

Jessalyn

Pathway to Destiny

Tom Donnan



Although inspired by a true story, names of the characters have been changed. Names in this book correlate to any living or dead person, is purely coincidental and part of the authors imagination.

All scripture used are from the New International Version. Copyright @ and taken from Biblegateway.com

Jessalyn is:

© Copyright 2021 Tom Donnan Zoe Healing Center.

No portion of this publication may be reproduced, by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or any other, without permission from Tom Donnan. Zoe Healing Center.

This book is dedicated
To Jesus Christ

Jessalyn is labor of two years' work.
As you read this book you will
See God's inspiration and
Creativity.

One

1975

Sally could see the top of the head coming through. She reached forward to administer counter pressure. In a jubilant voice she said to Jen, “The baby’s crowning, page Dr. Roy.” Sally has been a delivery nurse for twenty years. She will tell you it never gets old, seeing this miracle of life. In the flow of time, in her career, she has cried at most births. That is how she welcomes each baby into the world. In a well of emotions, her heart felt expression is joy. She calls over to Jen to bring the instrument tray table closer and says, “Oh boy,” taking a breath, “The baby is on the way”.

Jen and Sally have been working together in the Labor and Delivery Department for many years. In their experience, it has conditioned them to be ready for every contingency. Most of the OBGYN Doctors preferred working with them. Being seasoned and anticipating every need, it made their jobs flow smoothly. In the daily routine there are schedules to keep, rounds to make, paperwork to fill out. Time is at a premium. In an occupation that seldom follows a timeline.

Like a choreographed dance, they flow through the motions preforming in time to the advent of life. Moving from being pregnant, then becoming mother and child. What experience has taught this team; expect the unexpected. The unspoken goal is the desire for every delivery to go without any hiccups. Lives are at stake. Responsibilities are felt, this is serious business to often looked at casually. In a blink of an eye things can go south. From ordinary to critical and everything between. Their minds work like a flow chart right out of the handbook. At each juncture they know the corresponding response to the deviated normal delivery. On occasion, the *out of the blue* scenario has seasoned them. Even when something new appears, contingency run through their minds as they tune in to the voice of the Doctor.

Sally loves her job. During the delivery she is all business. Comforting the mother during the process, giving direction as the contractions increase, attention to details, she is focused, until! There is something about laying the baby upon the mother’s chest that triggers her tears of joy. It is the only time,

her face seems to flatten but her cheeks rise just a bit, her eyebrows curl at the outer edge. It is her presentation smile as mother and child come face to face for the first time. Inwardly, she is moved in an expression of satisfaction to have contributed in this miracle. The fuss beings, how long is the baby, how much is the weight, how much hair do they have to work with and can a little girl wear a bow. Head to toe, in all their glory, they are viewed in awe.

Looking through the scrub sink window and into L&D, Dr. Roy can tell there is no need to rush. With his scrubbed hands raised; he pushes the birthing room door open with his right shoulder and is greeted with the smell of disinfectant. Surgery and labor and delivery suites share the same surgical floor. This layout is for expedience if emergencies popped up. In here, the inner sanctum, doctors were seen and at times acted like gods. It's their domain. Total responsibility rested upon them. They would bear the news of miracles or release a torrent of trauma?

Jen assists Dr. Roy in gowning up as Sally finishing cleaning the birth canal area for delivery, then moved on to examines Clara's legs in the stirrups one more time. Dr. Roy's first rule in delivering babies is extending compassion to the mother while taking part in this miracle of birth. That is, when all is going well. He steps towards Clara and Dr. Roy said: "Clara, you're almost done." He is a man of few words; state the facts kind of guy. Long on compassion; short on empathy. Moving to the end of the delivery table, Sally pushes away to make room for him. Fluid in motion, this team flows as a work in process. He sits on the stool; Jen moves to repositions the powerful lights that are fasten on the operating room wall. Then she moves the portable light stand, as she has learned, to accommodate Dr. Roy likes and dislikes. Everything is going well. Back at the tray table, Sally opens a package of four-by-four pads ready to deal with clean ups. She looks over at the baby warmer to make certain it is prepped and ready. Neatly folded, blue and pink blankets lay on the shelf below the warmer. Next, she fusses with Clara's position for her comfort more out of empathy then necessity. Endless contractions, the discomfort associated with giving birth and the obvious exhausted look upon her face. Although Clara can hear what's happening around her; the medication to bring on, what is called twilight sleep, leaves her very relaxed and in minimal pain. Knowing this Sally says to her: "It won't be long now Clara; you have done the hard work. I know you are sleepy, but listen for when we tell you to push, Okay sweetie?" Clara forces a slight nod to acknowledge her.

Anticipation rises as a new member of the human race is about to come into the world. The Doctor directs his voice towards Clara, in his soothing tone says; “Clara, I need one more good push, can you do that for me?” Turning to Sally he directs her to apply fundal pressure during the next contraction. Speaking again to Clara he says, “Good, good, the baby is arriving.” Dr. Roy delivers the head, and his thoughts switch away from a normal delivery. It is the cyanotic skin color of the baby that changes the tone in the room. He observes the facile muscle tone is flaccid. Dr Roy calls for Jen to move the light in closer as the last contraction begins. The fluctuation in his voice is noticed by the team. It’s not until the doctor sees the baby’s blue lips he knows. He calls to Sally, “It’s a code blue.” He slips his finger in the canal to see if the umbilical cord is around the baby’s neck, it’s not. Sally instantly picked up the phone and dialed zero. Dr. Roy said in his, second’s means everything tone; “Suction!” Jen gives him the bulb syringe. The body is delivered, and it is also flaccid, and the umbilical cord is not pulsating. He grabs the two clamps for the ambilocal cord and cuts it. Picking up the baby and walking towards the warmer, he stimulates it by wiping it off.

It is like an eternity to Sally until she hears; “Operator.”

“Pediatric Code Blue in L&D2 STAT” and she hung up the phone without hearing a response from the operator. Under her breath, Sally could be heard praying; “Please dear God, we need Your help”.

Phone operator Gwen hands are shaking as she looks up at the Doctors board to see who is in house. There is only one Neonatologist. Reaching for the activation switch for her headset mic she says: “Dr. Berger, code blue in L&D2, Stat” and she repeats, “Dr. Berger code blue L&D2 Stat.” The overhead paging system goes quite but the air of curiosity escalates throughout the hospital wondering what crisis’s is happening in L&D2?

Two

Clara's husband Bob, her parents and a couple from Church are in the L&D waiting room. Not dressed to impress gives tell-tale signs this baby chose the early hours for its time of arrival. The morning sun is beaming through the third-floor windows on this warm summer's day. Bob gets up out of his chair, walks to look out the window, exhibiting his nervousness. Mindlessly he gazes upon the beautiful skyline of Oklahoma City. With the sun as it's back lighting the skyscrapers are seen reaching for the heavens. His mind is worried over Clara being in labor since three o'clock this morning. This her third pregnancy, usually the delivery time shortened with each baby, rule of thumb but not cut in stone. Bob had thought, seeing she went right from the emergency room straight into the L&D that the birth was imminent. He is antsy, it seems to be taking longer this time. For an emotionally controlled man, his face now betrays him.

Wilma, Clara's mom has had her mothering instincts brooding for days in anticipation of holding her new grandchild, especially if it is a girl. She has the ideal grandmother figure. Slightly plump in baby holding places. From behind Wilma's chair, unseen by human eye's is an angel; he approached and stopped right behind her. The hospital overhead paging system crackled to life and throughout the hospital everyone could hear: "Dr. Berger, Code Blue L&D2, Stat". Without a pause, in a calm tone the operator repeats the message saying; "Dr. Berger, code blue, L&D2". The angel places his left hand on her shoulder and releases a message to her; "Pray for the child and for your daughter." Then he waits. There needs to be action to gain intercession. He has guided her before and knows she will, without hesitation, respond.

All the emotions drained out of Wilma's face. Within she begins to feel faint as she turned to Bob and said in a quivering voice: "That's for Clara and the baby, I am sure of it! We need to pray and pray now." Bob, being a Pentecostal Pastor took action and reached out to the others to hold hands and lead them in prayer. Bob paused, Wilma began to pray and said: "I have such a heavy burden on my heart, Lord be with them now, please." Bob quietly said; "Let's all just pray our own prayers and allow the Holy Spirit to

flow through us.” All six people earnestly sought out the help of Father God. Some paced the floor, lips moving, praying while others sat in quiet desperation awaiting the outcome.

“Stethoscope” Dr. Roy barks. Placing it to the baby’s chest he listens, repositions it and listens again. He says, “There is no heartbeat.” He gives the order; “start CPR,” and he returns to attend to Clara. Sally repeats: “No heartbeat and we are starting CPR” glimpsing up at the clock to see it is 9:07 am. Jen placed the mask over the baby’s face and squeezed the bulb once to Sally’s three heart compressions. You could hear Sally counting: “One, two, three and squeeze. One, two, three and squeeze.” Within minutes the code team is beginning to arrive, one after another. As the Dr. Berger walks in Delivery room he shouts: “What do we have”?

He has only a few more moments to be with this precious baby and wanting to make the best of it. Standing just beyond the hurried activities, up against the back wall, there he cradled a beautiful baby girl in his arms. Lovingly and gently, he swayed from side to side looking into her beautiful eyes. Through the wall steps the angels from the waiting room and together they enjoy this little one from God. They are not listening to the frantic motions of the team; they already know what the outcome will be. God is answering prayers. As if on cue, they look towards the baby’s body and listen to Jen telling the doctor; “three minutes with no heartbeat.” Dr. Roy and Dr. Berger are unsure how long the baby has been without oxygen. Jen continues: “CPR was started at 9:07 am.” Dr. Berger gave a nod and they continued resuscitation for another five full minutes. Dr Berger interrupts saying, “Stop” he tells the team. Looking down towards the baby, not wanting too, he is about to call it. Looking towards the clock to see what time it is, he pauses reluctant to say the words.

The angel approaches the body of this little one. Still holding her precious spirit in his arms he leans over and kisses her on the forehead. Gently lets her spirit drift back into her body. He places the tip of index finger in the center of her chest and a flash of power enters the baby. She takes a deep breath and bursts into a cry. Again, the angel reaches out and brushes his hand across her forehead and over her brain releasing healing and life. With his finger, he touches alongside of each eye releasing a gift for her. Throughout her life she will get glimpses into the unseen realm. Raising his voice, he pronounces; “You shall be called Jessalyn; one who can foresee.” As the angel steps back, he knows God will receive the Glory.

Bewildering looks are exchanged around the warmer in utter disbelief. For a brief second, they are stunned, having never experienced this before. They all knew the doctor was about to call the time of death. The tears of joy Sally expresses with each new arrival were tears turned to sorrow at the failed resuscitation. At the sound of the baby's cry, Dr. Berger places his stethoscope on her chest and says, "We have a heartbeat" and the pediatric team now erupts into activity. If it were not for the total attention given to the child, they might have noticed Sally stifling back sobs.

No longer needed to help the code team Sally returns to assist Dr. Roy. Intuitively she reaches for the movable light as she sees he is trying to locate the source of blood coming from the Uterus. Changing his position multiple times there is a sense of, almost panic, in his motions. There is a steady stream of bright red blood flowing from Clara. The delivery table and floor have pools of it. Dr. Roy's shoes are now redder than they are white. There is no doubt. This is a delivery gone wrong.

"The placenta is not detaching; it's imbedded in the uterus wall" Dr. Roy said. He goes on to say; "Sally call the surgical team and tell them they are needed in OR3 for a Hysterectomy." Picking up the phone this time, only the speaker end of receiver is near her mouth. She presses an intercom button and speaks into the OR ready room and says, "Surgical team to OR3, STAT." She repeats it; "Surgical team to OR3; STAT."

In a raised voice, Dr. Roy says to Jen, "Call down to the blood bank and get two units of blood 'O positive', up here, STAT."

"Yes Doctor," She says.

He goes on to say: "Sally, get Clara ready to be transported to OR3."

Clara is too exhausted to respond in any manner. Yet she knows it is very serious and all of her thoughts are for her baby. She hears everything that is happening, and it is her worst nightmare. All kinds of things are going on around her and she desperately wants to scream out; "How's my baby, I want to see my baby!" She struggles to listen as life is ebbing away from her. She has lost too much blood. From behind her she hears a voice saying, "You shall be called Jessalyn."

The intensity of activity around the baby has calmed down. They have her cleaned up and monitoring her heart rate. A tiny heart monitor is on her

now and it is showing one hundred and twenty-four beats a minute. Dr. Berber grabs his stethoscope and listens. He says: "Sounds healthy and normal at the moment." He gives the order sending to the baby to the nursery. The nurses place her in the waiting Incubator with the heart monitor close to the baby's chest. The previous sad faces are now beaming with joy as they wheel her out of the L&D and into the next stage of care. What started out badly is now looking very good for this baby girl.

Clara's needs surgery. She must be taken into a sterile Operating Room with a surgical team to have the Hysterectomy. Knowing this Dr. Roy starts to strip off his gloves and gown, throwing them in a red bag container as he heads out the door. In the corridor, he grabs a new cap for his head and mask for over his mouth. Stepping up to the scrub sink outside of OR3, he looks through the window and into the surgical suite as the team prepares for his arrival. Things are not going as planned. Routine deliveries had become the norm, praise God. In these times of turmoil, he relies on Him more. Mentally he needs to make the transition to surgical protocols. He begins the five-minute hand scrubbing and opens the package. Placing his right foot on the floor pedal the water is on, taking the sponge he washes one finger at a time. The intercom system above him came to life: "Cleaning staff to L&D2."

The door to L&D2 opened as the transport team has Clara on a gurney, Dr. Roy glances over his shoulder as she goes by. He is in a rush to save her life, however, for her safety he must complete the full five-minute wash. You could hear the sink foot pedal pop against the stop. Dr. Roy, arms bent at the elbow, hands raised, pushes the door open with his hip. Waiting for him is the nurse to assist him, first the gown, next the blue gloves and then the outer latex gloves followed by eye protection. He is ready.

He calls out: "Is everyone ready?" Each part of the team answers yes. The blood he had called for is now hanging on the iv pole and flowing in the pick line. Clara had lost too much blood in the delivery room. Dr. Roy was concerned about her bleeding out. He knows she is exhausted. He knows time is everything.

The angel's steps through the wall and up to the operating table. He places his right hand very near to Clara's left side, near to where the doctor is now standing. As he places his hand upon her side, he releases strength into her soul in order for her to survive this procedure. Again, he releases strength and knows she is now strong enough to make it through. Addressing

the operating staff, with words they will not hear, the angel says; “God’s favor be on each of you.”

Jen walked into the changing room where Sally is already in the process of getting new scrubs off of the rack. Jen says, “I’ve seen it all now. There is no better way to say it other than that baby was raised from the dead.”

“I already believe in miracles” Sally said, and she goes on to say, “I have seen some take place at church on rare occasion, but if I did not see this with my own eyes, to witness it from beginning to end, I would have a hard time with believing this story.”

