knew what sort of husband I needed; one to love me unreservedly and who would take pains to express that love. There was peace in our home and our teenagers were a source of real pleasure and delight, we loved them deeply. My wants were not all satisfied but my needs certainly were and I treasured my spiritual riches.

What more could I want? After almost nine years in Canada, life was full of the ordinary, the mundane but necessary tasks of daily living. I loved to create and make new things and learn new skills. Life was good but at times my heart ached for the son I didn't have.

The spring of 1983 was exceptionally late and the cool weather had lingered but now it was beginning to be more like summer. We had planted the garden and soon the flowers would be blooming and our own fresh vegetables would be available. Early in May I sat there in my soft comfortable chair, the sun streaming through the living room window; the warmth of it enveloping me, our cat curled up next to me. My eyes were drawn to our big ash tree starting to acquire its new coat of green. A few late tulips gave the scene a dash of red. The magnolia's pale pink cups were nodding in the breeze.

"Lord you have given me so much. You have taught me so many things. Let me share more of it with others."

10: The Phone Call

"...always in life there is a place to leave and a new place to find and in between a zone of hesitation and uncertainty tinged with more or less intense anxiety. It shows itself at critical turning points in our life. We need support to live but need also at some point to let go and grasp a new support. The middle is a zone of anxiety...a supportless zone. There is always a letting go of what we have acquired and acquiring what we did not possess. We leave one place to find another; we turn back on the past to go forward toward the future."

Paul Tournier, *A Place for You*

The familiar ringing of the phone interrupted my work in the kitchen. I set the tray of freshly baked cookies on the counter and went to answer it. "Who can it be this time?" I thought.

The voice was pleasant but unfamiliar. "Am I speaking to Nancy Moore?"

"Yes, can I help you?"

After my affirmative response came another surprise, a request for my maiden name. Then the caller introduced herself.

"I'm Meg Bale, a social worker in Minneapolis," and more staggering questions followed.

"Did you have a son, born in Minneapolis in 1956?"

My mind, and seemingly my whole body, had gone numb but I was able to respond hesitatingly. "Yes...I did. Why do you ask?"

"He would like to get in touch with you. Are you willing?"

My comfortable, ordered life was in the space of a few seconds, threatened with collapse. All that was precious to me, my family, my friends, my way of life was now at risk. My mind raced through the possibilities at a speed I could not have imagined. Feelings of fear, of shock and also of tremendous relief clamoured for attention.

Was I dreaming? I couldn't have heard her correctly. How could this be happening after all this time? Now I knew that my son was alive. There had been no news of him for twenty seven years. Now at last there was word after so long!

He was alive but what was he like? Where was he now? Why did he want to get in touch with me after so long? What would happen next? Neither my husband nor my children were aware of this boy's, no, this man's, existence. No one knew. What was I to do? I didn't want to hurt them. They must not know or they might be deeply offended that they hadn't known before. Above all, how would William feel because I had not told him years ago?

The friendly voice interrupted these conflicting thoughts racing through my mind. "Your son, Tom, doesn't want to disrupt or interfere in your life in any way. He just wants to make contact with you. Do you want that? Would this be possible?"

"Yes." I realized immediately that I could not appear to reject him a second time. I had been forced, through much agony, to give him up those many years ago and now I must not stop this gesture on his part.

"Tom wants to reassure you he is alright. He is happily married and has two young sons. He enjoys his job as a supervisor working with heavy equipment. But he would especially like some information from you about his background.

He looks like a nice, and I might add, a very handsome man from the picture I have of him. I'll send you the letter and the photograph right away."

We spoke for a long time as I tried to let her know why I had to release him for adoption and then what had happened in my life since his birth. I knew she would relay this information to him.

"I will certainly respond to him but can't keep up a correspondence as my husband is unaware of Tom's existence. Our relationship is very close and special to me and I don't want to damage it and go behind his back."

"I understand, it must be difficult for you," she said.

"If I suddenly say something now after all these years it might be extremely painful for him. I know my husband's love won't change but he might be hurt and I don't want that to happen. I certainly will write to Tom even though there can't be a relationship which can continue."

"I will send his letter right away and you can be assured your privacy will be protected. You can correspond through me at the agency."

The phone call was over. It lasted almost half an hour but time had stood still. I rushed upstairs and knelt by our bed. I was in tears and turmoil and cried out to the Lord to keep control of all this. I stayed there for some minutes but realized the family was due home anytime. No one must see me crying or upset.

I got up and tried to compose myself, to control the intense emotions racing through me. Relief and fear vied for attention. I went back downstairs and began to make supper as though nothing had happened but my mind was in a state of shock. In a matter of a few moments the whole course of my life had changed forever.

I heard the car pull up outside and the family came in. "Have a good day?" William asked as he gave me a kiss. I replied affirmatively but in a non-committal way. I dared not express my distress, so I involved myself with the rest of the supper preparations.

We sat down around the table; Elizabeth and Ernest and William chatting about their days at school. Everything was the same and yet everything was absolutely changed. I finally had to face the past afresh and respond to my lost son. But the present life was so precious to me. Could I sacrifice it all?

To all outward appearances everything was normal about the house that evening. No one was aware that anything unusual had happened to me; neither then nor in the next few days. Life went on normally but inside I was distraught and in constant silent prayer. Lord give me Your wisdom and guidance. What was I to do? But I knew Who to turn to for help this time.

Those days following the fateful phone call were difficult ones. I was in unprecedented inner agony. It was like being on a runaway horse with no means of controlling it.

“Keep hold of everything Jesus. I praise You and give the whole situation to you. Just hang on to me through all of this.” I was upheld in those days by praise. Traveling back and forth to work I played tapes of praise music and made them my prayer and plea. There was no one to give me advice and nowhere to turn except to Jesus.

I had to keep my concentration on Him or the dread of what would happen came rushing in like a river in flood. The Lord was the only one who could keep my life from coming apart. It was so easy to get tangled in the events and emotions surging around and within me. It was necessary to force myself to focus attention on Him by my worship. At times when words and tears were not enough, I prayed in the Spirit. It was the only way to get beyond the limits of my own thoughts and words and allow the Holy Spirit to pray through me. He had the wisdom that I needed.

There was an intense longing to share all of this with William but I was fearful of the trouble it might cause. I did not want to inflict this on him as I loved him deeply. And yet I wanted him to know.

After what seemed like an eternity, in reality it was only a week, the letter and picture from Tom arrived. I ripped open the envelope with trembling hands and then my heart stood still as I saw, not a child now, but a grown man. My son.

What a relief to have this word from him after those long twenty seven years! I stared for ages at that picture. I felt a tremendous sense of joy to see him after so many grieving years when I had no word about him. I never knew if he was even alive. He was such a good looking man and with a lovely wife. My son alive and I saw him at last!

Tom described, very briefly, some of the events of his life and what he was now doing. I only found out later that this first letter could contain no identifying information and was therefore slightly stiff and formal.

The past became reality. So often I had wondered what had become of him. Had he become one of the hurting drop outs who could find no happy, worthwhile place in society? Was he even alive or had he gone to Vietnam like so many young men of his age and never returned? From his letter he sounded like a normal, happy man. Somehow he seemed kind and gentle just from his picture.

It was difficult to compose that first letter to Tom. I wanted to be sure what was written would be just right, for I knew how important it would be to him. I wanted him to know how difficult and painful it had been to relinquish him for adoption and that I had never completely recovered from the grief of that separation. He had never been forgotten.

After a lot of thought and prayer I began that important letter...“Dear Tom, It is so wonderful to know you are alright. I feel so grateful for your adoptive parents, they have obviously done a very good job in raising you.

I want you to know you were never a mistake in the Lord’s eyes; He lovingly formed you and has cared for you all these years.

Some verses from the Bible that have meant a lot to me might be a help to you too and are found in Psalm 139. It speaks of how God forms us in our mother’s womb, He knows us and watches over us our whole life through. God knew you before I did and wants your love and has a plan for your life.

Over the years I have prayed for you to find the real reason for living. I, myself, have found such joy and peace in knowing Jesus and long for you to know this too.

Since you are a grown man Tom, you already have loving parents so we cannot have a mother-son, parent-child relationship. But we can have a special friendship, a relationship based on the deep tie of our kinship.

The past is not really important. I hope you will treasure your wife and children and devote time and energy to developing a happy family life. It would be nice to keep writing but we can only exchange a letter or two as I can't risk hurting my husband."

For ten days the battle had raged. Yes I must tell my husband. No I can't. I lay awake for long hours every night beside William as he slept peacefully, unaware of what was happening to me. I knew the Lord was asking me to tell him. The conviction grew steadily stronger, but the fear of the consequences was equally strong. Finally I broke before the Lord, sometime in the small hours of Friday night. God was asking me to take the risk and tell William.

"Just trust Me." He seemed to be saying to my and I knew I had to do it.

I would have to wait to tell him until Sunday; it was the only time we could be sure of being alone after the evening service when our children would be going out with the other young people.

Saturday came and went with the usual activities and so did Sunday. Outwardly everything was normal but I knew that a violent storm was about to break around us. Our whole future depended on William's reaction to the news and I wondered if I should go through with it after all. But there was the distinct feeling the Lord was pushing and prompting me to be vulnerable again. Revealing this secret would make me vulnerable as never before in our marriage. Could I do it?

We went to church that beautiful, early June evening and I was apprehensive lest someone invite us to their home afterwards. No one did. It was obvious that the time had come and there was no escape. As we drove back I was silent, praying for wisdom to tell William in the right way. The lilac bushes were in full bloom and he commented.

"Aren't they beautiful? You always enjoy them don't you?"

"Yes, yes I do."

I said no more and he looked across at me wonderingly but said nothing. A minute or two later we were home and I knew how much the next few moments would affect both our lives. I had never kept secrets from him, except this one and it was a "block-buster".

As I stood in the kitchen, making tea, my unease became apparent. I was obviously very preoccupied and it caused William to ask, "What's the matter dear?"

My composure failed fast but I managed to answer, "I'm afraid you must be hurt in order for me to be healed."

The tears started to flow and he took my hand, "What do you mean? Come and sit down."

So this was the moment I had dreaded and yet longed for during our years together. William sat with his arm around me and I heard myself say, through the tears.

"A son I had, twenty seven years ago, wants to get in touch with me. He was born just before I went into nurses' training and I had to give him up for adoption. Nobody knew about it and I've always wanted to tell you but it just never seemed the right time."

He didn't pull away, but held me even tighter and closer, "Sweetheart, I love you. How have you managed to keep this to yourself all this time? That must have been the source of a lot of the hurt from the past hasn't it?"

I nodded, "Yes it has and I so wanted to tell you."

"What has happened? How did you hear?"

"A social worker called me ten days ago from Minneapolis and told me about him. Then she sent me a letter and photo. He's married and lives in Arizona."

"Oh Nan, I'm glad you've told me. What a load you have carried alone; we should have shared it."

"Remember when you asked me to marry you, I told you I'd been deeply hurt once and was afraid to care again?"

"Yes I do. I didn't pursue it as you know. If there was anything you had wanted to tell me I knew you would. I didn't have to know, it was in the past."

"Those three days were so rushed and I kept looking for a chance to share but there was no right time. So I just felt it was a burden I would have to keep to myself."

"Dearest, I'm so sorry you had to and wish I could have helped you to do it."

"But how would you have reacted if I had told you then; would you have been able to accept it?"

"Well Nan, I don't know. I think I could have, but its hard to know now. I'm a different person now than I was twenty one years ago."

That was past history. Now, what mattered was the present and a loving husband who understood and accepted me.

"Did no one know about this baby?"

"Not really. Even my parents only found out when I was in labour because I was out of town working the last three months. I did ask my pastor before we were married, if I should tell you. He advised me to forget it and not say anything. And of course I had to tell Dr. Mary in Nairobi but otherwise no one knew."

"Well have you replied to his letter?"

"Yes, I said I couldn't keep up any correspondence, because you didn't know."

"Well I do now and you don't have to bear any of this on your own any longer."

William kissed me and held me closer as the tears flowed again. "It's alright, you need to cry."

And I did. The relief surged through me as I shared this for the first time with my loving husband; he was not condemning me. He accepted me as I was and loved me. He wasn't hurt. That which I had always feared would happen, had not. We prayed for Jesus to heal the painful memories from the past and for wisdom in dealing with this new situation.

Then William laughed and I looked up in surprise as I asked, "What are you laughing at?"

He replied, "So what did you expect me to say when you told me, 'go away, I don't want anything more to do with you'?"

"I knew you wouldn't stop loving me, but I was so afraid it might hurt you because I hadn't told you at the start."

"The only pain I feel is that you have had to carry this alone for so long."

"I wasn't alone, the Lord took a lot of it away."