“That delivery is going to be one I will never forget.”

“Jen, you know, after all these years, I’m a softy. I was choking back the sobs while the code team worked on the baby. Then, when I saw and heard that first cry, for a second I lost it.” They both looked in the mirror, checked their hair, stepped through the door and back to work.

Dr. Berger walks into the L&D waiting room and asks: “Who is here for Clara?” All six of them stand up. Bob tries his best not to look panicked. As a pastor he has been in many dire situations to aid and comfort people. It’s different when it is your wife, your child. He says, “I’m her husband, what’s going on?”

“Things are very serious. Your baby girl was born dead.” This initial shock hits Wilma like a charging long horn steer causing her to fall back into her chair. He goes on to say, “All of our attempts at resuscitation failed. Just as I was about to call the time of death, she gasped for a breath of air and Her heart began beating. We hooked her up to a heart monitor and observed her until we were convinced, she was stable. She is now in the nursery.” Wilma gasps. Continuing he said, “We know she was without oxygen for up to five minutes. I’m sorry to say there may be brain damage, we don’t know at this point”. They are too stunned for words. Dr. Berger takes a slow breath to say, “Clara is experiencing heavy bleeding. Dr. Roy is now doing a Hysterectomy to save her life. I am sorry to bring you bad news.” Looking right into Bob’s eyes he says, “However, your baby girl is alive. She is a miracle baby. All of our attempts to revive her failed but God saw fit to intervene.” Smiling, he said: “We will let you know when you can see her. Dr. Roy will be out to speak to you as soon as he finishes the operation.”

Emotional shock came over them like a wet blanket. The outer world didn't exist in the moment as they all individually scramble in their minds on how to respond to this news. It's bad news, good news and unknown news rushing through the gamut of possibilities. As the Doctor leaves the waiting room it becomes silent. Bob leans forward as if he has been punched in the stomach. Wilma looks pale and tears well up in her eyes. At her age hearing bad news is hard. Grandpa Harry looks shaken for a tuff old bird. Wilma and Harry lived through the great depression, WWII, the Korean conflict, Kennedy assassinations, Cuban missile crisis and stringent challenges of a Texas life. Their seasoned, experienced, conditioned and all of it flew out the window because it hurt the most when it's your baby who is pain, in trouble. Bob goes into survival mode, his best defensive safeguard, he shuts down, he doesn't feel. The friends from church are without words. It hasn't occurred to them yet; God has been in control all along. Coming out of his mental stupor, Bob thinks, *one more hurdle; a successful operation for Clara and it will be alright*. They all sit there in silence, in their own thoughts, not knowing what to say. Often people will think about past family experiences or that of close friends. But this is a first in recent family history. Placing their faith in God is what they know and that is what they are doing. Composing himself, Bob says a short prayer for all to hear; "Father we trust in You and we know You work all things out for good." Harry grips the chair arms with both hands and stares mindlessly forward. The waiting is excruciating.

Returning to the waiting room, the angel steps up to Wilma once again, placing his hand upon her shoulder; he whispers into her mind, "Everything is going to be Okay!" She turns to Bob and the others and says: "I feel it; I know everything is going to work out. God is in control." With the words of her mouth, she declares; "There will be no brain damage, no physical problems with the baby. The hand of God is upon this child. Clara will fully recover from her operation and live a long and healthy life. God has answered our prayers." Bob knows when his mother-in-law has heard from God and he instantly takes comfort in her words. Faith wells up in their hearts and all begin to praise to God.

Three

“Okay, let’s close her up” Dr. Roy said to the team. The nurse hands him the needle holder and forceps. She then opens the suturing package as he reaches out to grab it with the holder pulling it out. He closes the inner layer and moves onto the outer layer of tissue. Within minutes the Anesthesiologist begins to bring her out of unconsciousness. The gurney is brought in to transfer Clara for her ride to the recovery room. The technician detaches the equipment from her except the mobile monitors that will go with her. The team was breathing easier. They nearly lost both the mother and child during the delivery. Dr. Roy steps away from the table removing his gloves and unties his surgical gown. The scrub nurse says, “Let’s get her on the gurney, all pull at once on three.” In one swift move Clara was on the gurney. Over the surgery intercom comes; “We need cleanup in OR3.”

In a brisk stride, Dr. Roy enters the waiting room and says: “Clara’s family?” Bob leaped to his feet and asks in a now clearly panicked voice; “Is she okay?” Pulling a chair over to be in a group he said, “There is a lot to say, please sit down.” He took a breath and began. “Clara had a very rare development in her uterus called Placenta Percreta. The placenta is to be attached to the uterus wall in a normal way. However, the placenta sent deep roots into the tissues in the uterus and attached to it. As the baby was being delivered a placental abruption took place; meaning part of the placenta separated from the uterine wall seriously decreasing the flow of blood to the baby through the umbilical cord. The good news is it was only a few minutes before she was delivered, and the Pediatric code team was able to resuscitate the baby again. What complicated the delivery further, there was a lot of blood loss coming from the tear in the uterus. The only way to save Clara’s life was to do a Hysterectomy.” He took a second to let that sink in and then continued as he could see the expressionless faces waiting for him to speak. “Clara had a lot of blood loss and we needed to give her two pints of blood.

From there the surgery went well without further complications. She had a Hysterectomy and will not be able to have any more children. Do you have other children he asked.” Bob replied; “Yes we have two boys.”

“You now have a little girl.”

“We are praising God. When we heard the code on the PA system, we all started praying for them.”

“I believe God heard your prayer in there. It could have gone much differently. Give us one more hour to get Clara in her ICU room and comfortable. You can all go to the nursery and see the baby now.”

Choking back the tears, Bob reached out to shake his hand as Wilma stepped closer and gave him a hug. Relief started to pour over all of them in waves as they were choking back sobs. Our human emotions are spiritual in their makeup. Every person responds differently to good and bad news. Right now, Clara’s family and friends are hearing bad and good news at the same time. Understanding how close they came to losing both Clara and the baby hit them like being kicked by a horse. A near miss is still emotionally difficult to handle. Then there is the wild swing in knowing they are both going to be alright. In their hearts is gratitude towards God for His help, it is sinking in they experienced a divine intervention. Together they moved towards the nursery. Their voice could be heard, in excited chatter, as they openly talk about what God had just done. In the town of Trinity where there is a church on every corner, this testimony will circulate. People here love God stories. Right now, they knew that they knew God had intervened.

Stepping up to the glass window the nurse rolled over the incubator for all to see. Their faces changed from grave concern, from their earlier emotional roller coaster, to expressing wonder and joy at the birth of this miracle baby. Lingering at the window grandma took in all of the baby’s features she could see. Rosie cheeks, alert eyes, perfect little nose and short brown hair. A beautiful baby girl wrapped tightly in a pink bundle. No one seem to be concerned about the heart monitor beside the baby. News came

that only Bob would be allowed to visit Clara. The rest of them would have to wait until she was stronger.

Before going into ICU, Bob called home to talk with his sister, she is watching the boys. He filled her in on all the details. As he entered Clara's room, he whispered a simple prayer thanking God and asking Him to bless his wife with everything she will need to recover. Above her head were all kinds of monitors displaying information. Intimidating as they were, he stood next to the bed, sweeping her hair to side of her face in a rare expression of affection. His heart was dying to say the words he is unable to speak. Still, he choked back sobs stifled in his throat. Uncommon tenderness she would have wanted to feel. However, she was asleep, so he pulled a chair next to her bed and waited. Tears welled up and rolled down his cheek in a momentary loss of control. Being raised in a long line of Cherokee Indian men, expressing emotions was seldom seen. Having the Holy Spirit, being Born Again, Christ in his life brought Godly change beginning to break old molds. It was dawning on him, the realization he almost lost her. How deeply he wants to share His feelings, but he wasn't raised that way. He expresses his love for her in other ways. If ever there was a need for heart-to-heart expressions, it was today. He was feeling the tug, but could he break the mold?

Two hours went by and Clara stirred awake. First groggy, then becoming coherent. She asked: "Is the baby okay?"

"Yes, a wonderful baby girl; you have your girl Clara."

"Bob" she said a serious tone, then continued; "During the delivery I could hear everything. I was frantic as I heard the words to call a code. I knew things were not right. After that I was totally asleep."

"Clara, did they tell you? You had a Hysterectomy. Honey, they did it to save your life. Everything will be Okay." Turning her head slightly, with great effort, she wanted to see her husband's expressions. She laid there silent, too exhausted to grieve now. She was spent, too much to handle. A nurse suddenly entered the room and looked at her vital signs, took her blood

pressure and then said; “Clara, I will bring your baby in now,” and she left the room. Bob said: “I called home and the boys are fine, so don’t worry about them. My sister is going to stay a few more days to help us around the house. It is going to be a while before you are back on your feet.” Walking into the room, a cheery voice said: “And here she is, your beautiful baby girl.” Two faces went from burdens and concerns to full grin smiles. “Now Clara, I’m only going to give you a minute with her; Then Bob if you would hold her after that?” She placed the heart monitor on the baby’s tummy, gently lifted her up and set her in Clara’s arm, a good fit. “I’ll be back soon for her, “and she left the room.

Bob stood next to them and asked; “What shall we name her?”

“Let’s name her Jessalyn.” At this moment Bob would agree to anything. Being overwhelmed in love and emotion, he wanted to please her. In his mind he is thinking: *We do not have anyone with that name on either side of the family. I don’t even know a person with that name.*

“Jessalyn it is. What do you think about the middle name of Mikelle? It means Gift from God.” Reaching out her hand towards Bob she says, “Jessalyn Mikelle it is.”

Standing nearby was Jessalyn’s guardian angel; to be with her through her life. He understood the call that was upon her life and would assist her to walking in it. He thought of scriptures in the book of Job, knowing life is full of troubles and hard work. Life can scar the human heart and turn it bitter. Sin is ever knocking at one’s door. However, it is the pure in heart shall see God and this is his goal for her. Beside him appears the angel who has been ministering to the family. He has come to tell him he has been called by Gabriel and must return to heaven. They share and unspeakable joy of laboring for the Kingdom of heaven, here on earth. In a flash of light, he was gone.

Four

The miraculous birth of Jessalyn, set her life on a path to sojourn towards God's destiny. Day to day life in the world looks totally different than her spiritual progress on the path. In her time of living life, before the age of reason, is the safety and freedom to be a child. In the earthly environment of her Christian parents, Kingdom knowledge is being imparted to her. Like a sponge she took it all in and flourished. On the spiritual path, well, it is more of experience. For a child, it is the joy in the moment. The day came when the path appeared before her.

Odd how it may seem, walking in the spirit and by the Holy Spirit is invisible to our eyes and mind in the world. However, with the eyes of her heart she experiences the path. Surrounding her at the moment are wonderful fields of beautiful flowers and ankle high grass. She is wearing an adorable dress with silk bodice and delicate lace on her shoulder and waist. It was a full bright yellow tulle skirt with lace design near the bottom. Wearing white anklet sox with a red tulip at the top, her outfit is finished off with a pair black shoes with a single strap. Shimmering in the light, her sandy blonde hair is pulled away from her face by a beautiful flower ring braid in her hair.

Like a gazelle, Jessalyn loved to skip. From one bed of beautiful flowers to another, she looked at all flowers to the smallest detail. The range in colors is bigger than the biggest box of crayons. A suddenly appeared in her life. The first, which will become, a lifetime of suddenly's. Those moments when God opens a door, window, or a path for His Child. Preoccupied, twirling, arms out, face looking into the pale blue sky she hadn't notice what was taking place in the center of the field. There, a circular area connected to a path. Jessalyn has never noticed it before. True to her nature, she had to investigate. Her guardian angel is sitting cross legged in the grass facing the west looking towards her future. For years he has delighted in guarding her. Now, he watches her with interest noticing her time of moving forward is near. Ever introspective, she observes before she speaks. Then it will be a torrent of questions.

Innocence has an expiration date; sometimes the loss of innocence comes sooner and for others it is later. Right now, at the age of seven, Jessalyn is in the essence of a sweet childhood. Skipping near the circle she stops short. Intuitively she knows if she steps into the circle, she will be leaving this place of splendor. She steps right up to the edge of the circle, careful not to allow even the tip of shoe touch the line. From there she takes a good look. But it is time for her to grow. The angel stands up in preparation and Jessalyn looks into his eyes, smiles and steps confidently onto the path. With a brisk walk she swings her arms high with each stride forward. Nearing the edge of the field, the only place she has ever known, she pauses. What lay before her is the unknown. Walking back to the angel she comes along side and grabs his hand. Together they will walk the path into her future.

In the distance, not far ahead is a grove of trees. Tall mature trees line both sides of the path. As they reached the center of the grove, Jessalyn notices a round circle like the one she stepped into at the beginning, only smaller. Reaching the circle, the angel stops and sits down cross legged on the path. “Now isn’t that just fine” she said to the angel. He told her; “Here is your first stop before you are born into the Kingdom of God. When you hear the words, don’t just think about them; let them enter your heart.”

“What words;” She asked.

The Sunday school class is alive with the sounds of children. Clara saw it was time to begin and had the children sit in their chairs. Once they were all quiet and looking at her, Clara led them in singing Father Abraham. It is one of their favorites. “Wonderful Children, you sang that song with all your heart. Now let me tell you a bible story;” Clara said. Picking up her bible she opened it too the book of Matthew chapter nineteen. She read aloud verses thirteen thru fifteen. “Then the people brought the little Children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuke them. Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.” (NIV)

“Well class, do you think Jesus loves little Children;” she asked them. All at once they answered causing Clara to smile. She went on to say; “We can have Jesus live in our hearts; do you know that?” Some of them shook their heads yes and others said yes out loud. “Would anyone like to ask Jesus

to come into their heart today;" she asked the class? Only one child responded, her very own little girl. She choked up a bit catching her by surprise, softly she said: "Okay Jessalyn, come on up here and we will pray." Clara told her to repeat after me and she shook her head in a manner saying yes. Clara begins: "Dear Father God, I thank you for Jesus and how he died for me and my sins. I tell you Father, I am a sinner, please forgive me. Please Jesus come into my heart and life, I want to live for you. Amen." For those few moments as they prayed in front of the class, as it was always done, it is the only time the children are quiet.

What an honor for Clara to lead her little girl in praying the prayer of invitation. Her heart was overjoyed. At the end of their prayer, she gave Jessalyn a longer than normal hug, one of those adult squeezer hugs and kissed her on the forehead. "Let's tell your father after church" she said sending her back to her seat. Jessalyn's heart was bursting to tell her dad. She is his little princess. Being the focus of his attention is the center of her universe. Upon hearing the news, Bob was ecstatic. He swept her up into his arms, spinning her around causing her legs to fly outward. A big kiss on the cheek brought a moment to remember. Every pastor relish's when the lost become saved. But this is his little girl. It's personal. His momentary softening of his heart is noticed by Clara. She prays it would happen more often.

Jessalyn glows in the love of her parents. Her brothers were another matter. Together they plotted teasing pranks. Good hearted fun. Exploiting the tickle zones, messing her hair, which she detested and the occasional chase through the house ending with mom yelling for it to stop. It was never too rough, in their eyes. She loves dressing up and being a girly girl and in the next moment she will be the tomboy fending off her brothers. Living in Oklahoma brings the city and the country together. One of the few places where dresses and cowboy boots go together. However, today there is a difference. In her heart is a glow, a love deeper than that of her parents. She is feeling the love of her heavenly Father.

Twirling on the path Jessalyn said; "I feel different. You know, clean. I know Jesus loves me and all the little Children and I love Jesus;" she told the angel. "My whole heart is filled with Him;" she went on to say. Placing her

hands on her hips she said, “Come on angel, let’s see what’s next.” Feeling the excitement of adventure, she takes her first step as her outfit changes to meet this new mood she is experiencing. Now wearing a blue dress with small white sailboat pattern. It stops right at her knee. With each step her dark brown cowboy boots rock back and forth. Leading the way, she resumed her quick gate and high joyful swinging of her arms as they sail off into her future. She starts to sing Jesus loves the little children.

It was only a short distance (one month) when she saw another spot on the path and ran to it. Taking a jump, she landed on it with both feet as if she was playing hopscotch. Turning to look at the angel; waiting for him to catch up. Placing her hands on her hips once again she said, “Come on, I’m too excited to wait.”

“Waiting is an important lesson every child of God must learn.”

“Okay, but not this time; alright?” Quickening his step, he reached the spot and sat down crossed legged and looking into her eyes and said, “Here is where you seal your decision to live your life with Jesus. Be bold. Tell them what is on your heart.”

Jessalyn’s father was closing the service when he said, “We have a baptism today. My daughter Jessalyn is getting baptized. Let me get her ready.” With that he disappeared through the door and the congregation could hear the sound of water being splashed. Once in the tub, Pastor Bob opened the sliding windows for everyone to see. Which will be a challenge; Jessalyn will barely be able to see over the bottom edge of the windowsill. Bob is ready to help her but knowing his daughter she is going to want to stand on her own even if it means she has to stand on her tiptoes. Turning towards the stairway he called his miracle daughter to come into the water. Nervously she took the first step and felt the water is lukewarm. She thought *this is better than being cold, but I was hoping for very warm water*. Standing in front of her dad, he had her turned towards the people and asked her if there was anything she would like to say. She nodded yes. In her little girls voice she said: “I love Jesus. When my mom prayed with me and I invited Jesus into my heart, I felt very good inside. I know if Jesus did

it for me, He can do it for you.” She turned to her father and a joy in his heart brought a flush in his cheeks. He has had the honor of baptizing his two boys, now his little girl. He said, “Jessalyn, with your commitment of faith, I now baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” She held her nose like her brothers told her to do just before she went totally under the water. She rested on her father’s arm. She opened her eyes like she does in the swimming pool and saw her father looking down on her through the distortion of the water. His expression of love for her was clear, in the water or out of the water. The congregation broke out into applause. Clara clapped so hard her hands hurt.

Returning to the spot on the path she talked with the angel about how good it feels to be risen in Jesus. Looking at him she said: “What’s next?”

Five

Onward she walked swinging her arms and twirling on the path. As she moved forward, she grew in height and aged one year, she is now eight. Then the next spot came into sight. “Look angel;” she said. “There is the spot.” Over this last year, Jessalyn had seen wonderful things and learned about her heavenly Father. In her mind she thought; *what could be next?* Upon reaching the round circle in the path, the angel sat down and crossed his legs. Jessalyn smile and asked, “What is going to happen here?”

“You are going to meet someone. He is the best friend you will ever have.” Walking around to the far side of the spot, gazing into the angel’s eyes, she said, “Here we go.” Having the face of wonder and excitement, she stepped into the spot.

Busy in the kitchen preparing dinner for five, the house is filled with the aroma of momma’s home cooking. Thoughts of her children’s future is running in her mind when she stops. She calls out. “J honey.” It is the way Clara calls her when no one else is around. Those times they move into girl talk. Jessalyn leaves her bedroom and enters the kitchen to see her mom has left herself vulnerable to a surprise prank. Clara is up against the counter, looking out the window and into the back yard, Jessalyn tiptoes up behind her. Seeing her mother in a daydream, standing motionless, Jessalyn thrusts her hands up on each side of her waist and says, “Boo” knowing she is going to jump out of her skin. It works every time; it never gets old. Once she has regained a normal heartbeat, Clara says; “That just took years off my life child!” Composing herself to why she called this seemingly innocent child in the first place, she says; “Now that Jesus is in your heart, I think it is time for

you to pray and ask to be baptized in the Holy Spirit.” Clara has watched her little girl grow. She loves the way J will asks question in the quest to understand. Plus, her daughter has a spiritual destiny. But today there are no questions. Very strange. Clara’s thoughts for her daughter are *What better way for her to reach that goal than the filling of the Holy Spirit empowering her.*

Getting out the mixer, Clara whips the boiled potatoes into mashed potato’s adding scoop of butter and a pinch of salt. It’s her home recipe for how the boys love them. “J honey, do you have any questions?” she asked.

“Yes, when is dinner going to be ready? I’m reading the book I checked out from the library and it is due in a couple of days.” Clara looked up at the clock and said, “At 5:15” to where Jessalyn turned and headed back to her book. So much for the heart-to-heart conversation she thought was going to happen. J saw it another way, a rite of passage. She has heard her father talk about the baptism in many sermons. Called for people to come forward to receive Him. But she would be mortified to go up there.

Their mother and daughter relationship are solid. Jessalyn has total trust in her mom. She has never misled her. Besides, she is her Sunday School teacher. Excited to believe there is more to this new life in Jesus, that her mother thought it was time, each night, during her nightly prayers, she asked for the Holy Spirit. She had seen it happen at church. How people, grown up started to speak with sounds no one understood; the gift from God called speaking in tongues. She would die; be absolutely mortified to receive the Holy Spirit in front of others. It was one thing to speak to people when she was baptized. Speaking in unknown tongues was more then she could take during church. She thought; *If God was going to bless me with that gift; He can do it when I am in my bedroom.* Clara’s anticipation is that the back door is going to fly open, two sweaty boys are going to throw their sports bags on the floor in front of the washer, rush into the kitchen to poach some food before she shooed them away. Like clockwork, she will hear the sound of car door close. It is a joy of her heart. Meeting the needs of her family. Wiping her hands off on the sides of her apron, one more detail and dinner will be ready for when Bob comes home. Depending how diner goes tonight. Like

most meals, her time of making a meal is over in minutes. There are times she wonders if those boys are even stopping to breath between bites.

After school one day, in her room, Jessalyn's thoughts drifted back to the Holy Spirit. Thinking about Him brought her a surprise; she felt a wind sweep into the room and the feeling of electricity around her. From within her chest, she felt Him well up. Startling at first, it is the depth of the love that calmed her down. Then it happened. He, the Holy Spirit took control of her tongue and she began to speak in words she didn't understand. Frightened at first; the strange sensation of speaking when she didn't tell her mouth to do it. She clasped her hands over her mouth, and it stopped. As soon as she tried to say something it was back. Running out her bedroom door and into the kitchen; she ran up to Clara and threw her arms around her mother. Tears in her eyes; not sure why she is crying as soon as she tried to speak Clara understood. Now she wrapped her arms around Jessalyn and told her; "This is the baptism in the Holy Spirit honey. It's alright. Let Him speak through you as long as He wants too. His words are prayers going up to Father God for you." *Okay*, she thought; *I'm going to do it*. She could only think it because she couldn't say it, so, she just let Him go. Walking around the kitchen table like she was reciting a prayer, she let the Holy Spirit flow. He went on for several more minutes as she kept eye contact with her mother. Even though she could not speak with her mouth legibly, she spoke with her eyes. Her eyes questioned and in return her mother sent a reassuring smile, as joy welled up in Clara's heart. Then it stopped. However, the intensity of the love didn't. She had stepped into a supernatural life with Jesus.

"Do you know who I met angel" she asked. "I'll tell you. I met the Holy Spirit. I'll tell you something else; I know I will never be alone. He will be with me." Like an artesian well, she bubbled up words to describe her baptism in complete details. "I am telling you angel, the words only stopped because I ran out of breath. Gulping more air, clear as can be, I spoke. You know what, I am glad that God understood because I do not have clue."

Jessalyn grabbed his hand, tugging on it so they could get to the next adventure. The message is for them to walk and talk. Standing up they faced the west and the future. In her newfound excitement her outfit changed. Wearing her favorite type of blue jeans and the pant legs were tucked inside her cowboy boots, the way she liked them. When it came to her boots she thought; *what's the sense of wearing boots if you can't see the top of the boot where all the beautiful design is?* Her blouse is a pure white and little red rose on the lapel. The angel knows this is a mountain top time. His expression is pleasure, to be a witness of his charge, growing in Christ. He reveled in the moment and her sharing with him all the details. Again, she said; “Did I tell you I spoke in another tongue? I tell you it would really be nice to know which language it was. I’m going to trust God on the prayer though.” She went on to say; “It’s like I feel him with me right now. I feel like my life is changing and I like it.”

The trees alongside of the path ended and they walked out to what looked like a clearing. There is green grass and outcroppings of flower, dotting their view that brought a fond memory of the place where they had begun. In a brief flash she realized how much she had grown. However, it was not a clearing at all but a plateau. Nearing the edge all Jessalyn could see is the horizon; until they reached the edge. The view is breath taking. Drawing in a deep breath she looked at the angel in wonder. “It is beautiful” she said.

Just to the right is an ornate bench. It is made up of three parts. Like bookends, carved figures of angels, looking outward, with their wings spread like that of a mother bird over its hatchlings. The seat shimmered in a mother pearl finish. When you looked at it the color changed in flashes and returned to the bright white pearl. As if on cue, Jessalyn juttet over to the bench and sat down. The angel did the same. They would take time to savor the moment. As far as the eye could see, there were hills and valleys sculpted below the rim. Turning to the angel Jessalyn asked: “When you look out there, what do you see?”

“I see the wonders of God’s gift to man.”

“How can you see all that? All I see is hills, trees, grass, bushes and spots of color where the flowers are growing.”

“Look between the hills, do you see the valleys?” He went on to say; “Those are special seasons in a person’s life.”

“Seasons!” she said using a questioning tone. “Like a change in weather?”

“No, down there in the valleys are seasons of character. Look to the left, do you see that valley on the far end” pointing his finger in that direction.

“Yes.”

“There is a ravine. It is the pathway to becoming more like Jesus.”

“Good, let’s get started.” With that they both got up from the bench. Just as they were about to take the first step downward, letters appeared over the path. The top line read: “Descending Jacob’s Ladder” and below it was: “Thirty-Nine Switchbacks.” On the third line it read: “Take time to enjoy each changing perspective.” Turning to the angel Jessalyn asked: “What does that last line mean?”

“When we get one third of the way down Jacob’s ladder, I will explain it to you.”

“Okay then,” being a bit put off by his answer. She thought *this must be one of those times to learn patience’s*. Quickly she saw this part of the trek is like no other. With each switchback you had the inner wall, which gave her a sense of safety. Then there was the outer edge and the full expanse of the canyon beyond. Some turns had nothing but open space becoming a bit of a challenge. Up to now there had been no essence of danger. But one wrong step and Jessalyn could fall to the valley below. This heightened her feelings of adventure and she liked it.

Once, where the path was nearly flat, she stopped and stepped right up to the edge to take a good look down. “Angel” she said. “Look down there.”

Now side by side she went on to say: “Doesn’t the path look like a flowing ribbon? See how it flows one way and then another. I can see where we are going.” With renewed enthusiasm she resumes the trek downward. On turn 12 and just ahead appeared is a rest area complete with a bench, turn thirteen. It is exactly the same as the first one up top except the angel’s wings are open halfway. No longer are they in the covering position. Jessalyn walked straight over to it and she sat down on the far side, she twisted to watch the angel. “Well,” she said. “It is time to tell me all about perspectives.”

He couldn’t hold back his smile of approval. Seated next to her, he raised his right arm and pointed out into the expansive canyon below. He said: “Notice how the valley below is growing bigger in your view?”

“Yes.”

“It wasn’t like that up on the top of the plateau. It was hard to grasp. Now, you have experienced the first third of the canyon. You know it by seeing it close up and felt it as you progressed. Now you know how each switchback is unique. It is in your memory. Everything we went by you were able to gain the feel and knowledge of it. But look out there now. It is so huge we have yet to grasp the feel of the next part of the ladder. We can see the ribbon like path yet to come. Now look back and tell me what you see.” Jessalyn pivoted on the bench but couldn’t see much so she got up and changed her position. Then she said: “It looks like a straight wall from here, but I know there is a trail there. I just can’t see it.” Then she noticed the variation in the color of the canyon rock near her and the color change of the rock above. Curious, she turns and looks at the valley below to see the lush green color. Turning again, she now noticed the rock layers. The angel took great delight in all of her facial expressions. They went from blank inward thoughts, to wondering and then she said: “I can see where we are going, but I know where we have been.”

“That, Jessalyn, is perspective.” Something welled up within her. She was growing intellectually, gaining new knowledge and she found it very satisfying. Just a second ago she was anticipating her lesson. Now she understood it. It was all about the knowing. And with that, a smile came to

her face. Abruptly standing up, turning, she said: “Angel, it’s time to go.” Grabbing his hand, giving it a tug towards the direction of the path, he stood to his feet.

Six

Descending, she started to call out the number of the switchback. On turn twenty-one, there is something that catches her eye. An outcropping, or a landing came into view that is several turns below. It is turn twenty-six and the next place to enjoy the view. But there was color down there. Not the shades of different colored rock layers, or the tan color of the path. This was pleasant to the eye. Flashes of memories came to mind of life up in the grassy knoll. How she loved to look at each flower detailing all of its design and colors. *How fragile they were* she thought. The surprise to this contrast took her focus off the path, quickening her pace to get to the new discovery.

Slowly taking in a breath of wonder, bending low, she approached. “Angel” she said softly and in excitement; “They are flowers.” In a semi-circle surrounding the sides and back of the bench; it is a small garden. First impression, they are all the same. Bunched at the bottom and in clumps, they grew up to a height of twenty-four inches. Each plant had many stalks in it and blades of what looked like green grass sweep out and bending over as they leaned outward. She observed each stalk. Out of the ground the stalk was green and about one quarter inch in diameter with green blades. Up nearing the upper third of the stalk were offset bulbs. At the top the bulb opened to reveal a delicate hair like bristle. The length of each bristle is one inch. Some stalks had all of the bulbs open, and others were in the process. The top and older bristle had the perfect hue of purple. She identified the color of lilac in the mid growth and lavender as it emerged from the bulb.

Without turning to look at him she asked: “Does this flower have a name?”