"Yes but you have gone through so much even so."

And I had The tears came again as I was reminded of it all. Of all those long years of carrying this burden. We continued to talk and pray about this in the coming days. We felt at this point not to share it with our children, it was just too much to handle right now. It was such a relief to be able to share with William. What a man! Now I could write to Tom directly and give him my name and address.

“Do you want to see your son?” William asked me.

“I don’t know, I guess someday we could meet but when could that be? He lives so far away.”

My heart, although relieved with this contact, was still quiet numb as far as any feeling towards Tom. It is impossible to immediately turn feelings on after completely suppressing them for twenty seven years. The suppression of sorrow as well as love had been so effective that there had to be a gradual thawing out and opening up of my heart over the next several days.

Now I wrote to Meg Bale and let her know my husband had been told and I was enclosing a letter to Tom which had my name and address in it. She immediately called Tom with the news and he was overjoyed. He had been happy enough with any news at all from me and this was far more than he had hoped for.

A few days later William and I sat in our front yard reading a second letter from Tom. I was deeply moved as I read of his joy at being able to write directly.

“Nancy, I’m so thrilled that we are in touch at last and I can write directly to you. Thank you for the first letter you wrote; it was better than I ever dreamed possible. I’m sorry for the hurt you have had over the years. I want you to know how much I care for you and have always felt you cared for me all these years.”

I read further and could hardly believe my eyes, it was too good to be true.

“Nancy, It’s wonderful to know you are a Christian too.”

Tom also knew Jesus personally! I sat there simply overwhelmed by joy! I was overcome by the love and mercy of God for having kept His hand on Tom. Tears of gratitude flowed as I sensed what a marvelous and unexpected gift God was giving me.

I handed William the letter to read and his eyes shone as he looked over at me and smiled. We rejoiced together and he sensed just how moving this was for me; my son had found new life in Jesus. God delights to give good gifts to us, His beloved children.

Tom went on to say...’it was through my wife Jo, before we were married. She helped me to find a personal relationship with my Lord.”

God in His providence had fitted all the pieces together into such a beautiful whole when I, myself, could do nothing. Here was another bond that we had in common and this made us feel closer immediately.

Tom and I, by letter, and by phone began to put together the pieces of the years apart. I was deeply touched by Tom’s love and concern for me. He didn’t want to cause any hurt or interfere in my life.

In our first phone call he simply said, “I love you. You are very special to me.”

I could hardly talk as I was overcome by the fact he could care for me, even though I had to give him up as a baby. It was an overwhelming feeling, such a kind and caring son the Lord had given me back. I could hardly believe it was happening to me and the happy tears came unprompted, then and often during those weeks.

Tom wrote again and said, "I've always wanted to find you Nancy, ever since I was a teenager. I had a happy childhood with my adoptive parents and three sisters, born after I was adopted. But the desire to search became especially strong when my first son was born. When I took Jim in my arms it was an indescribable feeling, it was a very moving and emotional experience. For the first time I was able to see and hold someone who was related to me. He was someone who was my own flesh and blood, someone like me in a way no one else was and I thanked God for giving him to Jo and me.

But this only increased my determination to search for you. It was three years before the search could begin and two more before it was completed. In the beginning I was a bit afraid; what would I find? As I prayed about it there was the growing feeling I would like whatever I found. And I do, I'm so glad I found you."

We both realised we very much wanted to meet, and soon; the need to see each other grew by the day. It was hard to believe how my heart was awakening to a deep love which before I had never dared allow myself to feel towards this son. I had known that if I had let myself love him fully I could not have coped, so I had pushed down, deep into my subconscious, all the feelings of love for him. At infrequent intervals over the years they had surfaced, as great feelings of grief and desolation that I could hardly bear.

Now this had all changed. My night was turned into day! My son was alive and was such a gentle, sensitive man. The joy of this was unlike anything I had ever experienced. It was a time of great emotional upheaval and I knew the extremes. There were times of joy mixed with periods when the suppressed emotions of the past, the grief and loss, came to the surface needing to be healed. William and I prayed specifically for them and there was healing.

Our desire for a meeting was discussed and various possibilities were examined. William came home one day and found me upset. "What's the matter dear, has something happened?"

"I just feel so discouraged. How can we possibly get to see Tom?"

"Why not?"

"It's so far, over 2500 miles, and that will cost so much. It's too expensive, we simply can't afford it."

"That's not like you to talk that way. You can't stop now so close to meeting Tom at last. We can work something out."

I soon realized I was not acting in faith but just trying to reason things through with my own understanding. And it produced the inevitable consequences, confusion and discouragement. When I stopped trying to figure it out and manage it on my own and gave it to the Lord to arrange, things began to fall into place. We would pool our resources and Tom and the family would fly to Toronto. Plans went smoothly from that point and there was no more discouragement. I learned an invaluable lesson on the necessity of letting go.

Days seemed to drag, as they do when a keenly anticipated event is approaching. I was working full time and this kept me occupied. And then I was camp nurse and that kept me very busy. But if only the days would hurry by.

"Nan are you anxious at all about meeting Tom?"

"Oh no, not in the least. I just feel overwhelming joy and as if I might burst!"

There certainly was no room for doubt or worry. Tom wrote and said he too was feeling exactly the same.

It seemed right, at the time, that this first meeting should involve only Tom and his wife and two young children and William and myself. Our two teenagers were away for most of the summer, Ernest on a mission team in Alaska and Elizabeth at Pioneer Camp. Their meeting with Tom would come later, for we had come to recognise they could not be excluded from this widening circle of joy. How could I have ever thought differently? But I had and that was only weeks ago.

11: Overwhelmed By Joy

*"....For this son of mine was
dead and has come back to life;
he was lost and is found.
And the festivities began."*
Luke 15:24 NEB

.....a joy too great for words.
1 Peter 1:8 NEB

This was the day! Tom, Jo and their two children were due to arrive on the late evening plane. It hardly seemed possible and yet it was actually happening; I would see my son for the first time in twenty seven years! How I longed to see him in person and give him a long delayed hug.

The day dragged as if on leaden feet and although I can often be oblivious to time, I was aware of every minute. The evening, with the long awaited flight due at 10:30 pm didn't seem to get any closer. The house was ready; neat and tidy. First impressions were important and I wanted our home to be pleasant and inviting.

Surely I would burst with excitement. At last, I would see Tom and talk with him face to face. How good it would be to also meet his wife and children. There was so much catching up to do.

Slowly, slowly evening came and William and I prepared to go to the airport. He called to confirm the arrival time.

"Nan, they said the plane will be an hour late."

My heart sank, it couldn't be, "I'll never be able to wait another hour, after all these years, I can't stand it!"

"You will manage love, I know it's hard." William came over and put his arms around me and hugged me. "I know the last few hours are the hardest. Let's just go to the airport as we planned and we can wait there."

As we drove to the airport I didn't say much. William knew my emotions were impossible to put into words. I tried to contain the joy, keep it under control, but it was an impossible task. I felt as though I would explode with joy, indescribable joy!

Once again I was overcome as I thought how good God is to be working this out in such a beautiful way. It was more than I could comprehend. Tears came as they had done frequently over the past few weeks. They were tears of happiness at the completely unexpected gift God was giving me. That which had been severed was being restored in the form of a new relationship with my son. The wonder of it was beyond believing.

We arrived at the airport and went to have a cold drink. I could scarcely swallow it, impatience and anticipation had tightened my throat. William knew the agony of waiting this last long hour and he held my hand tightly.

"It hardly seems possible how much our life has been changed in just two short months," he said.

"I know and somehow I still feel like I should pinch myself; that it is all just a dream and they aren't really coming tonight."

As we sat reviewing the amazing events of the past weeks, I looked up "Flight 595 has landed. They're here!"

I had seen the plane's number flash on the arrivals board.

"We can't go down yet; they still have to come through customs and immigration. For your sake Nan I hope it doesn't take them too long."

"Do you think we'll recognize them right away? They must look like their photograph."

"Oh, I'll recognize Tom!" I didn't doubt that for a moment.

We went down to the arrivals gate and stood up close to the barrier. I was oblivious to the crowds of people milling around us. They were equally unaware of the tumult of emotions churning around inside of me.

There he was! At long last, just like his picture and yet so much better.

We reached across the barrier; and across the years and I was engulfed in big loving arms. Tom was giving me that hug. What a feeling. Better than the best dream come true! Never had I ever dared to hope for a reunion and yet here was my son. I wasn't dreaming.

The Lord not only gave me back my son, but my daughter-in-law and my two grandchildren. Instant 'grandmotherhood'. There were more hugs all around for Jo, Jim and Tony.

"Jo, they look just like their picture. Nancy its so good to see you. I can't believe it's happening. I knew it was you right away because of the big smile on your face!"

"Tom had a similar grin the whole way here," Jo confided.

What joy!

We got the luggage and everyone out to the car and then I stepped back and had another good look at Tom. "It is so wonderful to see you, I can't comprehend it even now."

I looked up at him, trying to take in the fact-- here was my long lost son. I saw him standing there. He was tall and smiling down at me; dark wavy hair, a mustache and gentle brown eyes. Tom gave me another hug and then we saw in each other's eyes the love that had been locked inside us for many long years.

"I can not believe it, he is real. We are reunited at last. I have wanted this for so long. But it was always a seemingly false hope."

Finally we headed for home and all tried to talk at once, there was so much to be said.

We arrived at the house and came inside, "Welcome home Tom."

"It's so good to be here but it doesn't seem real."

We got the children tucked into bed and they were soon fast asleep after their long trip.

"Tell me about yourself Tom."

The four of us sat down in the living room and began to talk. And talk! And talk! The blank years began to take on flesh. We were completely at ease with one another. It was almost like picking up a conversation after a short break. We felt as though we had known each other all our lives, but of course there was also a need to learn about each other.

It was wonderful just to sit and look at my son, lost to me for so many years, and see the man he had become. Tom also had the same need to stare. We needed to absorb what the other looked like. It was a delayed bonding that was being accomplished.

"You have obviously had a good home all these years," I said looking at Tom sitting across from me. "Your parents have loved and cared for you well."

"Oh yes, I have always felt loved and known I was adopted from an early age. I guess it made me feel special, but I have also wanted to be my own person and set my own path in life."

I saw Tom liked to dress casually like myself. He had not come dressed in a suit, the weather was too hot for that. I was in my my favorite red blouse and navy skirt. Somehow I didn't feel it right to dress up fancy for this initial meeting. There was no need to overwhelm or impress Tom, I just wanted to be myself but also to look my best. The joy of the occasion gave me a glow which helped.

Our home wasn't elaborate either, we enjoyed its modest surroundings and so I was gratified to hear Tom say, "I feel right at home Nancy, your house is so comfortable and it even smells good."

"Oh, that is the muffins and cookies I baked; I thought we would need something when we got here. I am always hungry."

"Me too!" He grinned, how alike we were.

We all experienced an instant oneness; there was no effort to it. It was just there. There was a deep bond between us which we could not have produced ourselves. It was a conversation which didn't need many words; it was a language of the heart, a sharing of all the love and joy we felt at being together after so many years.

As we sat down to eat, the words from Luke which had been in my mind for the past few weeks came to me. "*For this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found. And the festivities began*" Luke 15:24 NEB

My son was alive! He whom I had grieved over all these years was with us. My son was no longer dead; he was very much alive and actually here with us.

Joy unspeakable! I was truly overwhelmed by joy.

This was the biggest and the best celebration I'd ever known; there was so much to be grateful for. We were celebrating a restoration of a relationship. Like the father in the story of the prodigal son, I over the years was unable to completely enjoy my riches while my heart was grieved over the loss of my son. I had longed to know where he was and part of me was not content until I could see him again.

Now I was full of joy which healed the years of hurt. We joined hands around the table and William gave thanks, for the food and for our reunion.

"If only Ernest and Elizabeth could be here, that would be even more wonderful."

Yet we knew it was better for us to meet first and then have everyone get together later. I'm not sure we could have handled all the emotions with all the people, at this first meeting if everyone had been there.

We sat around the table basking in the joy of a dream come true. Tom had found me; what I never dared to hope for had happened.

God has done this thing and it is wonderful in our eyes. He brought the broken pieces together. Tom and I were reunited. Those areas of brokenness in both our lives were being restored. We were beginning the healing and rebuilding of wonderful relationships.

Even with the restoring of this relationship between Tom and myself there was still the deep, continuing and very close one between Tom and his adoptive parents. I knew there was a love and bond in the Rye family that nothing would change; he was a part of them and they of him. *"God places the solitary in families."* Psalm 68:6 He did this for Tom, he had been given a family; given that which he needed to grow into the kind and loving man I now saw. I felt deeply grateful for them.