“It is called the Blazing Star” the angel said. Moving her face close, she breathed through her nose. Closing her eyes; she took a second breath as she experienced the smell of its pleasurable fragrance. Timidly reaching out her

hand, she cupped the flower and brushed against the hair fibers. They were very soft and fragile. She marveled at the beauty of this flower. Standing erect, Jessalyn moved to the front of the bench and sat down. She said: “Angel, this is a pleasant surprise.” He smiled as he sat next to her as they both looked over the flowers on the side taking note the angel figures supporting the bench had their wings fully opened. Eventually looking back out and into the canyon. It is a micro view of where they are to a macro view towards the future.

“Okay” she said. “Let’s talk about perspective.” He sat silently as she gathered her thoughts. She went on; “The way I see it, there are three positions to understand. First the future view. Look out over the canyon. We can see where we are headed. But we lack details and experience of the path. If we look back, we have detailed an experience from our gained memories. Then there is the present. Several of my senses are alive. I see the beauty and grandeur of my surroundings. I smell, with great delight, the fragrance of the flowers about us. I enjoy the company of your companionship and a place to sit and rest.” Startling her, she didn’t expect him to speak up, he said; “There is a balance with living in the present. Staying one place too long can bring problems. However, leaving a place too soon can rob you of God’s intended purpose.” Out of the blue; another lesson.

Feeling as light as a bird, she glided down the path making one turn after another until they reached the valley floor. Taking those last few steps, Jessalyn mused, *if I turn and start up the path will a sign appear?* It didn’t. It wasn’t as bright down here; the sun is being restricted by the high cliff. Taking the angels hand, they walked forward, until. Sprinting away and into the valley for her enjoyment and discovery were all types of plants. Manicured and perfect in every way; Jessalyn spun around in sheer delight. It is a sea of green. Below her feet is a short dense grass and easy to walk on. On the borders of the lawn are taller, wild grass varying in heights of six inches to several feet. Glancing back to see where he is, close by, she spied a narrowing of the tall grass until it revealed a path.

Carried on a light breeze were very pleasant fragrances. The aromas are coming from ahead. It is not until she reaches the plants lining the path that

she knows they are the source. “This is curious” she said. “There are no flowers and yet these plants smell sweet.” Pointing to the first plant she asks, “Does this plant have a name?”

“Yes, this plant is called Rosemary” he said. Leaping ahead to the next plant, she leaned over to smell its unique aroma. “What is this one?”

“Oregano” is his response. He went on to say; “You are walking in an Herb garden.” Examining each plant, she abruptly stopped when she heard the sound of flowing water coming from beyond the garden. Quickening her pace and the sound became louder and there it is, a babbling brook.

Before her, three feet across and inches deep, crystal clear water maneuver around smooth round stones and groupings of six-inch-high grass with white tassels on top. Each clump of grass danced with the movement of the water and the stirring of the wind. It is mesmerizing. She looked at the water as it got thick and as it squeezed between the rocks, then flatten out in the bed. It flowed in a rhythm choreographed by the rocks and plants as it descended on its way. The water babbled as it dropped from high places to low ones. The water turned white as air bubbles popped to the surface. Together they sat down and crossed their legs.

A smile emerged on the angel’s face as he saw Jessalyn’s inward reflection. He knew a question was about to be asked. “Angel” she said. “Why does this place feel good? The sound of the water, the moisture in the air, the motion of the water, the swaying of the grass brings a peaceful feeling.” First one, then the other cowboy boot came off followed by her socks. Scooting forward, two feet enter the water. “Ou” she said, “It is colder than I expected.” Rolling up her pant legs she stepped in and splashed the water with her feet. A little bit up stream is a rock big enough to sit on. Wearing a childish smile and looking back towards him, she said; “I like this place, it is fun. I could play here a long time.” Sitting on the rock in mid streams, Jessalyn moved her feet in and out of the current. Without looking up she asked: “Why do you think the angel’s wings were in different positions?” referring to the benches on Jacob’s ladder. It was not time for her to know, he responded,

“You will see.” They stayed there until contentment reached its peak. The valley held many wonders and surprises.

“Jessalyn!” A voice, called from the far end of the valley. Not sure what to make of this or if she liked hearing her name called, she looked into the eyes of the angel. It is a silent question of *should I be concerned?* He stood up answering her question by his motion, it is time to advance on the path. As much as she wanted to stay in this comfortable place, she spoke one word in a questioning voice, “Balance?” He grinned and she knew. There were so many questions upon her mind that were not answered yet. Like why does sound carry differently in the valley then up on the knoll? Or how does a breeze find its way to the valley floor when it is surrounded by rock cliffs? And, from up on top of the plateau many pathways could be seen but now that we are in the valley there is only one for me to walk on? Socks and boots on, focused towards the far side of the valley. Both hands extended outward from their side, as they brushed over the top of the tall grass. Jessalyn thought how soft it felt. Then, suddenly she stops. As it happens for her, absorbed information combines in an instant. Turning to look at the angel she asks, why is the Herb Garden here?”

“Each plant is a unique spice.”

“Explain to me how a spice matters here in the valley?”

“Each spice flavors food. It is called seasoning.”

“Angel, that is the second time you used season, but they don’t match. Up in the plateau you used it like weather changing to bring inner changes in our lives. Now you are using seasoning. What are you trying to teach me?”

“Changing seasons taste different to us. It can be a sweet taste in our experience or a bitter one we would rather not repeat. Some changes are spicy, or they can taste bland. All of them contribute to your growth.” There she goes again. Her eyes are open; her mind flashes with introspection yet to come to a conclusion. Turning forward, there it is, the path!

Lessons she thought. Always a lesson to learn. Right now, it is to discover who is calling me to move forward on the path. The canyon wall went from being off in the distance to a towering wall before them. Optically concealed until they are right upon it; a crack appeared in the wall where the path disappears around a bend to the right. It is a ravine where the rock walls sweep back and upward. As they approach a sign appear ahead of them and it read, The Narrows. Standing still, behind her is the comfort of the valley and all of its beauty. It filled her heart with joy, sweetness. At this moment she is feeling reservation and hesitation. The feeling of freedom she felt in the valley is now diminished to what will happen when she enters the Narrows. She is not sure if it is an intended lesson, but her extraverted emotions are now introverted. She is not sure why she is feeling and responding this way. Pivoting, looking up and into the angel's eyes is the unspoken question, *must we go in there?* She reflects on how the Holy Spirit is in her and with her, that she is not alone. Just before the narrow ravine walls and into the narrows, there was another circular spot. She had a confused look upon her face. She said to him; "It looks dark in there. I can't see where we will be walking. I can't see beyond that bend. Are you sure this is the way?"

"Yes Jessalyn, I will be with you every step of the way, but first you must experience this spot in your life." She does not like the sound of this. Reservation turns into apprehension. "Tell me why we need to go in there?" she asks. "God knows the plans He has for you. All that we have experienced is by the hand of God. All that is before us ends in your destiny. In good times and in bad, we need to hold on to Him and follow even when it is hard." She sits down on the path and thinks. *Patience, endurance, prospective, seasons, flavor, refreshing and discovery are the lessons she has already learned. It comes down to one point, trust. So far it has been easy to trust.* Now, looking into the ravine, it is another issue. *What do I know,* she reflects on? *She is not alone. She has a guardian. The Holy Spirit is with her. There is a plan to all of this, it is not random.* She decides to follow the path. Right in front of her is the spot. Once she looked for them with enthusiasm, now not so much. Looking into the angel's eyes, sadly she knew, she must step in it.

Everything about her said this is not going to be pleasant. However, she stepped into the spot anyway.

Seven

Warr Acre's and Trinity are suburbs of Oklahoma City that lies directly east. A bedroom community being made up mostly of three-bedroom ranch style homes. The neighborhoods are modest and comfortable. The blessings of God are upon this region. Life here revolves around Church, Family and Jobs. If you could see their lives and families spiritually, what would be seen is strong foundations built upon the rock.

The famous Route 66, running from coast to coast, comes through the heart of Trinity. The locals know it as thirty ninth street. All outward appearance, it is Main Street USA. A hub of activity where lives intersect. On the southside of the street are all the small-town stores. There are Clothing shops, mom and pop grocery's, the general store and the only drug store complete with soda fountain. Tom's Barber shop has its spinning barber shop pole out front. At a glance you can see if Tom's is open by the spinning pole. There is a front and rear entrance. If all the parking on 39th is full, parking is available in the rear of the building. Step through the door, Tom will grab his towel, pulls it back and whacks the chair with a snap to remove any hair, brushes off the arms and say: "Your Up." It is the one place where guys can come and shoot the breeze. Tom will ask: "Do you want a trim today?" and then call them by their name. Even the Nazarene University boys are open books to him. Just part of the job.

If Tom is true to his craft, he will make his patrons feel at ease. He will ask them what going on in their lives. Decipher whether he is to talk or be silent as his scissor clip a new man into view or as it is said, lower their ears. The familiar hum of the electric clipper or the sound of the hot foam machine are the tools of his trade. The closing acts, grabbing the leather belt and rapidly whipping the razor back and forth bringing it to a sharp edge. The finishing touch, a close shave on the back of the neck with a touch of the scented tonic applied with a mild slap on both sides of the neck. Years of

practice, Tom can juggle conversations between the chair and those who are waiting. He has two goals, a good haircut and keep the talk going. When the bantering is at its best; he knows he is doing a good job. Most talk in barber shops shift to serious matters like sports and politics. In Trinity, eventually the topic comes around to the Sunday Sermons and what they feel the pastor meant. Tom has a thriving business in part because the church folk always want to look their best and come in frequently.

On the west end of Main street is a new business, Sonic's Drive-in, a little ice cream competition in town and famous for their Malts and Shakes. Crossing over Rockwell avenue you will see the Children Center and rehabilitation Hospital, Southwest Christian University, Pentecostal Holiness Church and IPHC Ministries headquarter for world missions, are woven in amongst local business.

A diatribe of conversations has taken place, centered around the origins of Lucy's Beauty Salon. Located just a few blocks east of Tom's. The store front is not on 39th, it faces Peniel street looking east. What happens in the barber shop is cut and dried. In Lucy's it is another whole world. It is about transformation, ho hum to stunning beauty. Finger and toenails colored to fit the occasion. Facials to condition the skin. Teasing, sculpting, creating a hair style to meet the need in the environment of nonstop girl talk. It is when the reveal takes place, when all the pampering is done, the word Peniel comes alive, but adapted just a bit. The meaning of the name Peniel: Face of God. It's their Ester moment when they say they are ready to face the King on Sunday morning.

On the northside of center Main Street is a large Nazarene Church and Southwest Nazarene University Campus. Its origins are connected to Rev. C B Jernigan, founder of the Pentecost Holiness Church and co-founder of Trinity Oklahoma. From the northern boundaries for Warr Acres to the southern street of Trinity, people live out their Christian Faith. Everywhere you go, the top topic is last Sunday's sermon and by Wednesday it changes to what Pastor will be preaching next. However, if a conversation is taking place, and someone should say: "Bless their heart" its code for new gossip. Even in this spiritual atmosphere, sin grabs a hold of folk.

It seemed like it was getting worse day by day, the fighting. Right now, they are in the kitchen. Desperate to alleviate the emotional pain, she thrust her hands up over her ears in an effort to silence them. It didn't work, they were that loud, that meant they are yelling at each other. She ran. In her room, at the opposite end of the house, she nearly slammed the door closed. The world was crashing down around her and the safest place for her right now is her bed. She dove on it; already crying in deep sobs. The boys had their own way of coping with this; they walked out of the house. Their escape was to roam the streets of Warr Acres and Trinity and make their own excitement. Echoing across the times past is that of Wilma's saying, *Boys will be Boys*. These days, these times their pranks turned towards destructive mischief. It seemed to relieve some of their pain.

Nine years have passed since Clara nearly died. The second chance in life has become a double edge sword. The compelling drive to love and live life and the knowing I cannot go back to the way I was before. This is not unique to just Clara; it happens when people look into the face of their own mortality. You are never the same. Grasping to live life to the full begins a climb to live life without confining compromise. Liberty and control became a tug of war. To stay the same or be free to express, within the confines of vows before God. Clara has been wife and mother. Within stirs the call to be herself which is an oxymoron. Perpetually the caretaker, she is at a total loss on how to take care of herself. In that is where the struggle lies.

Jessalyn is now thinking about her parents fighting and she thought; *If her brothers fought like they are one of them would stop the fight. But who is there to stop them from fighting?* They used to work together as a couple, the nucleus of the family. The roles of authority and structure were intact. Now, it is everyone for them shelves. Bob is arguing and fighting to regain leadership. Clara resisted and knew the relationship is dead; Bob just hadn't caught up to the fact yet. Unspoken but not forgotten is the undealt with sin that has entered into the marriage. The sin does not need to be named it is the fact it is there that causes the damage. What is not helping? In the beginning, way they came together.

It is what happens when the oneness of marriage dies. Desperation to reestablish peace and unity is in the center of the angry words. It is the deep pain of a love that is ending. How can this be happening is the question on Jessalyn's mind. Her parents are born again, Holy Spirit filled Christians and their marriage is dying. Where is God in all of this? What could have happened that forgiveness cannot be extended? Jessalyn, in her heart wonders if they are fighting over her and something, she has done wrong. She holds this feeling to herself. Not daring to speak about it out loud. What if it is true? It would be more than her emotions could bear. Like rising waters in a small space, she begins to suffocate.

And yet! Jesus said in book of Matthew chapter 7 and verse 3, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" It is one of the most difficult things in the human experience, to see the sin you like and don't want to see! As a result, it was becoming a routine, horrible fighting or total silence.

In her room, away from the loud voices and hurtful words, she prays to God. He must be able to help them. Day after day, she quietly keeps to herself. Her world becomes smaller discovering it is no longer safe to be free. She watches as her brothers begin to rebel in the lack of being under parental authority. A continuous string of losses begins. Darkness enters her heart and she wonder *where is God in all of this?* Her heart begins to close down as she puts up protective walls to shield herself and she hides the truth employing a veil of denial. At the moment, all is not lost, there is hope it can turn around. Right now, divorce is not an option.

In the lonely hours of separation, Clara revisits it again and again. Who could have understood what new mindsets were birthed in Clara's mind when she nearly died. Our prospective of life changes when we look into our own mortality. It begins a glimpse that life can end in a moment because it almost did. When we are young, death or dying is far removed from our concepts of today and the thought to endless tomorrows. When you feel your life draining out of your body, while she was delivering Jessalyn, it brings crystal clear clarity in her mind. The smoke and mirrors that dull out feelings and view of life are pushed aside in the face of death. She was changed that

day, stronger. The Bob and Clara that took Vow's in marriage are no longer the same people. They are now separate and different people at the fork in the road.

For Jessalyn, her life seemed to be on hold. She watched the world go by as she waited to see the outcome. Life was not being lived; it was in limbo. Can a child of nine know they are depressed? All she knew is that she had aching pain in her body, mind and heart she didn't know how to handle. Unrelenting in emotional and spiritual pain became a daily endurance with no end in sight. She created an island escape. A place where she and her friend Kathy ran too often. A place where she could travel to the ends of the earth, too the far-off islands of safety.