As soon as we finished eating Tom phoned his parents to say they had arrived safely and everything was going well. He wanted to put their minds at rest. They might wonder if we would get along. Would Tom feel at ease in our home and would William accept him?. He was able to reassure them that he felt very welcome by both of us and we were thoroughly enjoying each others' company!

It was a privilege for me to talk with his mom and dad myself, "Thank you for helping Tom to find me. He is a wonderful man and I just want you to know how grateful I feel that you were the answer to my prayers all those years ago. Thank you for giving him such a loving home."

It came to me once again how amazing it was that I didn't feel jealous of them. I did not look back for "what might have been". God allowed me to feel peace and not have regrets about the lost years which I had been unable to have with Tom. To release him for adoption was the only decision I could make at the time, and I had had to live with that. It had not been easy but I was thankful for the family Tom had been given.

I was also seeing at first hand, even in those few hours, what a wonderful son we had; he had the same characteristics I valued in my other children. His adoptive parents had been instruments in the Father's hands to help make him a kind man.

I felt washed in a river of joy. My son was restored to me; the beginning of a brand new friendship. I could not have, and did not want, a mother's role with Tom. He was a grown man married to a lovely wife who loved him and who cared for him. Nevertheless we had a unique relationship, a bond we both felt deeply. A tremendous feeling of connectedness, of kinship, was there.

"You know Tom, It's important that we have met because now you can break any myths you might have carried about me; sometimes we can idolize the one we have never seen. I have lot of faults. Just ask William. I am often bossy and can nag."

William ignored that statement and asked, "Tom, how long did you live in Minnesota before you moved to Arizona?"

"We moved when I was seven. I love the country down in the southwest and that is where I met Jo."

I looked at the two of them, what a handsome couple. "You said in your letter it was through her you became a Christian. When was that?"

"Well, I saw Tom in our high school and he was so nice and different from the other fellows that I was determined to get to know him and I finally got him to ask me out."

“Jo took me to her church and it was there I realized I needed to know Jesus. Even though I was raised in the church I had never responded personally.”

“Thank you Jo for being the means the Lord used in Tom’s life.” I realised again how purposefully He had watched over my son.

Even though William and Jo did not feel all the emotions with the same intensity Tom and I did, they fully entered into the celebrations. They could not help but be caught up in the joy we felt.

“William, I appreciate how you have been so helpful to Nancy and myself through all of this. I certainly don’t want to disturb your life.”

“Well Tom, your contact with Nancy has certainly disrupted our lives but it is a wonderful thing to have happened. I can see how good it has been for her and I’m more than happy to have you all here with us.”

“Thanks, that means a lot to me to know we are welcomed by you too,” Tom replied.

“I hope the kids won’t be any trouble,” Jo remarked.

I could sense she felt a bit worried that their arrival with two children, Jim five, and Tony, six months might be a bother. I reached out to pat her hand. I tried to reassure her.

“I am sure it will be an upheaval but I’m so glad you all came; and we are used to having friend’s babies around. I know what it is like to travel with kids because we spent time with William’s mother or my parents with our two when they were small.”

The four of us could not stop talking. What a reunion. It was better than I thought it would be. It was so delightful to begin enjoying each others company. We had always appreciated Ernest and Elizabeth’s companionship and now to be given another son and daughter-in-law to enjoy was almost more than I could absorb.

We experienced real fellowship in the fullest sense of the word. Christ was at the centre of all this and we could sense the unity we had in Him. We have known this with other Christians all over the world but to have our tie of kinship as well made the oneness deeper.

“Nan, do you realize its 3 a.m.? You have to get some sleep before you get up for work tomorrow morning.” My husband was concerned for me, recognizing our need to talk and yet to get some needed rest. With reluctance I agreed.

Tomorrow would be my last day of work for a while, so although we didn’t want to stop talking we knew we must for at least a short time. I’m not sure if I got many minutes of sleep as I was too excited to shut my eyes.

It was difficult for me to leave them the next morning and go off to work since Tom had just returned after a lifetime away. Fortunately William was home on holiday. Looking back I see the Lord was getting me out of the way for a few hours so they could all become closer without interference from me. They spent a good day completing the building of our back deck.

That evening after supper we spent time looking at the photos Tom had brought. Now I could see the years recorded from infancy to the present. I found an amazing thing happening; I could look at these baby pictures of Tom without hurt or regret. Even though I missed this part of his life I did not feel anguish because of it. Jesus had worked a miracle and I only felt thankful for what He was giving me now! I had an

immense present joy and nothing could mar it. God was giving me a new day. My son had returned. I was able to enjoy today without regrets for the past.

"These are lovely wedding pictures. How old were you two when you got married?"

"I was twenty and Jo was nineteen. We were young but I wanted to begin a new life on our own. We wanted to build our future together."

"And this is your mom and dad? They look like such kind people."

"They are. I have been thankful for them and love them deeply. They have done so much for me and encouraged me in my search for you."

"Over the years Tom, one of the things that helped me was knowing some couple must be finding real joy in you and providing the care I could not give. Now I know for sure that this was true, what a relief that is for me."

"How long did it take you to find Nancy? William asked.

"It was just over a year from when I began contact with the agency. We went to Minnesota and had a long interview and I got my genetic and medical background information. From the description they gave I knew I must look something like my birthparents. That made me feel good to know I looked like someone! It's even more wonderful to see you and see me in you."

"Yes I know what you mean, it is an indescribable feeling."

"In your first letter Nancy, you said the past isn't important and only my adoptive family was."

"Yes, I remember writing that but I can see I was wrong. I had no idea how important finding me could be for you."

"I wanted to find you," Tom said, "and let you know I was alright and that I love you. Somehow I sensed you must be hurting and I wanted to help you to be free. I also wanted to share the love of Jesus with you."

I really could not reply as once again I was overcome by the care and concern Tom showed towards me. It was amazing too, that we did not feel any awkward moments with each other. We were even relaxed enough to enjoy teasing each other. William and I soon became known as the "little people" because we were shorter than the "giants", Tom and his wife!

Everyone noticed how much Tom and I resembled each other; we even thought and acted alike. I watched Tom sitting there cross-legged on the floor- a position I often adopted. "William, he even sits like I do and like Ernest and Elizabeth."

The others noticed the similarity of our personalities and ways of working. It was just like meeting a long lost twin! We thought and acted so much alike.

Tom was later asked by the men at his workplace when he returned, "Is she like you? Does she do six jobs at the same time like you do?"

Those days we had together sharing, talking and sightseeing were wonderful. It was delightful just to be in each other's company enjoying some of the interesting things in and around Toronto. A five minute ferry ride to Toronto Islands at the foot of the city took us to beaches and walks where we seemed to be miles from the big city.

Because it was so hot it was also pleasant to go for walks or sit by the stream in the shady parks nearby. This silent sharing of simple pleasures was also a means of healing. We took a trip to Niagara Falls and so fulfilled a long standing dream of theirs. They felt the same awe we always did as we stood at the edge of the huge cataract. The

roar of the water as it slipped over the edge reminded us of the Scripture describing the voice of God, “... like the sound of many waters” Rev 1:15

The places we went to see were not the important part of this time. Rather it was just being together enjoying the time we had and through it healing the lost past when we were apart.

Sightseeing with a teething and wakeful baby wasn't always easy but we would not have missed it for the world. Tony's funny ways gave us much to laugh at. Fortunately Jim was old enough to enjoy things and he found our soft green grass quite unlike the dry prickly Arizona grass he was used to.

We noted the love Tom and Jo had for each other and their tender care of the children. “Tom you love your kids but I'm glad to see you also discipline them. Our views on raising children are very similar.”

“Yes, we don't like to see unruly children, they are not very nice to have around.” Jo said.

Not only did Tom value his wife and children but also his adopted family, whose family gatherings were important. Jo also told us how he spent long hours keeping his parents' and sisters' cars running and helping out in so many ways. People and relationships, not possessions were important to them as they were to us. We also shared a mutual love of the outdoors and things of nature. We enjoyed the warm July weather as we sat on the completed back deck and discussed care of the garden and fruit trees. Together we picked the raspberries and beans.

It was a glorious new friendship we were establishing. It is not often we are given such instant loving friends and they were my son and daughter-in-law. Over the years I had longed to pray for Tom in person, to ask the Lord to lift off any effects that came from our separation. That had been a desire ever since we saw Him heal the wounds of our own past. Now together we could ask God to go back over the years and heal. I had long felt an adopted person might have a deep sense of rejection. Tom wasn't aware of this but so often our wounds are hidden, as mine had been. We also prayed again for healing of the heartache at my relinquishment of Tom. It was wonderful to do this together.

I could not help crying again and I told Tom how difficult it had been to allow him to be adopted. Both of us had experienced a severing, almost a death; but not a death which could be mourned properly. Now the severing we had experienced could be healed.

“Tom my grief over leaving you never left but the Heavenly Father enabled me to cope. The hurt didn't go but I was given the ability to deal with it with some measure of victory. Much was healed over the years. Being able to be with you at last is so wonderful; I never expected to see you again. I wish I could have loved you in person.”

“You did.”

“What do you mean?” I asked

“You did, you gave me life. Thank you for that. I love you.” And with these words he hugged me.

The next morning coming out of church, Tom looked down at me gravely. The sermon had been on abortion. “Praise God you didn't have one. Thank you for all the difficult times you went through for me.”

I couldn't reply, my emotions were too much to voice. What joy I might have missed!

The last few days flew by quickly and we realized that our time together was drawing to a close. We were having such a good time and didn't want it to end. But we knew that we were opening up a new chapter in our lives. This was only the beginning of many other good times together.

I could not stop repeating, "If only Elizabeth and Ernest were here to enjoy this with us."

This sentiment was echoed by Tom and Jo. "We can hardly wait to meet them, they sound like a wonderful pair". We longed for our two to share in the tremendous joy we felt. And they would.

How thankful I was of the way William had accepted Tom and Jo, yet I hadn't doubted that he would. I could see he loved them as much as I did. What an amazing man my husband was, how he reflected Jesus. They had grown to love him too and were grateful for his love and acceptance of them.

As the week came to a close we regretfully, but with peace, saw them off on the plane for Phoenix. We watched it roar down the runway then it receded into the clear morning sky until we could see it no more.

As soon as we got back home from the airport I went to look up a couple of verses that had been running through my mind for days. "Joy instead of mourning." That one I knew was in Isaiah 61.3, "to give them garlands (or beauty) instead of ashes, oil of gladness (or joy)." Then verse 4 was so true, "and restore what has long lain desolate." NEB

How true this was. Joy had replaced my desolation; my inner healing was happening. God is so good, He loved me enough to allow this reunion to happen, to bring Tom back into my life. I had known all through the years that God loved me, He said it in His word. I stood on that fact but now it was evident in a new and dramatic way. God loves each of us and longs for us to respond and receive His love into our lives. The Father's love for me was an anchor that I'd held onto in the dark and painful years. I'd clung to it year after year and knew it afresh in the blazing joy of reunion.

The other words that kept running through my mind the past few days were, "enlarge your tent." Where on earth was that to be found? Surprisingly it was also in that prophetic book, Isaiah 54:2-4,6 NEB "Enlarge the limits of your home, spread wide the curtains of your tent; let out its ropes to the full and drive the pegs home; for you shall break out of your confines right and left...Fear not, you shall not be put to shame, you shall suffer no insult, have no cause to blush. It is time to forget the shame of your younger days..Once deserted and heart broken..."

I sat glued to my chair, how specifically God was speaking to me! Words written thousands of years ago now spoke so specifically to my situation. My heart was touched by the accuracy of these words. But as I glanced again at the words I saw a footnote that I had made years ago. There in the margin of my Bible were the words of another translation. "ALL your children will be taught of the Lord and great will be the peace of them."

How precise, how loving were these words. God was giving me some clear words of comfort and guidance and it spoke to me of how He was in control of my life, even when I forgot this truth so often.

I wanted to mark this place so I pulled out one of the bits of paper in my Bible. This happened to be a piece of paper with a verse on it written by one of my fellow counsellors at 100 Huntley Street. She had given it to me in the early spring, long before things began happening. She said then that God gave her that particular verse, for me. It meant nothing to me at the time and I forgot all about it. Now it did mean something!

"The blessing of the Lord-- it makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it." Proverbs 10:22

I was hearing the Father's voice loud and clear. I felt overwhelmed by joy and thankfulness. I immediately also sensed that the blessing of Tom's return would be for more than just our immediate family. This would be a blessing for others also.

It scarcely seemed possible, just over two months ago I hadn't even known my son was alive and now we had met and our friendship begun. What joy! Our family of four had to let go of our ordinary life. "Enlarge your tent"--our horizons were suddenly expanded. Our way of life had to be changed now that we had been given a whole new family to love and enfold into our lives.

I felt emotionally exhausted but blissfully happy. I would never be the same again. The prophet Joel expressed what was happening in my life, "[The Lord] will restore... the years the locust has eaten." Joel 2:25 He would make up the time that had been lost between Tom and myself. The difficult, painful years had done positive things deep in my life. It forced me to draw on God's love and help; I needed to keep close to Him. I had known it was only He who could take away the pain.

I'd remarked to Tom a few weeks previously, "I feel like I'm in a rock tumbler, going through a painful polishing by the events swirling around me."

God wraps each event in our lives with love and forgiveness. He then transforms them into jewels in His hands. I could feel He had been doing that with the grief and pain in my life; it was no longer a heavy ugly rock of sorrow. It was now a jewel of joy!

12: Sharing Our Joy

*"....We do not know what to do,
but our eyes are upon You."*

2 Chronicles 20:12

How we yearned to share the news of Tom with our teenagers but we had to wait. Elizabeth was still working at camp for another couple of weeks and Ernest was still in Alaska with a mission team for another month. We would tell them when we could all be together. But how could we wait that long to share the wondrous news?. I longed for those day to pass quickly. Our children needed to know and enter into new relationships with their unknown brother. We couldn't share it with others before they knew. There had been just five friends the Lord indicated we should tell and we had done so. We needed their support in prayer.

It was the end of August before we were finally all together again. I looked around the supper table at the other three, all in their usual places. William, across from me at the head of the table, looked towards me with a reassuring smile. He knew how difficult this was going to be for me. He was my strength when I needed it. I knew he was praying that we would share this news in a sensitive way. On either side of me were our children, but children no more. Ernest had carried a man's responsibility all summer working on maintenance at a mission in Alaska. His dark curly head was bent as he finished the last of his supper.

"Lord don't let him be hurt," I prayed silently. "if only he can be reassured and know my love for him hasn't changed. He has always been so special to us.. We delighted in him and his quickness from the first. He was quick to laugh and to absorb new things and show concern for others. Help him accept this news."

I looked over to my left, and realized once again how much Elizabeth resembled her brother. Where was my tiny little girl with her long blond hair? She had grown now into a lovely young woman with brown curly locks. She had always been a delight to us and to all who knew her. Both the children were bright and alert with happy gentle spirits.

I loved them but was reminded again that I didn't tell them that often enough. It needed to be expressed in words more often. Thank you Lord for the joy they have given us. I know it's your gift.

"Ernest and Elizabeth we have something important to tell you," William began, "don't worry, it's good news. We want to tell you a story, a true story, that has a lot of sadness in it. But you will see it also has a lot of joy. This is a story of Jesus working in our lives."

"A long time ago, before I met your mother, she had a baby who had to be given up for adoption." There was stunned silence as William continued. "It's impossible to imagine the hurt that this caused her over the years. No one knew about this. Even I knew nothing."

He looked at three serious faces and said to me, "Do you want to continue the story?"

With a trembling voice I began. "I had a phone call one afternoon from a social worker in Minneapolis who asked me some questions about my name and so on and then told me that my son wanted to get in touch with me."

The details were then added, and William came over and put his arms around me. My tears were there at this point but I managed to say, "It's alright, these are happy tears at having Tom brought back to me."

William added. "You see the story is about God's love and forgiveness and restoration. We have prayed that you too will find out for yourselves that this will be a source of happiness when you take it all in. It is a lot for you to deal with all at once. After all it is not something that happens every day."

I could see the looks of disbelief on their faces; they wondered if they were hearing correctly. So I said. "I'm sorry this is such startling news. I know how hard it was for me to take it all in too. It took a long time."

"It is just so hard to believe, it doesn't seem real," Ernest said.

Elizabeth came over and put her arm around me as well and had tears in her eyes. "Dear, I know it is hard for you both to have this come so suddenly."

We hugged and I said again, "Let me know if you have any questions and don't worry if it is hard to believe. I'm still overcome when I think about it. Tom is so eager to meet you, his new brother and sister. Look, here are some pictures we took when they were here."

We looked at the photos that we had taken on the momentous visit in July and filled in more of the details. "One thing I kept saying when they were with us was, "If only Ernest and Elizabeth could be here! You'll enjoy knowing him."

Over the next few days we talked more about the startling new events and they found themselves, like I was, still in a state of shock and disbelief. They said it was almost like it was happening to someone else.

Tom phoned them a couple of days later. "I am so thrilled to know I have another sister and a brother. It would have been great to have met you both in July when we came to Toronto. But I hope it won't be too long until we meet. And I'm sorry this must be such a surprise to you," Tom said.

"It is, but we are glad to hear about you and we have been looking at the pictures. Even so, it is hard to believe."

Tom went on, "I just hope my coming into your lives won't cause you any hurt or disruption. You are very special to me."

The process of becoming acquainted was begun through letters and many more phone calls over the following weeks. There was a dramatic increase in our long distance phone bill, but it was worth every dollar. I found it increasingly difficult to get any time to talk to Tom myself. Each time the others talked I could see the animation in their faces; it told the real story of the beginning this new relationship. We saw our two begin to experience the same joy and delight William and I had in knowing Tom and his family. We knew that Ernest and Tom would enjoy working together on cars. Both of our children also shared the love of the outdoors with him. We were happy to see such common interests.

It was a delight at last to be free to speak of this wonderful news of God's restoration with our friends. We watched with amazement the same reaction in almost everyone as the tears welled up. They too could sense the wonder of this all. They could see the great joy it had brought to us. Indeed just as the verse from Isaiah had said, I felt no shame at the telling of all these events.

From the time of becoming a follower of Jesus, I never carried any burden of guilt as I knew His total forgiveness and had forgiven myself. Years ago I realized that I had no reputation to defend; Christ 'made Himself of no reputation'. I had nothing to hold on to to make me worthwhile, my value was not in myself or my past, good or bad. God loved me and had forgiven me. That alone gave me worth.

As I shared my experiences of our reunion I was brought into touch with others who told me of their own painful experiences of giving a child up for adoption. Many had suffered great condemnation for all of this and found it hard to believe that Jesus' forgiveness is total and complete. It was good to pray with them and see the release they experienced. Some said it was the first time they had met another Christian who understood what they had been through and the burden of the grief they carried.

When Tom was visiting us in the summer we went to 100 Huntley Street and met Don Osborne. He was so thrilled about our reunion and three months later asked if William and I would come on the TV program and share what had happened. He thought others should know the wonder of this restoration. This confirmed a feeling I had in the summer as soon as Tom left; this was to be a blessing for more than just our family. This was opposite to my natural inclination.

These feelings needed to be viewed critically and I didn't respond impulsively to all impressions. I would test them. This should be a blessing for others to hear also. I also wanted Tom to be on the broadcast too and knew if this was from the Lord the way would open up. But it didn't seem possible as the barrier was the cost of the flight from Phoenix. In spite of that, the impression that Tom should come would not leave and I told William but no one else. We prayed that if Tom should come, somehow it would work out.

Just over a week before the broadcast was to happen in November a friend spoke to me. "Is Tom coming up for the program?"

"No, he can't."

"Why not?"

"It is too expensive. Neither of us can afford it right now."

"Well, we feel it would make a real difference if he could tell his side of the story and we want to pay his way to come, that is subject to one condition."

"What is that?"

"That no one knows who has done this."

My response was instant. "Yes. You know I have been praying for this and Tom's desire is to be here also. Thank you for being sensitive to what the Lord wanted you to do."

This was an amazing offer, how marvelous to stand back and watch God at work. We phoned Tom and told him the good news and he was delighted. The arrangements were completed and he arrived late the evening before the scheduled broadcast. Once again he was flying into Toronto to see new relatives, not myself this time, but Ernest and Elizabeth. This would be their first chance to meet him.

There was great excitement again as we drove out to the airport. Elizabeth admitted to being slightly nervous but that was normal in the circumstances. It is not everyday one meets a new brother! Ernest, as usual, took it more in his stride, at least externally.

We had a good laugh as we saw Tom appear, wearing a big cowboy hat. "You know I like to travel comfortably." He smiled and then there were hugs all around.

Elizabeth whispered to me, "He doesn't look like his pictures, but much nicer."

Once again we experienced the oneness the Lord gives. We were all at ease in each others company from the start and chatted away like old friends late into the night.

"I know its not polite to stare," Tom said, "but I don't want to stop looking at you two. It's so good to see you and be with you."

William turned to me and a smile covered his face. "What are you smiling at?"

"You!"

"Why?" I asked.

"I'm just remembering all that has happened in the last few months and knowing how you are feeling right now with all your children together."

"Sweetheart, you have been through so much with me."

My mind went back to the many ordinary tiring days, ones of heartache when the children were ill, and the many quiet evenings we had spent together. Love is woven from many different threads into the fabric of a rich and enduring marriage.

"William, I was thinking about the verse I got before we came to Canada."

"Yes, you mean *"...He will give you the desires... of your heart?"* Psalm 37:4

"That's the one, but it reminded me of what you have often said. The desire of your heart was to be the best husband you could be. He has answered that, in the way you accepted me and Tom and the unusual news! I could not have asked for anyone better."

Next morning we went to the studio early to get ready. For days I had sought to know what the Lord wanted said. There would be a lot of people watching who needed encouragement; they needed to know God was also capable of doing the impossible in their own situations.

As the programme progressed we felt relaxed and at ease, as if we were sitting around chatting with friends. It was a privilege to let others know they could trust God to do "abundantly more than they could ask or think" when they trusted their lives to Him.

In the days that followed we heard of many that this had touched. Even in the studio audience there was a lady who had also released a child for adoption and found healing as she listened. I also received some very poignant letters from other birthmothers, telling of years of grief at the giving up of a child. They had never known anyone else in their situation. It was a very lonely thing. They were all impressed by William's loving support of me through it all; that he totally accepted all that had happened and still loved me.

The few hours we had with Tom came to an end all too soon. He and Ernest had worked on the car. Tom had been kind enough to bring a part that was needed and helped install it. They enjoyed doing the same things.

When we took him to the airport our goodbyes were softened because in just three weeks we would be flying to Arizona for Christmas. We were looking forward to

meeting Tom's parents and his three sisters. This would be moving into new territory for there are no guidelines for such meetings but we were all anticipating it with pleasure. I wasn't concerned because his mom and dad had supported Tom in his search for me.

The 18th of December rolled around quickly, school exams had come and gone. Christmas preparations were completed and we were off on our trip south. Tom and Jo stood waiting for us and gave us more hugs. Elizabeth soon saw she was the smallest of the 'little' people.

"Where are Jim and Tony?" we asked, looking around.

"We left them at home, Tony needs his nap and it's easier to visit at the beginning without them. We're taking you out for lunch to one of our favorite spots." Jo said.

We walked along, arm in arm, Jo was walking with William and teasing him again.

"I think you love him as much as I do Jo," I said.

"Maybe. He is a great fellow, even if he is short."

"Remember," William laughed, "good things come in small packages."

We went for a leisurely lunch, at ease and enjoying the special company we were with. How good it was to be together. Then we had a guided tour on the way back to Tom's house.

"Aren't those lovely oranges?" I said seeing the street lined with orange trees heavy with fruit.

"I'm afraid those are inedible, they are purely ornamental and too sour to eat. We have some back in our garden as well as peach and grapefruit trees. You can have a taste of the grapefruit, they are almost ready."

"It seems funny to see people in winter jackets with it a warm 60 degrees." Ernest commented.

"Guess they would freeze to death in Toronto if they have to bundle up so much here," Elizabeth remarked.

"Look! Palm trees like there were in Kenya at the coast."

"Those are date palms and over there are royal palms, we have five types down here. Tomorrow when Jo has to work, I'll take you to the Desert Museum. They have 1500 varieties of cactus and desert plants there."

"I remember that place. It's great. I saw it when I was here two years ago with a friend." Ernest said.

"We didn't know who lived here then!"

We all laughed knowing the special tie we had. We spent most of the next ten days together in a relaxed enjoyment of just being together. The first evening we went over to Tom's parents' house to meet them and his sisters. I was able now, in person, give them a hug and my thanks for being there for Tom.

"It is special to meet you and to see the family Tom has belonged to all these years. I feel so grateful for your care of him. It means a lot to have this chance to get to know you. I must say, I think you have done a wonderful job in raising him."

"Yes, he is a great fellow. We are pleased with him but then we had good material to work with!", they exclaimed. Tom seemed a bit overcome by all the attention.

"Thank you for helping and encouraging Tom in his search for me."

"We knew it meant a lot to him and we just felt it would be good whatever he found and that he would be happy finding you."