They had ongoing plans to meet at Kathy's house; it's on the way. Jessalyn's home is on the west end of Painted Pony Road or three P road. Did it ever cross anyone's mind? There were no ponies on this block. It is two houses to the corner. From there she made a left turn onto Hidden Trail and a short walk to Kathy's home on NW 66th str as it curved its way, back and forth, to MacArthur Blvd. Both girls mother told them they had to use the crosswalk at the Cherokee Hills Christian Church. Retracing their steps, as they have done many times, Jessalyn listens with one ear and allows her mind to wander. She thought, *Kathy loves to talk, and I listen. If I start talking it might come out and then the whole world will know what is going on. Being a PK, (Preachers Kid) you learn early to keep home life private.* Reaching Mac Arthur Blvd. The two of them stand at the broadly striped, white lines of the crosswalk. The fear of God has been given to them by their mothers. Patiently they wait for a break in traffic, which doesn't take too long, it's a small town. Having traversed the most dangerous part of the journey, only a few blocks south and set back on 63rd is their destination, Warr Acres Library.

Built of modest construction, the three main wooden beams, held up the pitched roof allowing a cathedral ceiling on the inside. Anyone walking in felt a sense of openness to the main room. Just inside the door you are welcomed with the aroma of books. Sprinting to the south east corner of the Library is their favorite spot. Tables next to the windows is where few people

sit. Kathy loved to explore the Little House on the Prairie books while Jessalyn lost her thoughts in travel books. Oklahoma is flat and doesn't hold the excitement of far-off places. Even the wind is in a rush to get somewhere else. For right now there is total escape. A children's version of Captain Cook's travels has captivated Jessalyn's mind. Those tropical places, far off, to forget about life for a while. The heaviness will be her companion on the way home. Wondering what she will greet her when she is home, fighting or silence? Both are heart breaking. Outwardly she is in control, inwardly, in her own world she endures her own fight. Clara has noticed her little girl eats like a bird; she is quiet and withdrawn but had no clue to the screaming fears in her head. The self-loathing and condemnation in her believing she is the cause of the problems at home.

Falling to her knee's, Jessalyn sobbed. She spoke one word; "Why?" Tears streaked over her cheeks and dripped onto the path. Turning to the angel, with heartbroken eyes, again she asked; "Why?" He sat down close to her in silence. Taking a breath, she said: "I don't want to go any further. It is too hard walking in the ravine. Let's stay right here for a while." Jessalyn uses the palm of her hands to wipe away the tears. The angel watches her inward reflection of her body language and the pain she is expressing. He waits and then she said, "I love them both. When I think about the fighting my heart hurts. I hurt because of the way they treat each other." They sat in silence. Then she asks, "Can we walk backward on the path, back into the valley?"

"No, he says. "You can only stay in the spiritual position you have grown too while walking out God's plans for your life. We cannot go backward in time." She didn't want to think, *she's only a kid* she told herself. Feeling squeezed by the close rock walls of the ravine, she blurted out; "This is like taking medicine that does not taste good." A bitter experience that is leaving a bad taste in life. The angel liked the way her mind made experience jumps. Before the lesson was about patience and balance. Now, the word endurance comes to mind. As if he was reading her mind, not knowing he was reading her face, he said; "Yes, this part of the journey requires endurance." Her walk of

learning Faith came with knowledge of God's Word and actions to carry them out.

Some sojourners have a gap right here. Between the knowledge and the actions. They get stuck. They have to make a choice, to stay where they have grown too or to get back up. In her heart she knew she wanted this time in the ravine to be over. She stood up, took the angels hand as he stood, together they went deeper into the ravine and darkness. It was getting hard to see as they snaked their way through the narrow, confining ravine walls. This time there was no jubilant excitement to reach the next spot, slow is their pace. Dulled to her emotions, a bit lifeless she walked on. The ravine widened and turned slightly to the left. There appeared another spot. She stopped, hung her head down slightly, looking at the spot with deep regret. In her mind appears the image of the first bench, the angel's wings. A picture of being under the angel's wings. It encourages her. She stepped in.

Eight

Dreaded decisions had been made and it is time to tell the Children. Saturday afternoon, all five of them sat down in the living room to talk. Clara said: “Children, you need to know your father is going to live in apartment only a few miles away.” David, the oldest asked; “Are you getting a divorce?” Bob replied, “No, we are separating.” Sam and Jessalyn sat there on the couch not knowing what to make of this, as if there is anything, they could say that would stop it. Bob continued: “We are trying to stop the cycle of constant arguing. We cannot hear God speaking to us in this condition. The goal is to seek God for reconciliation.” Jessalyn looked into her father’s eyes to see if she was still going to be his princess. She could not read his expression, and this troubled her deeply. Her heart reveled in her father’s affections. Turning and looking towards her mother, their connection still unshaken. She knew no matter what, mom would always be there. The meeting ended in silence. What would happen next is unsure. No more was said, but it gave the children a word picture that maybe things could be fixed. There is a bit of hope in the deep despair everyone was feeling. Serious change is taking place. No one, no one knew what the outcome would be. Jessalyn felt like the world should stop. It did not.

Bob stepped down as a pastor at church. The scriptures are quite clear, if your household is not in order, you are not to lead others. 1 Timothy 3:4-5 has been weighing heavily on him contributing to his resignation and rightly so. The right to minister in a church is not an option now. His marriage is hanging by a thread, the foundation for his children is in shambles. And now he needed to find new work. First things first, he rented a furnished apartment. Bob brought home boxes to pack up his things. The boys went out; they refused to help a man they are losing respect for. Jessalyn kept her dad company and carried the light boxes out to the car. Up to now, he is still here, his presence felt. It is when Bob kissed her on the forehead, gave her a

last terminal hug, it became real. He got in the car, closed the door, started the engine and drove off. It is the day her status as a princess died.

For Clara, the handwriting has been on the wall. She started with prayer, an all important first step, to find work. She successfully secured employment in an accounting firm as a secretary. Pleasantly surprised, her new employer would pay her a good income. A blessing provided by God. Good but not what she was uses to financially.

A daughter, wife and mother, Clara enters into a new phase in life, a single mom. Scary as it looked, living life without the help of a spouse and raising children, she undauntingly accepted it. She made out a list of things to expect and a to do list. Not on the list of future expectations is the absents of another adult presence in the house. Or how it feels to carry the load on her own. Then there is the silence in the night when endless thoughts roll through her mind. No one to comfort her when she is exhausted. The bed is cold and lifeless. Those items that came with exchanged vows and building a life together. They gradually slid into harsh words, controlled living and a repressed life that became a tug of war that had been literally killing them both emotionally and physically. The guilt she feels when she is happy knowing the fighting is over. As the rope broke, Clara fell back into the lap of her loving Father. Becoming dependent on him, she discovers He would meet all of her needs.

Of course, it evolved into a small-town scandal. While pastors are on the pedestal, they are supported by the accolades of the people. The fall from the heights into the pit can only be understood by another who has walked in those shoes. Untamed tongues contribute to their pain. The juicy gossip made the rounds. It is a shame, however, it happened with Mary the mother of Jesus and to Jesus as well. They became examples for Clara to hold on and move forward. Of course, it hurt. There is talk. Conversations taking place, in the shadows, the hallways and even Jessalyn's friend Kathy wanted to know what is happening. Before, people looked up to Bob and Clara and the children. Now it felt like they were all looking down on them. Festering within Jessalyn is the feeling she had caused it all. A tragedy of childish thinking. She ran things over and over in her mind and often escaped to the

library, her island. Day after day, weeks turned into months and the completion of the first year had come and now gone. Bob and Clara drifted further apart. Clara's little girl's life consisted of school, library and her room and whatever sports event the boys were doing. Dinner time is hit or miss. Meaning, the boys would get hungry but didn't always come home for dinner. Family life had completely broken down. Not knowing what to do anymore; Clara made the call.

Picking up the phone receiver; Clara let it hang by her waist. Placing her index finger in the hole of the first number and spun the dial clockwise. Even though it is 1985, not all of the country had the new touch tone phones. She finished dialing the ten-digit number; took a breath and held it as the phone rang. On the fourth ring, like an eternity, she heard; "Hello."

In a questioning tone she said, "Mother?" It is all Clara said and all Wilma needed to hear. Instinctively Wilma knew, *something is wrong*. Every mother knows their child. Wilma could hear it in her daughter's voice. She sat down and said, "What is wrong honey?" The bubble burst; Clara openly wept. Oh, there had been talks, she knew they were separated, but the realization it is over is a hard pill to swallow. Wilma listens to Clara sob on the phone and wiped the tears away from her own eyes. She is a tough Texas woman, however, when your child is feeling deep pain, she felt it too. Listening is a good medicine. She let Clara say all she needed to say. Then Clara asked her mother for her advice on many issues.

"This is what you need to think about" she said. "If it goes the distance and you get divorced, you will need to build a new life and find a new place to live. Realistically, staying in the house may not be an option for you and the children. You're going to have challenges keeping those boys under control with the breakup in authority. Without their respect for Bob's authority, it will be hard to keep them in line. You will have your hands full. Try and keep them involved in sports in school and park districts. If you find they are getting into too much trouble, consider moving to another location and separate them from their friends. Mischief flourishes when boys clump together. It is easier with girls; they usually move in pairs. When it is needed, send Jessalyn down to stay with me like we do each summer. It will be good

for her to get out of all the turmoil, and you can get about all work changing accounts.” They talked for an hour. Wilma always had a way of soothing Clara. The adult equivalent of a kiss on a scrapped knee. She felt understood and it felt good to have her full support.

Jessalyn sat on the spot, her legs drawn up against her stomach with her arms wrapped around them. Sobbing and sobbing her feeling overwhelmed her. The angel’s role is ever changing. He is neither parent nor friend. His role is to safeguard, teach, be a companion and release the supernatural into her life as directed by God. She cried till there were no more tears. Laying down, in the fetal position she drifted off to sleep. Extending his hand over her, the angel released peace towards her. He then moved his hand to near her side to release strength. He waited.

In crises moments, a defining moment, a decision is often required. A proverbial fork in the road, or in this instance, path. Times of divine intervention are needed. If the hand of God’s provision were not supernaturally given, the outcome to God’s path would go another route. Has anyone perceived the call upon Jessalyn’s life? Bob, Clara or her grandparents? Did Jacob have any idea he would see into the spiritual realm; see angels ascending and descending on the ladder that reached into heaven? No! It was a Sovereign act of God for His purpose. If it were not for the plans, in the delivery room, at her birth, the angel would have ushered her into heaven. However, she is set apart for a work that will bring Him Glory. Because of that, her walking the spiritual path requires aid. It is one of those mysteries the Apostle Paul talked about. He wrote in Romans chapter eight and verse twenty-eight. *All things work together for good of those who love God and are called according to God’s purpose.* At this spot on the path, He intervenes with peace and strength for her to continue. Instead of devastation and destruction in the character of His Child she will become strong.

Stirring from her slumber, sitting up, the near lifeless eyes looked towards her companion. Standing now, being drawn to move forward, she takes her first step. Her clothing changes. No girly girl outfits. No sun dress and matching shoes. No hair style to adorn her. Right now, all she is wearing, a black blouse, black jeans and worn-out gym shoes. Her hair is loose and nearly covers her face. With no sense of time, they walk until the next spot. It does not do any good to stop and think about entering it. The path is all about getting through them, gain knowledge, experience God's provisions and to grow spiritually. Coming towards them, a dark evil figure lurked. Too tired to be frightened, she stood just inside the spot. The unthinkable took place. The evil shadow stepped in with her. The angel spoke to her saying; "Lean not on your own understanding, trust God."

Nine

Clara is concerned about Jessalyn. Lately, she sees her daughter with a blank stare on her face. Just the other day when she was standing at the doorway to Jessalyn's room she didn't notice. Clara took stock in what is going on. Nothing! There she sat, back against the headboard of her bed, knee's drawn up and her current book wide open. But Jessalyn is looking over the top of the book in a trance like stare until Clara broke her gaze. She spoke up and told her: "J honey, guess what?" To which she just shrugged her shoulders in a nonverbal; I don't know gesture. Clara tells her, "I just made plans for you to spend time with your grandmother." Expecting to see excitement she has expressed in the past; instead, she sees indifference. Now she is alarmed.

Jessalyn returns to her daydream when Clara leaves the room. In her mind is playing the memory of the picnic at Lake Overholser. It was a clear day, sky blue, an unusual day marked by mild winds and upper seventy's temperatures. It is hard to believe, but they got a lake shore picnic table under one of the few trees in the area near the boathouse. Clara had spread a tablecloth over the table, rested the lunch basket in the middle and set up plates, glasses and napkins, doing her mothering thing.

Jessalyn looked up to her brothers. At the lake, she kept her distance until they got it out of their system. Catching things. Fish, frogs, snails but they steered clear of any snakes. For her, it is a princess day. Bob walked her over to the playground knowing she loved to swing. There he pushed her, even though she could do it herself, and he listened. She had the total sum of his attention. A rare time when all she felt and all she thought bubbled up in her and she told him everything. A connection is felt, he allowed himself to be with her. Relishing the moment, it released her heart and the words flowed. Here is the place she ran too when the weight of a collapsing world overshadowed her.

Seems each family member is in survival mode and Clara has not seen the warning signs that Jessalyn is struggling with the loss and change. Panic sets in. Clara must take stock of the drain the separation is having on her children. While Jessalyn is away she will spend more time with the boys. A fleeting thought comes into her mind to do whatever it takes to reconcile her marriage. Quickly she ends that thought. It takes two to accomplish that and Bob has cut ties. Plan B to the rescue.

Her mom always had a way to opening her like a good book and getting to the story. She is hoping her baby girl will open up to her grandmother. Home life right now has become an unsafe atmosphere. A dark cloud seemed to envelope J. She has not learned yet, that spiritual doors are opened by our thoughts and what we believe in our heart. In the self-blaming, a door has cracked open, and evil had entered her life. Jessa, grandma's pet name for her, have a special bond between them. Clara is counting on it to help her little girl. All attempts to talk with her have failed and it is frustrating. Since she has been little, they talked about everything, now she is shutdown emotionally and spiritually. Without one of their heart-to-heart talks Clara does not know what is running through J's mind. The last thing she wants is to have her blame God.

Walking to the car, Clara has the suitcase in one hand and a basket in the other. A snack pack she would call it. Filled with J's favorite treats and two cans of orange crush soda to drink. The traveling time from Trinity to Greenville Texas is four hours including rest stops. It is Wilma's habit to stop midway at the Davis Oklahoma rest area. There they could make the necessary bathroom pit stop and pop open the treat basket. Picnic tables were scattered throughout the area. First choice is anywhere near the playground.

Emotionally, Jessalyn is like an armadillo in its protective position. Her armored skin wrapped around her wounded heart. No one could see the self-condemnation she is harboring. Normally when she was with Wilma, it is a talking marathon. Nonstop exchanging of words, one heart to another. The ride to Texas is quiet and she is withdrawn. In the rest area Jessa, well she did not rush off to swing and this concerned Wilma. It is the most

unusual ride to date. They traveled in silences. Carrying her suitcase into the spare bedroom, she unpacked. For Jessa, when her mind was occupied things were okay. At night lying in bed or when she is alone in the bedroom her mind drifted into the dark abyss. The unwanted visitor relentlessly spoke dark thoughts into her mind. It is tormenting.