We all knew how true it was and how it had enhanced the relationship Tom had with his adopted family. Those ties had been forged over many years and were good and strong. He enjoyed them and the easy friendship with his sisters.

It was interesting to know Mrs. (Nita) Rye was also a nurse and we had some 'shop talk'. While we were there we also attended the graduation of his eldest sister who had just qualified as a registered nurse. Tom's younger sisters were also working in hospitals.

The few days were busy with sightseeing and talking before Christmas. There were many new things to see and places to go. We even went down into Mexico for the day. Later we were shown Tom's two huge desert tortoises who mowed his grass!

Christmas morning at Tom and Jo's we exchanged gifts since this was the first Christmas we could give a tangible expression of the love we felt. We all had taken special thought and care in choosing or making these gifts.

"Tom, here is a reminder of me and of Canada. It is a sweater for you made from wool which I dyed and spun. These deep purple colours are from lichen dyes and the dark brown and other shades are just the natural colour of the wool. Hope you like it."

"Thank you Nancy, that is special," Tom said as he gave me a hug. "I'll always remember this first Christmas we had together."

"It's nice to be able to make you something because I have made many things for Elizabeth and Ernest over the years. This is my most memorable Christmas ever. I have been given the best gift of all this year, YOU!"

It was fun at the Rye's for the big Christmas dinner with over thirty of the family gathered around. They were a bit concerned for us, and his dad Glen, asked us "Hope this is not too overwhelming having this many people around?"

"Oh no, we're enjoying it; it is good to meet more of your family and see how Tom fits into it all. How grand to acquire all these new friends and relations. We have never had a lot of family close by, so it's delightful."

As we were talking later Tom's mother Nita, commented to me, "You know I keep feeling I've seen you somewhere before, Nancy."

I laughed, "You have. You have been looking at me for 27 years!" Everyone had been commenting how alike Tom and I looked.

After the holidays we did more traveling into northern Arizona in the mountains with snow. Most of the rest of the time had been cool and rainy. We were a bit crazy being out in the cold looking for petrified wood and different rocks. We enjoyed each others company in spite of the differences in ages. I was intrigued by the similarities; the same laughing eyes, the tender hearts and gentleness.

The two younger members of the family, Jim and Tony gave a great deal of pleasure and it was a new experience for our two as they didn't have relatives that young.

Later Tom and I were talking. "Tom, you are so like my other two in many ways and like myself but I can see danger areas where you also are like me...and shouldn't be. You can get so busy and don't spend enough time with your family, you, like me try and do too much! Be careful, take time to cultivate the good relationship with Jo and the kids."

"Yes I do realize that tendency and try and watch it carefully as I love them so much."

"I can see you do and that is wonderful, but being too busy can carry over into neglecting time with the Lord, doesn't it? You see I know myself!"

Tom laughed, "Yes we are alike in bad ways too."

We went out for our last meal together and realized what an amazing ten days it had been. There was that deep bond between all of us as we sat around the table enjoying the spicy Mexican food.

"It has meant so much to me to have found you Nancy. I feel like I finally found myself, when I discovered my roots, my background. I always felt as though I had no history of my own and that my past was a big blank. It leaves one with an empty feeling, because something is missing."

"Tom, I was wrong when I wrote, in my first letter, that the past wasn't important I didn't realize that it was to you. And I was wondering if you have tried to trace your father yet?"

"No I haven't but now I feel like I can get on with life in a new way. It is a new kind of security knowing what my past is, and knowing you."

"Remember we talked before about one of Paul Tournier's books, A Place for You"

"Yes, I remember."

"Tournier says we all seek for a place, especially when one is torn up from our roots like you were. He said we all seek not just our roots, our place in this world, but our place before God."

"That's what they were saying on 100 Huntley Street when we were on, wasn't it?"

"Yes, remember they talked about when we find the Lord we find out who we are and that fills a deep longing in us."

"When I came to know Jesus personally, I had a wonderful sense of knowing He loved me and when my search was completed and I found you....." Tom was a loss for words. He went on, "but in a wonderful way I feel closer to my adoptive family because of it all. I think we have even a deeper relationship now than ever before."

I reached across the table and put my hand over his, "I'm glad, that is the way it should be. God's love never takes away, it only makes things better."

We looked over at the others laughing and chatting and Tom remarked, "It has been so good to get acquainted with Ernest and Elizabeth, I love them so much, they are very special people. William too."

"They are, but you know it is not a matter of getting acquainted for us two, rather it's just the fact of being able to be together. It's hard to put into words."

"Our friendship is a special gift from the Lord," Tom replied.

Goodbyes the next day were very hard, maybe because we had been knit together so tightly. We knew we had to go; we each had our own lives to live but there was now an added dimension to them. We wished there weren't so many miles between us. But there had to be a letting go, our children had lives of their own. We can look ahead with thankfulness for all the years ahead of us.

After our return home I sat one evening thinking of all that had transpired, when William spoke; "Nan, remember the poem "*Rabbi Ben Ezra*" by Browning? I've often quoted it."

"Is that the one you used to mention in your letters to me?"

"Yes. Its fitting for us now. It goes like this,

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life
for which the first was made:
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, "A whole I planned
Youth shows but half;
Trust God, see all,
Nor be afraid."

Conclusion

*"As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you.
Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands,
you will dwell in my love....I have spoken thus to you,
so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete."
John 15:9-11 NEB.*

*".....overwhelming victory is ours through him who loved us.
For I am convinced that there is nothing in death or life,
or in the realm of spirits or superhuman powers,
the world as it is or the world as it shall be,
in the forces of the universe, in heights or depths--
nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God
in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 8:38-39 NEB.*

Down through the years the joy in my life was often only a tiny, flickering flame in the darkness. At times it shone brighter, now it has been blown upon by the Spirit of God into a blazing fire in my heart. My son who was lost is found. I have been overwhelmed by joy!

But where do I, we, go from here? Life will never be the same again. God has taken hold of my life; taken the traumatic events and transformed them into undreamed of joy.

These recent events have caused me to stand in awe as I see His love and sovereignty. I knew this before but now it is inscribed deep in my heart. God loves me. He is in control of everything.

He is able to do far more than I could ask or think. He wants to develop in me an increasingly trusting life with Himself. My Christian life is not made up of saying some words but a lifetime of fellowship with the Risen Christ. It is not a matter of how well or how often I pray or what I can do for Him. It is learning to love Him with my whole heart, soul and mind, and my neighbour as myself.

Neither is my relationship with Tom a matter of words, legally he is no longer my son. But he chose to come back into contact with me and now we have a loving relationship that will grow richer over the years. This will only enhance the bonds he has with his adoptive family. A lifetime of shared experiences with them has produced the love which he has for his parents and sisters. I can never take their place, nor do I want to.

Often in life we find ourselves faced with impossible choices, none of which seems good. Some decisions though must be made. My choice to allow my son to be adopted produced hurt for me far beyond my comprehension. And yet I felt there was

no alternative, any other choice would have caused even greater trouble in Tom's life. At least this way I, not he, could carry the burden.

Sometimes our choice is only between different types of pain. Love may be keeping a child but it may be loving the child enough to see they have a normal healthy family life. Loving can be caring more for them than for our own immediate gratification.

I am thankful my pain caused me to draw near to Jesus, seek after Him and not become bitter. What happens to us is really not the important thing but how we respond to it. Over the years I have had to root out bitterness, anger and resentment, deliberately choosing to reject those things. I had to choose to live again and not focus on my problems. I had to focus on Jesus, not on the 'what if'.

Traumatic events can set the stage for glorious new beginnings if we have true repentance, not merely a feeling sorry for ourselves. Suffering is universal, we all face some sort. Others were different from mine but all are equally or more painful. But He is able to bring us through all of it with victory if we cooperate with Him.

Part of this involves letting go of the past, or it becomes a heavy stone, dragging us down. I had to choose the way of forgiveness and joy ; to cultivate it by a deliberate choice. I often failed to do this but had to try again. Each time it was a bit easier. That didn't mean I had no feelings of anger or fear. If I covered these up or pretended they were not there it produced more problems later. It was necessary to acknowledge my grief to myself and to God. Healing from all this takes time.

Often people going through similar situations feel a sense of shame or failure. We can be used and discarded by others but never by our loving Heavenly Father. He wants to use our very brokenness to reach others. Life must go on and we know no one is completely whole but all are in process.

When my birth father left us I was too young to recognize my grief, devastation and feelings of rejection from this experience. But they were there. Now I have to recognize my grief and hurt and allow God to mend it. I've found it invaluable to have others help me pray through it.

Year by year I have exposed my wounds for Him to heal and in turn felt His love in deeper ways. The walls I erected around my heart, to shield and protect it have come down. This makes me much more vulnerable and of course more easily hurt. That is the risk that is taken to keep living and loving His way. Others have failed me but I must chose to trust again. His love draws me to want to be more like Him. To love Him with child-like freshness, extravagantly.

Love and restoration are at the heart of all the Lord's dealings with us. He wants us brought into fellowship with Him, to come back where we belong and become what He wants us to be. True freedom comes in the total forgiveness Jesus offers. His word says He will restore that which has been lost. That means the years Tom and I have lost will be restored to us; not the actual years but in new and wonderful ways. For this to happen we both have to cooperate and not look back with regret but enjoy what is ahead of us.

Through our reunion we have become aware how close to the heart of God is the whole idea of adoption. It is referred to throughout Scripture. When we come into that personal relationship with Christ He says we are adopted into His family. We become

His children, bought at great price by the blood Jesus shed. He assures us we are His and causes us to cry, "Abba, Daddy, Father." Romans 8:15

The Bible recorded some adopted people who had important roles. Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and in that way prepared for the purpose God had for him. Esther, adopted by her uncle Mordecai, found herself in the place to save her people.

We know, Tom and myself, how the Father allowed the events of our lives to prepare us for what He wants done. He does not waste lives or events but when we are willing he transforms them for good.

Adoptive parents don't have to fear their child will stop loving them if there should ever be a reunion with a birth parent. In fact, from many stories we have heard the adoptive family and their child are drawn closer when a reunion happens. Parents sometimes fear their children will grow away from them but in all growing up there is a growing away into adulthood. This is normal. Our children must become persons in their own right and we must help them do so. When we can do this together we remain close as a family.

The world needs adoptive parents and I am so thankful there are special people like Glen and Nita Rye. They cared for my child when I, who was in an impossible situation, could not. From my hurt could come joy for them and now I share in it also. Adoption should not be a purely legal transaction with its absolute severing of relations but should somehow rather be on-going. It should meet the needs of everyone; adoptive parent, birth parents but especially the child. The adopted child may have a desire to know his or her roots or reassure their birth parents they doing well. What a comfort it would be for a birth mother to know how her child is doing. This contact could be made with privacy guaranteed, if needed, and on going progress reported. A lot is being done to make adoption more open and humane for all involved.

The adopted person needs to have birth parents provide very important, even life saving, medical and biological information. If there are hereditary diseases the adoptive family should know or a child's life could be in danger.

Some adopted people may want to have a reunion when they are older adolescents or adults, when they are old enough to cope with the intense emotions. For some it will take time for them to even acknowledge the hurt and anger buried inside them as they have felt rejected by birth parents. So often the question is, " why was I given up?" They must face the pain and let the Lord heal it, He can and will.

I still see areas that are very puzzling and difficult. Is search and contact right for everyone? I don't know. I can imagine there are cases where a lost child turning up after many years could cause a shaky marriage to fail apart. But if the adoptee is caring and if the search is carried out with great responsibility and sensitivity, problems can be avoided.

Tom did his search in this way and respected my right to privacy. He didn't barge in uninvited, he asked gently through a third party for contact with me. He understood and accepted, no matter how hard it was at the time, my reluctance. at first, for full and open contact. It takes time to accept news as startling and far reaching in its consequences as this. I had also to be sensitive to Tom's need to have contact and information and take the risk of allowing him into our lives. If I had allowed fear to rule my life I would not have experienced the healing joy that reunion brought to all of us.

Professional help, as we had, is vital in these emotionally stressful situations to help guide everyone through contact and reunion. Far too often there is unfounded fear of what will happen.

I've read and heard about many contacts between birth parents and adoptees and it is clear that any information and any form of contact is so important. Any information about their roots is a very healing thing for an adopted person even when there is not a very good reunion. Our very good reunion may be one of the rarer ones but even with a less than satisfactory reunion it is good as the void of the past is at least partly filled in.

Some alternatives to the current common adoption practices should be found. What form it will take is not clear. A teenage, single mother keeping her child may not be the best for either. Some do it successfully but require lots of loving support, financial, social, and emotional. If a birth mother knew there would not be an absolute severing; if each could have some news it would allow more babies to be released for adoption. In some cases there is on-going contact between adoptive and birth parents and adoptees. It often works very well. Something needs to be done to bring inner healing to those involved in adoption. Some counseling services report 40-50 % of their clients are adoptees! Is this not a cry for help? Many have a sense of betrayal, and a strong desire to feel loved. Only the Lord can do this.

Aborting an unwanted child is not the answer. God has given life to the child and we don't have the right to kill it. Psalm 139 tells us it is God who formed us in our mother's womb. He has a purpose for each child that is conceived. It is very hard to go through a pregnancy but with support it can be done. Jesus who loves us is more than willing to forgive and heal.

Some more help for unwed mothers is required and much has come in the years since Tom was born, in the form of loving support and acceptance. We must give them a haven whether they keep their child or not. The church should be in the forefront of showing love and compassion and many are doing this.

Many adopted children feel lonely and rejected as a result of adoption. These feelings may come even during pregnancy for studies have shown a mother's feelings are transmitted to the child she is carrying. All of this is not beyond the reach of healing by the Lord of the Universe, the Loving Father.

Both adoptive and birth parents can pray for their child. We need to come in faith knowing He is abundantly able to do more than we can ask or think.

Some still struggle with feelings of guilt, of failure and find it hard to receive the forgiveness Jesus offers. He wants to release us from all of this; total forgiveness is a gift that sets us free. We are precious to Him, the cross stands forever as a sign and seal of His love. He wants to transform all our failures. He doesn't ask us to pay for our former lifestyles; Jesus did that. We may have sorrow because of it but even that He wants to heal.

Keeping the secret of my child's existence from William was difficult. I longed to share it with him and perhaps should have done so. But with the circumstances being what they were, I didn't and then my desire to avoid causing any hurt sealed my lips. In spite of this I have had such a satisfying life in the love of Jesus. He helped me deal with the emptiness and deep hurts and filled the void inside. We have to give Him the

freedom to touch our lives. Frances Roberts expresses this beautifully in her book, *Come Away My Beloved*, © 1973 Frances Roberts King's Farspan Inc.

“ Behold with great love I have chosen thee and made thee Mine, saith the Lord...I wait for thee to turn from everything else to Me alone. I want you to give Me all of yourself. I want the real you. The more you can bring to Me of your true self, the more I can give to you of My true self...

I come to thee via My Holy Spirit from depths within thy being that thou hast never plumbed; from chambers within thy soul which thine eyes have never seen.

Rooms of darkness.

Not dark because of sin necessarily, as we think of sin; but dark because they have been kept closed.

Indeed, none but I have the key to open them. I do not only have the power to open them but the wisdom and the love; and I never confront thee with that which I do not give thee grace to meet.” (used with author's permission)

(NOTE see Reunion and Beyond for more that has happened in these dark room areas!)

As I look at myself and at my past it is the truth as I have perceived it and as I saw and felt it. But so much remains a mystery. Only after Tom found me did I see the full depth of grief which I had carried all those years. So much was hidden, even from myself.

Each day is a new beginning, we are not bound by the past. I have to respect myself in spite of all my faults and things that still need changing. God is not finished with me yet! He loves me and stimulates me to change. He wants us to have His presence and the power of the Holy Spirit so we might go through life with his victory. God has mended the broken pieces of my life and transformed them in ways undreamed of. And this is a continuing process. I am now able to praise Him for that which once caused such pain. It was intended for harm but God used it for good. He transformed the void of grief to overflowing joy. For that I can only praise Him.

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Marshall Pickering, UK.

I am so grateful for...

William, my beloved husband and best friend, who has loved me through it all.
Ernest and Elizabeth, our two children, ever a source of wonder and a joy to be with.
Tom, a special gift from the Lord, who was given back and who also brought the delight of Jo, and their children into our lives.
Glen and Nita Rye, Tom's parents: God's answer in my time of need.

REUNION AND BEYOND

Chapter 1 The Years Since

The years since our reunion have gone by so fast...we now have grandchildren older than our two children were at the time of Tom's return. Our families have blended together, shared love, interests and a commitment to Christ. These have all helped to knit us together. Life B.T.-- before Tom, was thirty years ago. We have the years with so many shared memories. These have been wonderful years but with many challenges for all the family. Life is not always easy.

It has been a pleasure to watch Tom and Jo raise their children into such mature adults, by giving love and discipline and help in ways that made them so interesting and a delight to be with. Jim, Tony and their sister Alice all married and settled into fulfilling jobs is a wonder. Jim and Tony were so young at the time of our reunion and now they are grown and Jim has children of his own.

For years Tom and Jo also fostered many children, pouring in love, concern, and good discipline. Very often these children came from abusive, damaging situations. No one should have to suffer in ways they did. The love and care given by Tom and his wife simply were not enough in some cases to counteract these traumas.

Only the Lord knows the sacrifices they made and the help they were to so many children. They gave loving care so even when they did not see the good results they wanted it was not lost. We often can't see the outcome of the good we do.

Our reunion did not heal many of the emotional wounds I had carried, since most were buried so deeply I was unaware of their existence. Many of these were from my early childhood, seemingly in a hidden chamber that I did not know existed.

When *Secret Child* was written I knew only some of the pain from the past. I'd barely scratched the surface of the 'stuff' which came up later. So there has been a gradual uncovering of what was hidden. I came slowly to see the depth of my grief and abandonment which was invisible for so long.

Because so much in the past was traumatic, hard, destructive and isolating it has made me value highly what has been restored to me. I've been given much and it has made me very grateful. My husband, my family and Tom's restoration into our lives have been wonderfully healing.

Like many others, I never had, and didn't even know what a normal childhood was like. Only later did I realize I never had a loving father to care for me. I had a mother who, because of her own unhealed trauma, could not nourish me. I had to acknowledge what I had lost or never had as a child.

We have to grieve our losses, to grieve what we did not have and go on from there. Healing from these things is possible and necessary. Letting go of the past and of our losses must happen before the healing can come. Forgiveness for those who have hurt us is vital. It was made apparent when I saw others with loving fathers. I did not

have this and at times it would make me sad. I had to acknowledge this loss, feel it, then go on and turn with gratefulness to all I did have.

Fatherlessness leaves a big hole in our lives. The lack of protection, nurture, discipline and unconditional love makes it hard to trust. This can produce the lie in us; 'there won't be anyone there for me when I need them'. Often we can't even recognize the fatherlessness we carry. We believe a lie, and we make judgements against God. We don't believe He will help us in similar situations. I have had to work through this again and again. Father God had to wash from me all the lies the enemy planted in my life about there being a loving Father. I had to choose to receive truth. I was not an orphan.

But at the same time, in many ways, I knew this security in my Heavenly Father. When I was in situations with people of influence or wealth I did not feel at all intimidated for I knew I was a child of the King. I knew for certain my Father approved of me, I was His daughter. This wasn't pride but gratitude in knowing I was accepted for who I was as a person. Yet at times of crisis came the nagging thought, 'will He be there for me this time?'. It is always a choice of what to believe, truth or lies.

Then some years ago, I heard how the effects of 'control issues' might affect our lives. When my eyes were opened to this I asked Jesus to remove any controlling spirits from my life and a couple of months later I found myself full of grief and emotional pain, crying for no known reason. This was not normal for me. This turned out to be the opening up of the huge well of grief from being abandoned as a fourteen month old. Friends prayed with me and soon I felt my normal happy self. I knew that I'd given permission for Jesus to 'remove the lid' which had kept the grief locked away. It was in effect a false comfort blanket covering the grief I wasn't aware even existed.

When young children experience a loss they are often thought to be too young to grieve. But of course they do, they have lost something very important and precious. No one probably helped me, I could not verbalize feelings of grief and all the trauma of being left. If only! But I do not blame or fault anyone for failing to help me at my time of loss and abandonment.

When I was fourteen months old my father walked out and then my mother was away for a few months. I was in the care of neighbours. My mother returned but I saw her intermittently. I might see her briefly for a short visit once a week when I was between ages two to six. She had to work to support herself and me and when I did see her I'm aware now she was also emotionally wounded and could not give the nourishment I needed. I obviously had enough care and love from my aunt and others who were looking after me. I also lived for months in a 24 hour a day nursery school as well as many living arrangements. And I had thought I'd had a normal childhood! I still do not know how many different places or with whom I lived during those years.

Abandonment not only brings grief and a sense of loss, but forms our view of the world as a result. This can make one unwilling, but not consciously, to trust others to be there when needed. Worst of all we can't trust our Loving Heavenly Father to be there when we need Him. This all hides below the surface but affects our ability to trust God and others. Having to be independent because of the circumstances, resulted so often in, "I'll do it myself". So we keep others and God distant from us to try and protect ourselves.

Even from my earliest days of knowing Jesus personally, during nurses' training, I knew He loved me and would care for me. But there was still a hidden part of me that

asked, "will He be there for me this time?" Of course He always is but I had to know in my heart not just intellectually in my head. This results from being in once sense an 'orphan'. I needed parents, security, and someone to be with me and love me and listen to me. So my relinquishment of Tom and the resulting grief was only a part of my emotional garbage most of which had come from when I was young.

Chapter 2 Reunion Issues

Our reunion was so good it is hard to realize not all reunions will be like that. There is a lot of fear associated with a search and reunion. Many fear the loss of love of their adopted child, or of hurting their adoptive parents. If the search is so that the missing child or parent fill all our own needs there will be problems. This was not the case for Tom or myself. We didn't try and find our whole meaning in this new relationship. We were grateful just to find each other after years of not knowing anything.

Not all our relationships can be restored. I was never able to have a restoration with my birth father who had left my mother and me. When I met him years later he seemed indifferent to how his leaving affected me. He never seemed to care. But I came to a resolution and forgave. Some things just are the way they are.

The relationship with my step father was not good either. I was never able to stop the hatred and abuse from him, which in later years was only verbal. Again I had done all I could do. I forgave and tried to be kind, but told him to stop the verbal attacks. We should not go on taking abuse, or demeaning remarks. We have to honor our parents but that does not mean accepting abuse. Any abuse is wrong.

It has been said that adoption touches one person out of four. So many are affected, it may be birthparents, adoptees, adoptive parents or siblings of the adopted child. By its very nature adoption involves complex issues. Over the years with more open adoption practices some of the more difficult issues are lessened. When birthparents know where their children have been placed the huge void of unknowing is lessened. Often they are able to choose the family their child will be placed in. They may also be able to send letters to the child which will be given to them when they can understand about adoption. The field of adoption has changed immensely and for the better. But many of the issues I faced are still out there, there is much unresolved grief and loss crying out for attention.

We are called to reconcile relationships including the relationships broken through adoption. Restoration of these broken ties surely is a reflection of God's heart. Malachi 4: 6 NIV promises, "*He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...*" This of course includes mothers and their children. This should include those affected by adoption. It is important to restore relationships.

Often adoptees feel the pain of not knowing fully who they are, even if they are very loved in their adoptive family. Why was I given away? This is an unsettling question that needs answering. This was true for Tom. One of the foremost issues for Tom was just to be able to see someone who looked like him. On the other hand birth parents like myself know grief that lingers; "Where is my child?"

Many have questions about adoption. What right do birthparents have to contact their child who was released to adoptive parents? Is it only unhappy, poorly adjusted adoptees who want to search? Is it true that adoptive parents will lose their child if a reunion takes place? Are reunions useful or helpful? Should we not just forget the past and get on with life? If our adopted child searches does that mean adoptive parents have failed in some way? With newer open adoption laws all of this is less traumatic.

Reunions can be less than good, that is a fact. But it also a fact that reunions can bring healing for all involved even when they are not especially good. Just having some information or some contact is good. The desire to search by adoptees does not mean they are ungrateful towards their adoptive parents. It does not mean they are unhappy or maladjusted. It is usually a burning need to fill in the blanks of the past or to answer the question "Who am I?" or "I just want to see someone who looks like me."

Adoptive parents need to have assurance that they are the 'real' parents. It was they who fed and nurtured their child over the years. It was they who made a family and were with their child through all the joys and sorrows. They are family. Bonds formed from early childhood will not be broken if they are formed in love. Children are a gift whether adopted or born to us.

Birth parents must be sensitive to the adoptees family life and not disrupt and push their way in regardless of consequences. They must not be demanding of love or attention. They must settle the fact-- they are not the parents of this child. Their 'child' has had parents who have been there for them over the many years of growing up. It is so important to always remember this.

Adoptees have to know their security in their family and decide when and if they should search. It is usually they who initiate a search. The best results come when the adoptive parents can support the desire for a search. Even if the reunion is not as good as expected it most often gives the adoptee a new sense of wholeness and freedom. Finding out medical information is also very important. Some of these things became clearer to me when I served on the Ontario Adoption Council for a few years.