How does a now; ten-year old child come to this point? A safe loving home turned into arguments of hurtful words and intense bitterness. It is more than she could bear. Entering the abyss, she thought of ways to end it all. To end it meant, to end her life, freeing her from the emotional and spiritual pain she is constantly in. Her body is constantly aching. Her head hurts under the crushing pressure and headache were often her companion. She is too young to know adults call them migraines. Worthless is what she felt. She was once a princess in her father's eyes. His abandonment is too hard to bear. She is limited in the knowledge of taking one's own life, like the ways an adult may come up with. She isn't even sure her plan will work. But if she failed, she will try again until it did work and she is dead. She would wait until no one is around.

Midweek, Wilma had still not cracked Jessalyn's book to hear her story. Baking seemed to open the way to a heart-to-heart talk. Bowls and cookie sheets pan were the sounds coming from the kitchen sending out an open invitation for an assistant cook. The wonderful aroma filled the house. But Jessa took no notice and while grandma was busy in the kitchen, she took action. Conceived in her mind is to jump. The stairway was being restored by Grandpa Harry and a section of railing was gone. She climbed the stairs dead already to her emotions; they were turned off. Unafraid, she stepped to the edge of the top stair looking into the open foyer. In a moment of hesitation, she stood there glassy eyed, mindless.

Wilma is pulling on her oven mitten when she heard the small soft voice of God in her heart say, "Go into the foyer immediately." Quickly she walked into the foyer and didn't notice anything until she looked up the stairs. She screamed out; "Jessa, what are you doing." As if in a trance, she is startled by her grandmothers' voice and came out of it. A spiritual burst went forward in Wilma's voice. It struck the darkness enveloping Jessa and it

retreated. She took a step back, away from the edge and sat down on the top step. With the absence of darkness, the armadillo shield opened. She stumbled down the steps and threw her arms around Wilma. A torrent of tears flowed from her eyes, her nose is running, and her voice is filled with sobs. Together, they sat on the step as Wilma let this little heart empty the pain it is holding. Reaching into her apron pocket she pulled out a tissue. Wilma said: "Oh my Lord, the cookies." The pleasant aroma turned to smoke. They rushed into the kitchen, pulled open the oven door where a billow of smoke escaped. She said: "Batch number one is going to be chicken feed. Would you like to help me bake another batch?" To which Jessa shook her head yes. Okay child, first thing, open the back door and window so we can get some fresh air. Inside of grandma's heart is to keep this on the low profile. However, in the days to come she would pray, intercede and decree the evil out of her life. She kept a watchful eye on the child.

Something broke for Jessalyn, the oppressive, heaviness accompanying the darkness is gone. Her grandmothers caring for her brought a welcome relief to the atmosphere of no love, no caring at home. Words began to flow from her once again, the burden is relieved, and life is looking brighter. It is amazing when being loved can do in the heart of a person. Sometimes it only takes one caring person to make a difference.

Going through the motions, making cookie batch number two, Wilma goes into one of her favorite God stories. She says, "Jessa, did I ever tell you the story about the Greenville's eastside miracle?" Wilma left the kitchen for a moment and came back in with a stool for Jessa to sit on, the story would be that good. Continuing she said: "Your great Me Ma, my mother, when she was about your age" is how she began the story. She went on saying, "You see the little girl next door was born with two clubbed feet. It is a terrible burden, she had to be carried from one place to another. They did not have wheelchairs then like they do today. Well, it is wearing her mother out. She became desperate. I mean really desperate. Then she heard about the tent revivals taking place in Texarkana. Newspapers told stories of people being healed and the fire of Pentecost being seen." Grabbing the tollhouse chocolate chips, she begins to stir them into the mix not missing a word. "Well," she said, "Somehow that mother got the money, bought two train

tickets and went to Texarkana. It wasn't easy for her, the meeting is on the edge of town and God provided transportation. The first night, prayer time came, several people laid hands on her little girl, no healing. In the hotel room at night that mother cried out to God for all she was worth. The second night, no healing." Placing the cookie sheet in the oven, setting the timer, she went on as she wiped her hands off on her apron. She said, "The third night, during the sermon on salvation, the words were hitting her like a strong wind. When they called for sinners to come forward; she got up and went forward. She gave her life to Jesus, felt her sins were forgiven, her sin sick soul healed. The old-time song of being washed in the blood is being sung by the piano player and now she knew what it meant. In the back of the room, several women were screaming. They were huddled around her little girl. No one laid hands on her for prayer. The healing came by God's own hands. Those clubbed feet straightened out and strengthened. There she stood looking towards her mother with wonderful smile and tear-filled eyes. Those two became the talk of the town. It is their testimony of the healing and salvation that touched my mother's life. Thirty-six years old, my mother gave her life to Jesus Christ. It swept through our family and half of Greenville. As a matter of fact, I still have the newspaper article." Taking the cookies out to cool before she left the room, she brings out an old scape book. Way in the back pages is a yellowed newspaper. Headlines read; "Local girl healed in tent revival held by Rev. C B Jernigan and Charles Parham. Yeah Jessa, that neighbor girl became one of my closest friends."

Wilma turned and got a glass, filled it with milk. As they sampled the cookies, she asked Jessa; "Have I ever told you about the day you were born?" Jessalyn's eyes got big. "No" she said. "I have heard mom and dad say I was a miracle baby, but that is all." Wilma took a deep breath and said: "Yes you are a miracle baby" and began at the beginning. Wide eyed and filled with wonder, she listened as her grandmother told her God's hand is upon her life and that He has big plans for her. The time she spent with her grandmother, this summer, is her bridge over troubled waters.

“What changed angel? I went to grandma’s house in darkness and now the darkness is gone. Why?”

“You reached the bottom; the love of your grandmother brought hope to your heart and helped you to want to live. Wilma’s spiritual walk, suffering and willing to walk out her journey has brought her to a higher level of authority in the name of Jesus. Her prayers of intercession forced the darkness to flee.”

Too tired to think about this, she will revisit it later. However, another lesson just happened, and she does not want to waste it. There will be more losses. Many changes will meet her in the days ahead. She has come to accept her life is different from her friends and even her brothers. Currently there is no way to account for this.

Looking further down the path and into the ravine the rock walls began to widen, they are not as narrow where they are now. This too brought hopefulness to her. Taking the angels hand, they walked side by side, weaving their way forward. Turning to the angel she says, “It was hard being in that dark place. I hated my life. But I didn’t know, I didn’t know I had a destiny.” This new prospective has changed everything. Now, Jessalyn began to smile as the ravine opened and they could see out of it at to the far end. Within her spirit she is feeling an upward direction. This excites her. For too long the road has been downward. However, there is one more spot positioned right before the incline. Stopping abruptly, she has a hurtful look. “Angel” she says, ‘I thought you said I am moving upward?’

“Yes, you are. This trial, although it will be hard, is not a downward event, it brings you to the end of the ravine.” The last spot took all of Jessalyn’s strength. Her mind numbs over. Within her she argues about stepping in. She prays a prayer inside her mind, from her heart; *please dear Jesus, carry me though this one!* She stepped in.

Ten

Two years had passed when the Children were told their parents are going to divorce. By now they were expecting it. Peculiar, carrying on with life, uncertainty hanging over your heads. You advance day by day and then parts are suspended in limbo. It wasn't as much living as living in denial, it was more dreading the finality when hope comes to an end. The home they knew is in the past. The house is sold, Clara and the children moved into an apartment in Trinity. Jessalyn sanctuary, the library, is now too far away. Occasionally she would see Kathy when plans were made for them to get together. But that too ended. Loss after loss after loss became a part of their lives. To the point it became their lives. A tragic mindset entered into their subconscious; good things won't last or people you love and care about will only leave.

There are many traps and pitfalls in the life of a broken family. Jessalyn seemed to sense God has a call upon her life. Unwittingly it provided her with an anchor to the ongoing atmosphere of continuous losses. In the new school, the beginning is hard. However, the protective eyes of her brothers kept her safe. Unlike that at home. She is fair game for all the pranks they could think up.

Jessalyn should have known something was up, they are being too nice to her. They couldn't wait till bedtime. It is better than they expected. Piercing the night, an extremely shrill scream filled her bedroom. Followed by exuberant laughter from across the hallway. Jessalyn's bedroom door flew open, and the next noise is the sound of something hitting the boy's door and bouncing off the floor. David told Sam; "Go get it before mom sees it." What they hadn't expected is the second scream. Clara came running into the hallway. Seeing a snake in the hallway she screamed. It is a two for one night. It made it all the more fun. Or the time Jessalyn is on the chair in front of the TV. The boys had a balled-up pair of socks tied to a string, ready and waiting. Sam, the fall guy of the pair, giving David deniability, yanked on the string making it look like a mouse ran in front of the TV. You would think the entire neighborhood heard that scream.

As pranks go, they usually go too far. Just when Jessalyn thought she was ready for anything; the boys came up with a new plan. Primed and set,

they waited. Sooner or later, she was going to need to go. Turning her back to the boys, risky move, she headed down the hallway, pushed the bathroom door open and instantly she is wet from head to toe. They set a bowl of water on top of the door. It worked as planned. But no scream! Confused looks on their faces. Then they heard running water from the bathtub. She came flying out of the bathroom armed and dangerous. Sweet satisfaction. However, mom saw it another way. Pranks were banned forever, or so she thought. Her brothers conditioned her for the other facet of her life, being a tomboy. She ran the gamut, girly girl to as tough as the boys. It suited her.

News came from Bob; he was moving out of state. He had found someone new, and they were starting their new life away for Oklahoma. Another piece of Jessalyn heart died that day, her princess status. Not that she didn't feel it already. The door closed hard. She would cling to it thru the few times they were together. In the end, the hollow feeling of abandonment filled the daddy's little girl place in her heart. To survive the cloak of denial is used. Denial is rather sinister. The issues are still there, just turned off for the time being. Subtly the effects are felt. The voids in their hearts often fester only to reemerge when you least expected them. A new mind game began. Hope sprang eternal each day the mail arrived. Jessalyn played the game hoping that a card or a letter would come from her dad. This game never ends, the excitement it might be today wans.

From deep in the heart of Texas, Clara had grown up Texas strong. She needed it now. She learned to love God, family and Texas. That's the creed in the Lone Star State. That and owning a pickup truck or a minivan, gun rack optional. It is serving her now as she pleads with God for strength. Never expecting to raise a family by herself, non the less, here she is. Prayer, prayer and more prayers flowed from her heart. Not always spoken but always expressed. The war being waged is for the healthiness of her children. She gave life to them. Suffered and sacrifice for them. Gone without seeing her own needs met and now she knew this is bigger than she is. She needed her heavenly bridegroom to supply all of their needs. And to help her children to get through this with as little pain and destruction as possible. A tall order.

A parent always hopes their children will have a better life than they had. That too is Clara's hope. She paid no attention to the demands on her life. Her focus is the Children. Come hell or high water, she would carry on. Being the primary wage earner; cooking and cleaning she tried to do it all. Being their protector and covering them with her love. There is no time for a pity party. Running the *what ifs* through her mind. It only accomplished to

wear her mind down. It's over, he is not even in the state anymore. Her mother is hours away. It is up to her.

Time to put her money where her mouth is, as the saying goes. Does she really believe God will provide? Faith first, then the results. Oh, how she did want to live that out. It is contrary to the world we live in where first see the results and then the faith comes. The hardest hurdle yet. It operates like a Black Hole out in the Universe. Sucking in all matter, even light, only to disappear never to be seen again. That is how unforgiveness works. It voids faith principles. To get the best God has for them, she must, she has too, forgive.

We lose sight. The big picture. Beyond our immediate surroundings and problems. The bridge for Clara is psalms 34. In her mind she repeats verse 19; *The righteous person may have many troubles; but the Lord delivers him from them all.* She forces her mind to review their lives. They have a roof over their heads. Food to eat, education for a hopeful future. A community based upon Christian Principle. Knowing blessing flow because of honoring God. Having a church community where a knock on the apartment door is opened to a church member baring groceries. And living in America; a Nation blessed by God. The big picture. Resolving the lack in life by seeing the more. She whispers a quiet prayer; Thank you for all you have given us and please God, bring us into a routine.

Signing the boys up for sports and going to their games to support them is a priority. She was good at that and did not relent. Still, David was getting in trouble. His anger ran deep. Trying to unpack the mind of a boy; it is hit and miss. This time his acting out is boarder line serious and it troubled her. Clara thought to herself; *if only I understood the boys; I could help them release their feelings. To have them to open up and have a heart to heart, well that is not going to happen.* What did help her, like most males, they thought about one thing at a time. She honed in, listened which brought her close.

The lease on the apartment was up. She looked for cheaper rent and far enough from their current neighborhood. Putting distance between bad influences will work for a while. But how far can she move? Trinity is a small town. The goal is to get them through the volatile teen age years with as little damage as possible. A tall order even for a Texas raised woman.

Grief stricken, Jessalyn asked; “Angel why did that have to happen?” He responded, “Freewill.”

In an exasperated voice she said: “What is that have to do with my parents getting divorced.”

“In the world there is good and evil. Every choice that is made in life directs a person into the light of God or the darkness of evil. Every person is tempted to choose darkness; it is there God’s grace is needed. When you were baptized in the Holy Spirit you received power. That power helps you to walk in the light and surrounds you with God’s provisions to stay on your destiny’s path. Look down the path and tell me what you see?”

“I see very small stones, tan in color that is three feet wide with dark brown bricks set on edge recessed into the ground.”

“Very good, now look forward and tell me what you see?”

“The canyon walls change in color to a lighter tone. The ravine begins to widen but not by much.”

“Is there anything else?”

“Off in the distance I can see switchbacks leading upward.”

“This is the bottom point in your life. You will go no lower,” he said. Jessalyn is exhausted. Not by the physical exertion but by emotional stress. Change demands effort, effort demands energy and commitment of one’s will. Encouragement enables a sojourner to move forward when their abilities are expended. At the heart of the matter is the desire to please God, to continue forward, to respond to His calling, to move onward when everything inside you wants to stop and stay where you are in life. Hindsight exacts the inward desire for growth and healthiness that is beyond one’s abilities to achieve it. And yet God brought you through when you could not do it for yourself or would not have done it for yourself. Because of this, He alone gets the Glory.

In the echoes of sermons in her past is the words; we are to be transformed into the image of God’s son. The picture of true healthiness. Chains break off, generational cycles are broken, inner healings take place and each and every gain the sojourner will have in their character will be for all of eternity. To reach God’s goal upon His path here on earth is the preparation of eternal destinies.