New relationships that come with a reunion are fragile and like any new friendships need care. Intense feelings are aroused but it is good to remember they do settle down and life becomes more 'normal'. It is an enhanced normal as the broken pieces are brought back together. It is necessary to walk through this emotional mine field with gentle and careful steps. We must remain aware of the others involved not just our own feelings.

When I researched this complex issue many years ago I found much valuable information from varied sources. I quote from one of the books by Arthur D Sorosky, Annette Baran and Reuben Pannor, *The Adoption Triangle*, Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1984, p.192.

"Our feeling, however, was shared in some measure by all adoptive parents: they feared losing the love of their adopted child to the birth parent. Not only was this fear unfounded, but if one statement can be made unequivocally, it is that a primary benefit of the reunion experience is the strengthening of the adoptive family relationship."

This was Tom's experience, our reunion was wonderful but it also cemented his love for the Ryes. They were, and continued to be, his family.

Britain and Israel among other countries have had more open-ness for adoptive records and searching adults. It hasn't produced an epidemic of reunions nor unhappy adoptive parents. Secrecy and rigid rules have created many problems. Surely openness and sensitivity should prevail. The dark shadow of not knowing is unproductive for everyone.

When sailing into the uncharted waters of reunion one can never know what is ahead. But we know the One who can guide us through unmapped territory. He constantly calls us into restoration.

Now, looking back, I know Tom had a great need to see and meet a blood relative, someone who looked like him. It has been interesting to see the strong physical and personality resemblances between Tom and myself! This produces teasing and laughter in the family as they see the same remarks or behavior in both of us. Our grandchildren especially tease me about this.

We have often talked about how Tom's need to search was at its root the Father's desire. He desires restoration because Jesus came to restore all relationships but primarily that with the Father. This also means He wants us to live in good, restored relationships with each other wherever this is possible. We have to bless each other and not speak negatively. That also requires a lot of forgiveness to keep our daily interactions healthy. It means being lovingly honest with each other. This is continuous. We must always endeavour to be in right relationships with those around us.

What about the huge issue of abortion? What about the 'inconvenient' pregnancies? They were not wanted. Babies were disposable. But they were children, not just tissue. From the moment of conception they were living human children. Their lives were taken so the mother could get on with her life. How long will we encourage the killing of the 'inconvenient'? How many boyfriends or husbands push for the supposed solution which is abortion? What does it solve?

But even for this there can be forgiveness, but it must be asked for. God waits for us to ask. Jesus paid the price for our forgiveness, but we must come with a powerful sense of that which we allowed to happen. He can forgive and heal the sorrow we carry. I am forever grateful abortion was not really available or I could easily have allowed it to happen to me. Desperation can enable us to do wrong things.

Our reunion is an ongoing process with many layers. At first it involved just us and Tom and Jo and their children. These relationships changed as their children matured and then married and had children themselves. All this applied to our two children and, as the years passed, with their spouses. Now it is all the above plus their children. It is a wonderful growing web of interaction.

The process of becoming a new enlarged family was tricky. We have different ways of doing things and we had to learn to accept one another. Because we live so far apart the times we do get together are very special and all the more enjoyable. It has been so important not to look back and think 'if only'. I can not have the past back but can enter in and enjoy the now. It is such a waste of joy and energy if we keep looking back with regret.

After Tom's first visit the verse from Isaiah 54:2 NEB came to mind, "*enlarge the limits of your home, spread wide the curtains of your tent; let out its ropes to the full and drive the tent pegs home*". We have had to be ready to let out the ropes and spread wide the 'tent' of our family. It has made for an incredibly delightful, joyful family.

We had to change the shape of what our family is. It has certainly enlarged! The amount of food consumed has increased greatly, we now need enough to feed a small army! But along with that the fun and laughter has also increased. It has made us more flexible, it has given us great joy. It is worth the work of making the tent of our family so big. "*The children born in your bereavement shall yet say in your hearing, 'This place is too narrow, make room for me to live in.'*" Isaiah 49: 20 NEB

Even though we have had a wonderful reunion I can't build my life around Tom. I love him but I also have a life apart from him and he from us. We can't hang on tightly.

Love lets people go. This can be hard in practice as we release our children into their own lives. We learn slowly.

In this reunion process we don't replace Tom's relationship with his adoptive family. They are his parents. They have had all the years together. Yes I gave birth to him but they were the Lord's provision of parental love and care. This reminds me of the verse, '*God places the solitary in families....*'. Psalm 68:6 He did it for Tom and He did it for me. I have a wonderful marriage and now an large extended family.

Not only have we had so many good times with Tom's mother and father but also with his sisters. There have been lots of laughs, hikes, family celebrations that have tied us together. All these new friends came along as a bonus with our reunion. From the very beginning we were welcomed warmly by Tom's family.

There are so many layers of relationships with friends and family of different ages and interests. I have had the immense joy of seeing my children's children. This brought tears of gratitude at the recent wedding of my grandson Tony as I sat next to Tom and his wife. I have also been able to see my lovely grand-daughter Alice in her new home with her husband. And when at my oldest grandson Jim's family I have also enjoyed watching the energy in my great-grandsons. God is good.

Chapter 3 The Family's own view of our reunion

My husband William's side of the story:

After twenty seven years of silence the appearance of a child, now a man, given up for adoption can be a severe strain on a marriage; however the 'can be' may also be 'does not have to be'. For Nancy and me it was not in any way a strain. The shock and pain for her was severe. Her faith and trust in Jesus, as described in the book "*Secret Child*" made this clear.

For me the feelings were not nearly so intense. My mother and father had always taught me to respect people for who they were, not for their wealth, social position or personal handicaps. My father was a very compassionate man. His comment on seeing what we call a down and out, begging was 'It can happen to anyone'. He would give help in some way. So I found it easy to continue to love, trust and accept Nancy when she told me, tearfully, of Tom's birth.

I found it easy to accept Tom himself, partly because he was a loving gentle man. I found it easy to accept Jo who was a loving mother. They had completely different backgrounds to mine but they were now part of our family. My relationship with Tom was strengthened by our shared interest in the outdoors, in birds and animals. It was also in practical things like his helping finish a deck I was working on. I was careful to tell him I loved him and was proud of him, that he was accepted as part of the family. I also wanted to affirm his many talents, gifts and abilities. I liked him!

Tom's return proved to be a change for the better for all of us. From our very first meeting, mere weeks after the lightning bolt of a phone call, Tom and the family have been welded to us. The fear of "what if" proved once again no match for the miracle of "watch this". So much good has grown out of this reunion in the 30 years since he miraculously appeared.

Our family of just four at the time suddenly became eight, and now numbers twenty two. We have done things and been to places which were completely unimaginable before the reunion.

All this is general and perhaps superficial. What about specifics? Well none of us in the family is perfect. This has caused inevitable friction on occasion. But what we have in common is a faith in Jesus and a desire to establish strong families. By now of course there are many families in the extended family. Three of Tom's children have married and some have children of their own.

One of the blessings of parenthood is to see children grow and mature, leave their parents and start families themselves. When this happens one of the chief aims of parents has been achieved. The other aim is to see children come into their own personal Christian faith. This we have seen and are so thankful and blessed for it.

Before the reunion we had visited Arizona briefly, being of course unaware of the big part it would play in our future. We now look back on extended stays, and trips to places few visitors ever see. We have been blessed to be involved in weddings and graduations and family gatherings. Many of these included Tom's adoptive family, who

are also family to us. Tom's parents have over the years received us warmly and we have spent time with them on almost every visit.

Weddings especially are family gatherings and one of the unexpected delightful consequences of the return of Tom has been the involvement of his family and ours in several weddings. Milestone birthdays are important too. For Nancy's 65th a special party was called for. Unknown to everyone but our daughter and her family, Tom came with his daughter for the big event. This was in the middle of days of snow, ice and freezing rain. It was such an amazing surprise that for a moment Nancy was, uncharacteristically, speechless. His arrival also meant that many more of our friends were able to meet him.

The cementing of relationships between Tom and his family and our two children has surprised some people. The unspoken thoughts were that there would have to be some jealousy or discord below the surface. This has not been the case for they are very alike in personalities and interests. The reason perhaps is that we have from the very beginning prayed for each of the children and their future spouses. We prayed for this since they were small, and prayed for the one they would marry. We now do this for our grandchildren and can see the wonderful results.

Tom's comments

The first book, "*Secret Child*" ended with Jo and me having only the two boys. The Lord blessed us with another child, a beautiful little girl for her older brothers to spoil. Our family was complete or so we thought.

Jo and I always talked about giving back through being foster parents or even adoption, because my adoption was so great. I had been placed in a loving home with those whom I considered to be my family. I felt special because I was chosen and we talked about my adoption openly, when I was of an age to understand. My adopted family was very supportive and encouraging with my search for my birth parents. They felt I should wait until I was eighteen years old to start the search. I finally felt ready to start the search at the age of twenty-seven.

We became foster/adoptive parents and went through all the training and requirements and soon had an eight year old boy placed with us. Our family accepted him and loved him as their own brother. This was the child's first home. Through many disruptions and trials our family loved these children. Without the love of Christ and the support of our Christian family and friends we couldn't have continued fostering. Many of those children are still in our lives and still considered part of our family.

The Lord blessed our family because of these foster children. Our biological children have grown into compassionate, caring, godly children because of the opportunity to understand, befriend and enjoy time with the foster children. The ages of children we served were from four weeks to eighteen years.

Our three children are now grown, healthy, married and living their lives for the Lord. Our eldest son, Jim and our daughter-in-law, Barb are parents of two boys full of energy. They are Nancy's great-grandsons. Barb is a beautiful loving wife and mother. The most important people in her life are Jim and their boys. Jim is a lot like me, hard working to a fault and so much in love with his wife as I am with my wife of thirty six years. He is quiet, kind, a great father, big brother and husband. He has achieved many things and is there for his siblings whenever they call.

Our second son, Tony is grown up and now a part of the ministry team of his church. He loves the Lord and lives for him. Tony was very patient through his twenties, praying for the Lord's guidance; was he to marry or not. A young girl was also living for the Lord in the same ministry and was praying for the Lord to do his will in her life. The Lord brought them together after working together for seven years. Little did they know the Lord was preparing the foundation of their union all along. They were married one year ago and can't stop smiling.

Our daughter Alice has grown into a beautiful godly woman. Four years ago she married a wonderful young man whom she met at church camp in California. He has fit into our families' lives and wants only the best for his wife. They study the word of the Lord and seek His guidance in all they do. They both love the Lord and strive to do His will in all they do. They are blessed with a lovely home.

My life together with Jo has been quite a journey of thirty nine years together, counting the dating years. Our three children and their spouses have brought so many blessings into our lives.

Some of the bumps in the journey, I wish we had not had to take, but with the help of the Lord we have learned from them. I wouldn't have wanted to have this journey without my loving wife Jo by my side. Jo and I had great opportunities in our careers. I have had the opportunity to fix everything from simple things to the largest Caterpillar bull dozers. Jo started working in the hospital where my adopted mother was head of nursing. Once we were married Jo had to leave that position because she couldn't be married to the boss's son! She then became a Hair Stylist and owned several beauty salons. After our children were grown or almost grown, she became an Emergency Medical Technician and continues to work in the medical field. She has now gone back to college to become a Registered Nurse.

Jo and I are now part of a leadership team that formed a new Christian church to fill the need that was apparent in our small town. The church is growing every Sunday. We started with eight team members and we now have up to fifty fellow residents attending our services.

When I was twenty seven I went to the adoption agency that I was adopted through and they found my birth mother. Having another family to love and share my life with has been amazing. I never knew what would unfold when I made that first phone call looking for my birth parents. At the age of twenty seven, I realized how important it was for me to find them. My wife and I had had our first son, Jim, and I realized that he was the first person I had ever known that was from my blood line.

Now I have a wonderful addition to my/our lives in my birthmother, her husband, a brother and sister. We have so many common interests which is strange because we were not in each other lives for such a long time. The first meeting with them was an eye opener of how much genetics affects who you really are. Both of my siblings from my birth mother are now married with families of their own. I have loved getting to know my relatives. All of them expanded my heart in a way I never thought possible.

Time has flown by since the Lord gave us the second chance to be a part of each other's lives. It is amazing to think thirty years have come and gone since the first letter was sent and received, the first phone call was made and the first time we heard each other's voices. Plans were quickly made to meet each other, first in Canada and then in Arizona. It seems like yesterday or a moment ago!

Without the hand of God in our lives, how different our histories could have been. The Lord's plans are always greater than we could ever imagine for ourselves.

I am thankful for my brother, and sister, nephews and a special godly man that I can trust, respect, love, and have great joy just being in his presence. I thank them for accepting me into their family without reservation.