In all human calamities we look for some reason to blame it on. In our dark days it seems the only solution to feeling better is to apply blame to someone or something. On the path to recover, Jessalyn must learn two important spiritual lessons; to forgive and trust. One moment in life is but a snapshot of knowledge. It is later on and through prayer we can see a bigger picture. Without forgiveness the trauma begins a repeating cycle in our lives. Playing out over and over again, it can be applied to people and things that were not involved and are not there when the injury took place. Forgiveness breaks the cycle leading to trusting God. Believing He has a good plan and that He can be trusted with our hearts and lives. The call to forgiveness is for the forgiver more than the one being forgiven. She will learn, unforgiveness imprisons a person. For now, everything is about surviving the journey that at times feels like it is going to kill her.

Jessalyn determines to continue forward to the delight of her guardian. Taking that first step, only her blouse is changed to a light green color. Like new leaves on a tree or new blades of grass. She feels hope. There is more work to be done. Her hair is in a ponytail. The angel finds humor in how it gets wiped from side to side each time she looks back at him.

In times of life when we are in the valley of decisions and the ravine of change, we become short sighted. It is all we can handle. The small picture. And so; it is with Jessalyn. Her heart drops from her hopeful place. Before the upward switchbacks is another spot. Stopping in place, turning to look into the angel's eyes questioning him, expressing a hint of anger: "Angel, there is a spot! I thought I was done with the ravine. I do not know if I can do this again." Tears fill her eyes. Dread fills her heart. She thought; *God is asking too much of me*. She begins to argue with God about how she cannot do this and why she cannot do it again. Sitting down on the path, venting all of her frustrations towards her heavenly Father. She empties all of her pain and feelings, but it does not change her position. In time it becomes clear, the direction of the path is not going to change. God is not going to rescue her. Arguing is pointless. She looks inward. Searching for something to help her in understanding it all. Thinking about all the spots she has made it through. The Holy Spirit has been with her each and every time. She is not alone. Then she makes the connection. Each time: the events in the spots brought new knowledge and understandings. There is a reason for each spot. Believing her heavenly Father has her best interest at heart, encourages her. Before the valley and ravine, each spot brought her spiritual gain. In the valley, each spot brought her loss and character development. Somethings

were rooted out of her and other attributes were added. Now, looking outwardly is the knowledge there is going to be another loss in her life, change. Faith wells up in her heart and she express verbally, "I can do this." She stands, takes a deep breath and steps into the spot.

Eleven

The boys are the manpower behind each relocation. Like a revolving door in a big city, you move in and in a whirl, you move out. For Clara, finding a three-bedroom apartment has been challenging. Anxiety runs high, Clara wonders will she have enough money. You would be amazed at how many landlords balk when they find out you have teenagers. Maybe it's her tears that closed the deal. It usually comes down to them leasing the hardest unit to rent; it is the second-floor corner units. During the summer, they have the heat from the flat roof above them and the outside brick wall. Radiating heat like a brick oven. It helps to heat their unit in winter and fries them in the summer. Paying the bills factors into everything. If, money is not tight in the summer, then they can run the air-conditioner. The money supply is leaning towards nonsufficient funds most of the time. It is often a paycheck-to-paycheck budget. You have to admire Clara. Instinctively she knew when they needed a boost which meant spending a bit of money they didn't have in the moment. Thank God for McDonalds. She can order ten cheeseburgers, four fries and drinks for a meal out. The boys ate eight cheeseburgers and only took two breaths.

Access to the apartment is via the outside balcony that runs the length of the building. There is no screen door. A blessing for two days; moving in and moving out. At least the sliding glass door has a screen. The last load; the fourth hop to a new place. They made the living room furniture the last load. Experience has taught them to bring it last. With all of this practice, the boys are near professionals when they are not horsing around. In most cases, this will be their new home, at least for one year. Apartment life means living with less, it becomes the goal. Refining and defining the needed items to only the essentials until they have breathing room with money. It is amazing how much stuff comes in the apartment in just one year. Out of the back of the U Haul, the couch is one of the last items. Packed first were the end tables, lamps, chairs and the couch. First in; last out. When it came time to carry the couch up the stairs, David took the bottom end as Sam took the top. They made it look effortless until they had to round the corner, up ended it, to get it through the door. Dripping with sweat, David said; "Mom, really, you need to change your rental agreements so they we do not move during the summer."

The last few summers have been wonderful mother daughter times because no moss grew on her boy's shoes. Clara would tell you it is a bad analogy. What the boy's shoes needed are odor eater insoles. If David and Sam were not in school or doing their sports activities, they found work to earn pocket money. Clara could not criticize them on how they spent their earnings. It often went for new cloths, sports equipment and such. It helped her stretch the bare bones budget they all lived on. Although it hurt her when she saw the new cloths and she didn't help them pick it out, or for that matter, to go shopping with them. Because they were all so busy, the boys being employed helped keep the family atmosphere somewhat calm, instead of being a continuing, escalating pain in the butt. Clara pauses from unpacking the kitchen utensils. She has an open view of the front door over the counter that divides the room. She is watching the boys as they man-handle the couch, at times holding her breath as they teeter over the railing. David and Sam argue and laugh in the same breath. In a heated breath, Sam says, "David, don't push any more, I'm losing my grip" while the couch is two feet over the railing. Of course, his brother gives a little extra shove for fun. At Sam's expense. Jessalyn shouts at them; "Hey, why don't you bring it in through the sliding glass door?"

It became routine. The boys were gone most of the time doing their thing. In the constant chaos of family life, Clara's eyes often teared as she watched her daughter. She honestly thanked God J is not in a hurry to grow up. She knows that in the next two years she will be going through the physical change. When a girl reaches the bridge from childhood into adolescents. She reminisces about the time in her life she would have gotten all emotional, gooey. That women is gone. Time is running out, her last baby is about to springboard into hormones and boys. Making the best of this season; knowing how much J loves the local parks, she makes them a priority.

Nearest to their new location is Eldon Lyon Park. It is the south east corner of the park where they spent most of their time. It had the standard playground equipment and picnic tables. J never tired of the swings. For her, it is escapism. Not that she is aware. This mindless activity is all about the sensation now and later when she is in bed. An eight-foot arc reduces the drama of life into an escape of the mind. Ignoring the car noise on NW 36th street and N Divis, she listens to the squeaking chain hitch. The overhead noise brought about visions, daydreams of traveling the world. For all Trinity resident, the sounds of airplanes landing and taking off from Wiley Post Airport is just part of life. No one pays attention; it is local folklore.

Airplane pilot, Wiley Post, is the first person to fly solo around the world. A huge achievement in his day. Not long after his prestigious feat, he died in 1935 doing what he loved, flying. Thousands of planes land and take off each year at Wiley. It's hard to believe. All these planes coming to the OKC area. Will Rogers Airport is located just to the south by only seven nautical miles, the aviation hub for Oklahoma City. On rare occasions a landing emergency arise at Will Roger. Air traffic control tower diverts planes to Wiley.

For Clara and children, the only drawback to living near the airport is occasionally you had to drive around it. From north to south it is two miles long and one mile wide. Positioned on the west edge of the community, rarely are they inconvenience. Do the folks around the airport take notice of the noise? If they did, it wouldn't be the landings. Planes, for the most part, use minimum power before wheels touch down. Takeoffs required full throttle, full power and into the wind. Depending on which way the airport windsock is facing will determined the direction for takeoffs. Everyone living within a mile radius of the airport will hear a plane taking off. As the wind blows, with every change, procedures adjust. Eldon Lyon Park is only a mile south of Wiley's five thousand feet long runway. All large planes use it. Today, a slight five mile and hour breeze is coming from the north. The landing approach is bringing the planes right over the park. At times, as she is swinging upward Jessalyn can see the belly of the plane. Fleeting fantasies of far-off places fly though her mind. She imagines she can fly. High above everything, seeing in the distance, but always circling her hometown. For now, she is indelibly seared to this area.

"J" Clara calls. "The food is ready." One last hard kick, as she flies off the swing, landing on her feet. A perfect ten dismount. Together they say grace thanking God for their meal and a pleasant day. Jessalyn face goes blank, and her eyes look inward as she is about to do the unthinkable. "Mom" she says. "Do you think I will hear from Dad soon?"

"It is possible."

"Does he have our new phone number and address?" Not wanting to lie she says, "I haven't sent it to him yet, I will." Truth is, the only way Clara could keep track of Bob's current address is reaching out to his parents, which would be terribly difficult for her, or through the Cherokee Nation Tribal Administrations. If Bob kept registered; there were benefits for him and his children being part of the Nation. To be on record with the Nation is part of their heredity. A once thriving Tribe during the nineteen thirties, turned disastrous when the government began the Guardian Program. A

dark, dark time that sent those with Indian blood into the shadows. A lesson Bob has learned well. Clara gives her hope that she might hear from her father soon.

Wilma had a knack for knowing when Clara is struggling financially. Those Godsend checks did wonders for the emotional relief. J is unaware of occasional windfall of money from her grandparents. But when they had extra money it showed up on the way home. Heading back the apartment meant making a right hand turn on 36th, going two blocks and then making a left turn. But if Clara kept going to N Council road and made a righthand turn Jessalyn knew it is Sonic time. “Yeah” she screamed. They had their coveted location at Sonic’s. Midway in the outbound aisle you could watch most of the cars from there. Once they were at the kiosk, you could see the menu. Not that she didn’t already know it by heart. Unbuckling her seat belt, on her knee and pressed up against her mother, she looked out the window to all the choices. Most of the time it came down to a cheeseburger and vanilla shake. One of life’s pleasures for Clara was seeing the glow in her daughter’s face. That bubbling over excitement took place there and then the girl talk flourished. The heart-to-heart conversations Clara loved, needed.

Life! If you did not guard it, it is gone. Clara knew this and spent time making memories. If there is one thing in life she did not plan for, raising teen age boys alone. It is not going well. They were not interested in making memories and were off doing who knows what. Those times when they kept things from her. It brought about many sleepless nights. However, her daughter on the other hand is still at a time before the changes begin. The raging hormones she is seeing in the boys has not begun in J. So, as she is pressed up against the door, J looking at the menu, is a cherished time. Ordering is all fun. Having already eaten at the park, all they really want is an ice-cold shake. Knowing brain freeze may be a result they ordered with reckless abandon.

Mindsets or inward promises we make happen in a blink of an eye. The terrible fights Clara and Bob got into affected everyone. The sharp hurting words. Screaming at each other. Things said you can never take back. The effects it had on the children, were they irreversible? When relationship ends, strained authority breaks down, screaming is an expression that feels like you are in control when you really have no control. Clara made a mindset. She would not, never again, use screaming, a loud voice to guide her children. Clara became an immovable force to be reckoned with when it came to the boys. It worked. It took more energy than she ever imaged.

Behind her brown eyes, thin frame, the wavering will be held strong until she was alone. Quivering, she would calm down slowly. Rising to the challenge because love required it, she grew, and it became natural.

Getting settled before school began is the reason they always moved during the summer. In three weeks, David starts his senior year in High School, Sam, his sophomore year and Jessalyn enters eighth grade. *Football practice startup is in one week and cannot come soon enough* Clara thought. The boys being involved in sports in an answer to prayer. When they are between activities is when the trouble occurs. She got one of those dreaded visits from Charlie. When she sees his police car coming her way, she takes a deep breath.

Trinity is a quiet bedroom Community. Crime seldom happens here. It is when pranks go wrong or taken too far it is time to intervene. Clara has good boys and keeping them on the right path is becoming increasingly difficult. Often it turns into a battle of wills. In Bob's vacuum, devoid of his authority and discipline, the boys are adrift, angry and at times unmanageable. Their bridge over troubled water is Charlie. It is one of those coincidence. Whenever David or Sam are doing something wrong, he tends to show up in the nick of time. As much as Clara was hoping for a two-year lease, it is Charlies last visit that she knew soon they would move.

There does not seem to be enough time in the day. Balancing the boys' sports activities and spending time with J is a continuing tug of war. Low energy reserves are why Clara chooses her battles. However, David's rising levels of disrespect will need to be addressed. Inner turmoil; being disrespected is eating away at her. It is during their times of confrontations it becomes apparent things are not good. That is why her time with J is a welcome pressure release. Together, they have fun and forget about life for a while.

The finishing touches are complete, they are now settling into their new home. Again! Clara calls out; "David. I need you go get keys made." He asks for the car keys and heads out the door. The routine is, six keys are made. Every person gets a key with spares for the ones that get lost. Just asking him to do this chore took effort. Not knowing if he is going to pushback or have an attitude. He leaves without saying anything.

In the back of Clara's mind, she is grateful church has been a part of their lives. It is hard for all of them after Bob left the state. It is a complete breakdown of the family. But yet, going to church on Sunday became the glue

that held them together. Her consolation is they are hearing the Word of God each week and it does not fall to the ground void. It has life. Really, she is running on Faith and trusting God. Day by day, He meets all of their needs. Trust did not come easy for her. Now, with a history of His supernatural provisions it's gotten easier.

Each time they moved created the need to begin again in this new location. Once school started everyone understood what is required. The boys got out early and walked to school. J rode with Clara on her way to work. She is dropped off and picked up later on her way home. Saturday is laundry day; Athletic clothing needed to be washed first before the whole build smelled. Sunday church, Monday evening is grocery shopping. The least favorite day of the week is Tuesday. The day she dealt with the bills. The first check is written out to God, her tithes. When she had a financial short fall, He is faithful to supply.

It's heart wrenching. Clara knows it happening, her family is eroding before her eyes. Each morning, she reads her bible with a cup of coffee. "God you said you will help me with all my problems, please do it" a quick prayer. The underlying hostility in David is becoming visible as graduation draws near. At times he seems on the edge of yelling in anger. Then he holds it all in. Normally a time of celebration it became a war zone. Clara knew she could not meet all the needs of her children. It is not for the lack of trying. They need a father in their lives. Being abandon by Bob set dysfunction into motion. Day by day David became more unhappy. Almost belligerents. As before, J took it stride. It is what she knows but no longer innocent. She does the only thing she can do, stuff it inside.

Days after graduation it happened! The explosion. Screams, yelling and hurtful words. A volcano erupted out of David. Every pain, every hurt is hurled at Clara. He stormed down the hallway and into his room. She ran after him trying to calm him down, to understand what is driving him. To connect with the problem.

He pulled out a duffle bag he had in the waiting. He began to throw his cloths into it. Anything he needed went inside it. Going into the bathroom he grabs all his stuff. In tears, pleading for him to stop, Clara cannot believe her eyes. He cannot do this. He is my boy, just a boy. She says: "David, we can work this out, you do not need to leave. What are you doing?" He is silent as he grabs the duffle bag and walks out of the door. Jessalyn has flashbacks. She watched her father pack and walk out the door. Her emotions are in a ball. Tears fall from her eyes. David, her brother, who she looked up too, left.

The submerged feeling of the divorce come back with a vengeance. She runs out onto the balcony, and in the dark, she watches him walk away. Sam stayed calm; he knew it was coming.