Fifty plus years ago my life was saved and I received blessing from God. Nancy prayed for me down the years and the Lord has blessed our families and continues to do so.

Thank you to the Rye family for loving me unquestionably!!

Thank you to the Moore family for loving me without hesitation!!

Thank you God for my life!!

Our son Ernest's comments

My impressions when Tom found our family:

We had just finished supper that evening at the end of the summer, when mom told me and Elizabeth the story of Tom and his search to find her. It seemed rather surreal, since this was the kind of thing you read about but it didn't happen to your own family.

I suppose my initial response was somewhat subdued and detached since he was still an unknown and a long way away. Mostly I remember being impressed by my dad's reaction to it all, how he was concerned that mom had had to carry the burden of the secret all those years. There was no question of his acceptance and forgiveness.

We got to meet Tom quite quickly, since he flew up to Toronto within a couple of months to participate in a 100 Huntley Street program with mom about the reunion. Having a brother was a novel idea for me, and meeting him at the airport for the first time was exciting, and immediately felt very natural and normal. We hit it off right away, and it was nice to find he shared my interest in cars. He even brought with him a part I needed and then helped to install it even though the weather was freezing cold. A big change from the warmth of Arizona.

We took a photo of me, mom and Tom sitting side by side on the couch and we were all struck by the fact that all three of us had the same eyes and forehead. Tom and I were alike in our tendency to collect everything as well. On a trip to Arizona that Christmas we found his garage stuffed to overflowing with every imaginable item. This was something I was beginning to develop at that age and have continued as I owned my own garage.

The long distance between Ontario and Arizona has meant we have only been together a few times but often talk on the phone. But we did spend Christmas down there and Tom and his wife have been up to visit us and my family a couple of times. It has been great getting to know his family and kids and we have enjoyed having Jim up once and Tony and his wife came recently.

This story has continued to have an impact on everyone who hears it, of the way in which God works all our circumstances out for good, even though we can't always see it at the time. Dad's response to everything and his support for mom continues to be an inspiration to me in my relationship to my own family.

Our daughter Elizabeth's comments

Years ago when we were first told about Tom as we were sitting around the dining table it felt like a dream. It was like I was hearing about someone else's story, the sort of thing that happens to someone else but not to you.

My dad's opening words were, "we have a story that we want to share with you that started a long time ago. It has sad parts but also a lot of joy". I remember realizing how much my parents loved each other and had allowed this to bring them closer together.

When I spoke to Tom on the phone and then met him in person it was like meeting someone I had known all my life, but never met.

He was very warm, kind and generous. I am grateful for a wonderful extra brother. Tom and Joanne sent thoughtful gifts that they had chosen or made such as a stained glass jewelry box that Tom had crafted and that I still use.

Some of my own family's thoughts about the reunion: this was a real life, and personal demonstration of God taking what was intended for harm and bringing something good and beautiful out of it. God redeems mistakes. It was also an opportunity to see grace extended.

This good extended to our boys enjoying getting to know Tom and his family in their visits to Canada. We also had the opportunity to visit Tom in Arizona recently and had so much fun exploring Arizona with someone who has such a depth of knowledge in so many areas.

"Just ask Tom" is now a family saying because he always had an answer to our many questions on a far ranging variety of topics.

Chapter 4

BUT GOD

The lost years--they are lost--BUT GOD has given so much more. When I was young my family was taken away but in the years since God has given more in abundance. I have my husband and our children with their spouses. My son and his wife, my grandchildren and great-grandchildren all were restored .

I had no hope of seeing my lost child again BUT GOD brought Tom back.

I had no loving earthly father, in fact two failed fathers--BUT GOD, my Loving Heavenly Father has allowed me to know His deep love. I have found it to be a strong, reliable and personal love which has healed me. I had no place of true rest but He has given that in Himself.

I have known the deep pain of abandonment, my early years were lonely-- BUT GOD has adopted me and I no longer am alone and He has allowed me to enlarge my tent. I am not an orphan, I am His daughter.

I've been given this loving family. He has provided comfort and stability. I failed and made wrong choices BUT GOD redeemed them. He has brought such good out of my awful situation. God uses our biggest failures, He redeems them, when we put them in His hands.

We have seen family and friends go through very hard, very difficult times. BUT GOD, out of their crushing circumstances produced treasures. There is a refining and depth of character that happens. I call them 'treasures of darkness'.

The treasures of darkness are mentioned in Isaiah 45:3 *"I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of the secret place, that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by your name"*.

In retrospect I see that by enduring in the hard times and the difficult places I was able to know in satisfying ways that my God was with me, He enabled me to persevere when all seemed hopeless and darkness was all I could sense. It was so often a battle against losing hope. Is this a part of the treasures of darkness, or buried treasure? This hope in God is a golden treasure which often has to be fought for.

Emotional pain can produce great physical pain in our body. If we experience emotional traumas it often affects our physical being. Usually we don't know what to do with the bad emotional junk that comes our way. We might be verbally abused. We can have grief or loss we have not dealt with or a multitude of things that we can't handle. We often can not verbalize it and so push it down; we try and forget .This, I believe, is what happened to me.

Grief and emotional abuse took its huge toll. Year after year the physical pain in my body persisted. I did what I knew to do, forgive, pray but still I was overwhelmed with pain. It was hard to push through, to rise above the unending pain, to have joy in spite of it. It is a lonely path, no one else can really understand even when they want to. But it certainly kept me close to Jesus, the only one who understood and could really bring comfort. He didn't judge me when I seemed to lose hope for a time. But again and again I found that the Lord was close to me when my courage was broken and despair

tried to take over. I stood on the truth that I knew, Jesus really did love me. We can't rely on feelings but on truth.

Isaiah 50:10 says, *"who is among you who reverently fears the Lord...who walks in darkness and deep trouble and has no shining splendor...let him be confident in the Name of the Lord and let him lean upon and be supported by His God."* It seems to me "no shining splendor" must mean -no joy.

The treasure of hope can be very hard to come by when we are in the painful, difficult times and when all seems dark. Then I had to hold on to the truth; God is good and He loves me. My focus had to keep coming back to this. Hope in God is a huge treasure. I kept coming back and finding it again and again and declaring His truth into my situation. We have to walk through the fire of hard situations when we can't understand what is going on.

James 1:2-3 NIV *"consider it pure joy... whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance (endurance?)"* I really don't relish having these truths worked out in my life. My choice most often would be for an easy life.

Frequently my pain would go on for an extended period of time and I'd begin to fight against the lie that Jesus had forgotten me, that He didn't care. Then there would be a verse or a prophetic word from a friend which gave clarity once again, so I could go on. It is hard to measure the depth of despair and hopelessness or the depth of joy He brought. He is faithful.

It has been a hard and lengthy battle but this is faced by so many; mine is only one story. Often we battle through the difficulties not just for ourselves but for our family line--for the generations to come.

I once heard Pastor Bill Johnson (of Bethel church, Redding, California) explain, "we need to learn to live for a generation we may never see. Our choices affect those still to come." I had to choose not to think about and live just for what was easy in my life. My choices affected others.

But God can allow us to go into the 'lions den' or through the 'fire' not because we have done anything wrong but it has a use in our lives. Our Loving Father never causes sickness or accident, that comes from our enemy. But He will use the hard things and bring good out of them.

My Loving Father has given and given; family, strength in hard times, friends, valued work to do, responsibility to reach out to others.

There have been great battles for years; the battle with discouragement and then to come again into hope. I believe He tests our hearts asking if we will believe truth. A huge battle is to believe He is good. God is good!. All the time! We cannot judge Him by our circumstances.

I believe we earn some authority when we come through the fire with faith even when we can't understand. Then the choice is to love Jesus through it all with the wisdom and strength that He has given us.

Arthur Burk (Sapphire Leadership Group) has given me a different view of this, and has helped me to clarify things. He said when we face difficult situations ask "What benefit is there for the King in this situation? How can I endure this with the resources I have?"

I think this is what I've done, without using those exact words. In the midst of pain, without knowing what was going on I'd have to just declare my love to the Father, then trust He would use whatever difficulty arose and enable me to face it all.

When I say pain, in these situations it is not physical pain usually but hard situations we face. So we need to see difficulties in a new light and ask what is the value of this? How do we use it as a tool to develop who we are. Difficulty is not our master but it can help us grow-it can be a hope for others-it can enlarge our hearts so we then can be filled with joy.

Chapter 5 The Wonderful Years Since We Were Given Reunion

Our reunion illustrates some big truths about God. He is faithful. He is healer. He is a God of restoration. He is love. He is good. God is good and loves us even when our circumstances scream otherwise. His are the only words that are absolutely true and to be trusted. Trusting Him in the hard times is difficult but in the end brings peace and joy. We don't usually know when we are going through our time of testing.

Reunion brought with it a lot of opportunities for me. Some were things I'd never dreamed of or desired. After the book was released I had a lot of requests for speaking engagements. These were mostly around our area but a few from further afield. A Norwegian language version (*Hemmeligheten* Rex Forlag 1990) of the book came out and became an ongoing radio broadcast series. I was asked to share my story on radio in New Zealand and also had the opportunity to meet a lady there with a story like mine. There was a TV program in Northern Ireland. Writing the original book, *Secret Child* was far beyond what I thought I would ever do.

Life has also been busy over the years with a wide variety of activities. Times with our families and the grandchildren are very special. Creative pursuits have always occupied me. Quite a bit of travel has been realized. I helped coordinate the March for Jesus in Toronto for several years. Our large church has provided opportunities on the prayer ministry team and in the Healing Rooms and with a small prayer group that meets in our home. We have tried to give back also in other ways, visiting in the local nursing home, being a friend to international students and helping at a nearby food bank. It is a delight to give out of the abundance we have been given.

I've not done great exploits. In many ways God just wants us to live our lives well. We have to honour Him and others with the unique abilities we each have. We are all different and His calling on our lives is different. We need to be careful and not compare ourselves to others. Of course, that is easier said than done.

Friends have been a very valued part of our lives, they have helped in practical ways, prayed for us, laughed and shared many meals together. Life is made rich with the diverse relationships covering several decades. Because of moves and job changes some of these are seldom be face to face. Whenever we have celebrations, birthdays etc, we try and gather friends and family together. It is interesting how much there is taught in Scripture about the need to celebrate. God commanded Israel to set aside specific times and seasons to celebrate. So He must value relationships that are strengthened in this way.

Friends have stood with us through some very difficult circumstances as well as the times of fun. Often when biological family were far away those friends became 'family' to us. We have always enjoyed having both the married and single to be a part of our lives. We receive and learn and enjoy them all. This has been especially healing for me.

The ordinary things of life, such as tending and enjoying our garden and modest home, are also important to bring healing and keep us grounded. We have to treasure

the mundane also, life is not lived on the mountain top every day. The early days of reunion were certainly overwhelming powerful days of joy. The joy is still there but in a more everyday sort of way.

I have spent a lot of my life learning to come into real rest in Him. I've needed to learn to be in absolute dependence on Father God and to be led by the Spirit. I've learned to embrace who I am, flawed but still loved even when needy and broken. I am still learning.

This has been a story of a buried secret from the past. It is a story of restoration and healing. It is most of all a story of God's love. It is a story of a difficult childhood that has been made new. It is a tale which is not finished.

There has been a story or song line running through my life although I did not hear it. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong!"

The idea of restoration speaks to all of us. When something is lost we are delighted when we get it back. This is especially so with human relationships. If we have lost connection with someone we love and value it hurts severely. Then the subsequent reunion is so moving.

Luke gives us the well known Bible story of the Prodigal Son-which really is about the Forgiving, Loving Father. It is a picture of the love of God. It was the Father watching, looking longingly for the return of his wayward son. That is us. That is Our Father. He welcomes us back into His love. He has been forever longing for us as we went our own selfish way until one day we looked up and saw the love in His eyes for us.

If you go back to the book *Secret Child* you will see how the verse from Luke 15:24 spoke so movingly to me, "*my son who was dead has come back to life...he was lost and is found.*"

There is great richness in this story that shows each of us the love of our Heavenly Father. Joy and delight come when we are reunited with Him.

The prodigal son says, "Father forgive me" and the father's response--"*But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the festive robe of honor and put it on him and give him a ring for his hand and sandals for his feet.*" (the ring signifies sonship and family honor) The loving father restores his son into honour and relationship. Our Father longs to have us come home to Him.

We each need to know The Loving Father has the ring and the robe ready for us.

I am so grateful for...

William, my beloved husband and best friend, who has loved me through it all.

Ernest and Elizabeth, our two children, ever a source of wonder and a joy to be with.

Tom, a special gift from the Lord, who was given back and who also brought the delight of Jo, and their children into our lives.

Glen and Nita Rye, Tom's parents: God's answer in my time of need.

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