Stunned beyond belief, J is in shock. It is another huge loss in a string of losses. Another male has left her. It is personal. In her heart she hopes it will turn around, that he will come home. That he will be part of her life. It does not happen. After the divorce, they were four, from here on out, it will be three. J has already hardened her heart to survive, this penetrates her armor. Another burden to carry. She runs to her bedroom, throws herself onto the bed and cries. Clara falls into a chair, leans her head upon her hands in utter disbelief. Weeping, she begins the what ifs. She thought *if I had only talked to him*. Eventually she regains herself. What else can she do. She needs to keep it together to take care of Sam and J. The apartment falls silent. Mumbling to herself she says, “I can’t believe this.”

Standing in the spot, Jessalyn falls onto her knees and bends forward. Here on the path, she feels all of her deep-seated emotions. The natural barriers humans can erect to prevent feeling pain do not work here. Crunched up in a ball she lets out a loud, scream. She screams so hard her throat feels it. In one long scream she vents her pain. It is not enough. Again, she screams and then again and again. With the expulsion of her last breath, she can hear her scream echoing, bouncing off the ravine walls.

Numb! She does not look to the angel for answers. Another mindset is ingrained in her; everyone will leave. It is hard for her to think. She is stuck in the ravine. For years she has been squeezed on every side, or so it felt. Jessalyn is distraught. In this moment, the angel gets a throne room message, he lifts his hand towards Jessalyn, and she has a vision. In an instant she sees events that challenged her mother’s parents. How they responded with inner strength. It flows into images of Clara difficult times in life, it strengthens her. She sees a group of people challenged to the max and she hears the words spoken; “Trail of Tears” not knowing what her father’s family has had to endure. Somehow learning about their trials helped. She thinks, *they were strong, she will be strong*. Jessalyn, says to herself *I will make it through this season of life, through the valley of her character being refined*. Stepping out of the spot, Jessalyn walks onward. Her clothing changes to white blouse and white slacks. Her favorite cowboy boots are

cleaned and polished and her hair is in a braid. Reaching the incline, beginning upward to the next switchbacks, a sign appears above. It reads: "The pathway to more." Jessalyn takes a few steps, turns and looks back and knows. She has begun the transition into becoming an adult. The little girl in her is no longer the dominate part of her life. And yes, she sees an image. Angel wings part way open.

Twelve

Silently they walked. Emotional stress can be very taxing. Exhausted, Jessalyn placed one foot in front of the other. Is she determined to gain her future or is she just going through the motions? In contrast to being in the valley, experiencing the ravine has cost her greatly. She's spent. The upward journey is slow going. Her view is limited. The path is the only focus right now and the upward climb takes up all of her vision. She starts to grumble about the steepness of this switchback, but thinks, what's the uses. Rounding the first switchback, it is an inside curve. God has provided a resting place. As if a huge ice cream scoop notched out a semi-circle in the rock wall. A white marble bench is highlighted by the rich red rock behind it. A sign above reads: Thawing station. She doesn't care what it means. Inside of her is a gnarling ball of emotions. Run is the word she is feeling. Run from it all. But it is not something she can run from. Tempted to turn to denial, as if what happened never existed, it just will not go away. The outside world does not matter. The raging storm within her will not subside. It is all consuming now. Finding relief.

Processing is not a word she would use at the moment. She feels sick, but *what part of me is ill* she wonders. *He just left me! I love him. I look up to him. I feel safe when he is around. I am stronger knowing he is my brother. He provides protection because the kids know how strong he is.*

"Your heart is like a wagon wheel" angel said breaking her train of thoughts. Moving forward in this conversation, he continued. "Each spoke supports the load of life." Jessalyn, eyes filled with tears, looking at him with a curt expression as if saying *why are you talking to me*. "Emotions are spiritual. You cannot see them. You feel them. The center of all feelings are held in your emotional heart. The hub of your wheel is your emotional heart. It functions best when all the spokes are intact and strong. God gives people family to form the wheel. You have just had one of your spokes removed. Your heart is broken. The connection to your brother is gone and now your emotional heart is struggling with the loss" he tenderly told her. Handing her a cloth, Jessalyn takes it, wipes her eyes and blows her nose. There they sat together, and she felt his presence. It helped. In her mind she heard; *there is no rush. Let yourself thaw out. When you are ready, we will go*. If they were in the garden, Jessalyn would have had a myriad of questions. One might

have been, “Angel, why is this called a thawing out station instead of softening station. If it’s a heart issue, our losses harden a heart, not freeze it.” Ultimately, she would have seen they are the same.

The rock wall is now on her left; they have gained an elevation of fifty feet. Barely visible is how the ravine forms a V shape. At the bottom of the V, where the path is, it can no longer be seen. The stark bareness of the rock walls holds a picture memory to be filed away. She knows what the ravine is like. Those days of trials and storms. Turning the angel, she asked, “Did King David write psalm 23 because he walked through the ravine?” He smiled, that smile telling her he is not going to answer, it didn’t really matter at the moment. Glad to be out of it, but her innocence’s is gone. Life can be hard, very hard. From fifty feet up the ravine walls widen quickly, and it feels good to out of its constrictions. Still carrying a burden of dread, the trauma too fresh, she doesn’t feel relief. She will need more distance and time. Out of nowhere, the angel says; “The absence of a loved one’s life leaves a void in your heart. It never goes away. Filling it with God’s love helps to remove the pain. Being sick at heart, feeling the ill emotions is a part of life. It is only God who can take our tragedies and turn them into a sweet aroma.” As he spoke these words, a feeling of comfort entered her. She felt understood as if he was looking into her soul.

Switchback after switchback, the prospective changes. Below the path is now forming a ribbon. Once it held excitement in the adventure. Now she has a feeling of accomplishment only by the fact God brought her though. Towering above them are the foreboding rock wall. In her heart Jessalyn wants to get back into normal life. Beyond tests, trials and storms. Stopping, stepping up to the edge of the path, looking into the canyon, she is unable to appreciate it’s beauty. Looking down, she begins to count the turns. Twelve! In this realization she looks to her companion. In a stunned horrified expression. Dreading the final turn, yep, there on the landing of thirteen is a spot. The pleading looks on her face tells it all. She says: “Angel, no.” Tears well up in her eyes and roll down her cheek. “This will be new and different,” he said. Continuing: “However, you must control your fears when feelings you experienced in the ravine return to you. Those thoughts and images are no longer true. If you can overcome them, your destiny begins here.” She’s older now and learning what it means to be a grown up; she wants to move forward but not without being cautious.

She lived an innocent life before entering the ravine. The last three spot changed her life forever. She stood there looking at it. Waves of caution

flow over her thinking. It's an unknown. She asked; "What happens if I choose not to enter this spot?"

"Your destiny will be placed on hold and you will stop growing spiritually." It seemed like time stood still and then in her heart she remembered Jesus standing at the end of the path with His arms stretched out towards her. She thinks *there has to be more. Otherwise, why would Jesus be calling me forward.* Jessalyn walks around the spot as if she can gain insight from a different position. Taking a quick glance into the angels' eyes to see if there is a hint to what it will bring. It is what it is, a stalling technique. She puts her hand to her chin, looks up to the angel and asks; "What is new about this spot?" knowing he is going to answer her question with a question. She's ready for him. "Look out into the canyon and tell me what do you see?"

"Okay, I'm looking. What am I supposed to see?" Not hearing an answer, she turns and looks into his face, he is waiting on her. She thinks; *Let's play this game. It must be lesson time. What's right in front of us? The switchbacks up. Then down below the ravine. Just beyond is the wonderful, beautiful valley where we rested and played. Then there is the path leading to the plateau. There is one difficult, painful, experience after another. One lesson after another. How am I going to come to an answer? He comes up with thoughts and ideas I have never conceived. Maybe I should ask?* She has somewhat of a tone when asking; "Angel, what do you see?"

"I see we are on the other side!" Now her thoughts are really racing. She is thinking; *I should have known. An answer I don't understand.* Exasperated, she looks into his face and that, you'll see smile. The delay has helped, the dialog is filled with the essence of surprise. Again, she thinks; *He is not talking about endurance or the other lessons. He did say it would be new, they were all new. He did include different. Ah different.* "Define different," she asked. He doesn't answer; he shoo's her with a hand motion to go ahead and get in the spot.

Clara's heart is filled with excitement, not for herself, but for J. She thinks; *my miracle baby has been through so much change. I never wanted this to happen for my children. But we're through it now. David, I miss him every day. I can't imagine what I did wrong. Sammy, I just can't read the boy. He is closed off and distant. Those boys, it hit them like the 1930 tornado that tore through Trinity. Puberty, testosterone released a torrent of aggression*

in David. Sammy watched what happen with his brother and keeps things to himself. They went from my sweet boys, who loved pranks to challenging me and others to be top dog in all they do. Praise God for football. Controlled aggression. It helps them burn off inner hostilities they carry. Turning her thoughts to her daughter, she thinks, Time is up for J; I saw the blush in cheek a few days ago. It is going to hit soon.

Not every decision Clara has made worked out well, or as hoped for. In the quiet of the night, she runs through the memories of the last days of J in seventh grade. In her mind, it is like watching a movie. She sees; The passenger door fly's open and J plops in, already ten words spoken, and she is barely in the car. There is so much to talk about. It is her last few days of being a seventh grader. There is so much to tell. "There was a big stink in the office today. I couldn't get all the details, but it sounded like test scores are lower than last year. The principals in an uproar over losing state aid." As soon as Clara can get a word in edge wise, she asks a question. "J, how would you like to go to Martin Park on Saturday?" Stunned and overjoyed, it is a no brainer. On the verge of a squeal, she says; "Yes!" Then diverting her thoughts in that direction and goes into anything that might interrupt the new plans. The weather, Sammy's schedule, although school sports and work and who knows what else, he is seldom home. Sam is not a factor, she hopes, a possibility of keeping them from going. And of course, the wind, as annoying as it can be, it doesn't matter there, except if it is one of those dust storms or a heavy rain. The beauty of Spring Creek turns yucky after a rain. The water almost looks like blood with the red soil being carried away by it.

Wiggling the key in the truck lock takes more and more time to get it open. The Plymouth Duster has seen its better days. All that matters is getting from point A to point B. The drive to Martin Park is their furthest destination from home. "There" Clara says, and the trunk pops open. They each grab two items, slamming the lid; they head out. From the parking lot there are walking trails to the right and to the left. They go to the southeast corner of the parking lot to the trail leading to the visitor center. J knows all the signs and displays by heart. So, she doesn't even glance at the turtle display. In a quick step they pass the visitor center. Here the trail breaks off in several direction. A nice touch is the old split log fence that lines one side. Walking in the shade provided by the tree canopy; they reach the turn off. It is very well worn. It starts off as a deep rut with a two-foot rise on each side and ends with eight feet high walls near their destination. It looks like a U. The erosion is not because of foot traffic, it is rainwater runoff that has carved this mini canyon.

There is a color change in the soil. The trail from the parking lot is tan dirt. As they enter the U-shaped path, just below the surface, hidden by the ground cover, the soil is deep red. It is very soft, roots stick out of the dirt on the sides and as they descend some of those roots are so long, they brush against their legs as they walk by. Then comes the coveted sound of flowing water and children at play. Spring Creek is the locals favorite place to be. It is beautiful and dangerous. Ten feet below ground level; the creek has carved its way to red bed rock. Frequent rains erode the side of the creek making it hazardous. The steep side walls collapse after there has been a heavy rain and water levels have risen. Today the creek is not raging with fury, nor a babbling brook. The current in the creek is just right.

Their seclude spot is at the dogleg bend. With a smile, J sees no one is near her favorite spot. Shoes come flying off, jeans and blouse removed, and her new bathing suit is about to get wet. Mom sets up camp, folding chairs come out of bags, her book at the ready, a cold drink is available. Before she begins reading her book, she reads her surrounds. She feels a joy when J is having fun. Eying her little girl in the middle of the creek, allowing the water to rush over her legs and fall on the flat rock below. Subtly allowing her eyes to drift towards the boys downstream. Right here in the bend, the creek reveals different rock layers. Some are long flat sheets; in a strong current it turns into a natural water slide. Endlessly she would ride on the water. And today there is a good current, but it doesn't interest her. To slide on the rocks would put wear on her bathing suit. It matters now. To look her best. Legs stretched forward in the creek water, arms extended back, resting on them, she contemplates what happens next. Wearing her favorite baseball cap, phony tail out the strip in the back, sunglasses for the glare off the water, she views her surroundings. Then, the little girl comes out and she begins to have fun.

Clara pushes her sunglasses back up. She takes pleasure in seeing her daughter switching from being a teenager to her little girl at play. J walks over to the bank of the creek. She looks and looks for just the right leaves and twigs. Then she sits down in the creek, builds little sail boats by weaving the twigs through the leaves, just the right angle causing a bow to be in it and sets it afloat. If it is built with balance it will right itself each time it goes over a waterfall. Mom watches her constructing the boats and the occasional glances down creek towards the boys. Yep, the chemistry that wasn't there just weeks ago is focusing on the boys just two waterfalls away. One of the boys catches a boat and looks towards Jessalyn. Her heart pounds as he comes towards her to return the boat. "Hi, I think this is yours" handing it too her. He goes on to ask; "How did you learn to make it?"

“My older brothers taught me. They could make ones with sails on them. Mine is like a canoe.”

“Well, you did a great job” he says as he turns away and goes down creek to his shy friend. Who now wants to know all the details all the while kidding him.

The water is refreshing, the scenery invigorating and a reprieve to daily life. Clara raises her book up again, resumes reading and enters into the characters’ lives, right where she left off. It is a good story. An escape from her often-dramatic life. She has pleaded with God to enter into a time, a normal routine. This is her answer to prayer. Peering over the top of her book from time to time, several chapters later she is splashed with water. A call to come sit by me from J. On the rock ledge, mother and daughter relish the day.

“Mom, tell me again about that flower” as she points to it. “It is called the Blazing Star.”

“It is so different. I love the different shades of purple.”

“Do you remember story your father would tell you when he was a boy and one of the family got sick?”

“I forget” but she really didn’t.

“His grandmother would hunt up a Blazing Star plant, digging up roots and all. She would bring it home and grind it up, it was a medicine they used and needed.”

“Like how we use the aloe vera plant at home?”

“Yes. Using the roots as an herbal medicine. Your father never talked much about his family or early years.” Turning to J she said: “Let’s eat” in an effort to deflect the conversation away to less painful topics.

Clara let J play until the last minute. She didn’t want this day to end. Watching her daughter, she couldn’t help but see her little girl ways, morphing into a young woman. It’s her baby and yet another door is closing, a chapter ending. She likes reading this story, it is a good story. When they exit the park, other characters will reenter. The plot will thicken, and life will get more complicated. But right now, it is a singles focus. A wounded princess finding fun in life enjoying the creation of God. She wonders if God had them in mind when He created the creek. The crystal-clear waters on their way to unknown destinations. Coming to visit them today, flowing by in no

particular hurry, here in the bend of the creek where God's children come to play.

It is getting hard to read in the shade caused by the setting sun. She knew the ranger would be waiting at the gate to lock it up. "Got to go J" she said in a, oh my gosh it's late tone. Things were flying into the bags in a clump. It didn't all fit. Carry bags in hand, towels over their shoulders, they retrace their steps at the conclusion of memories that will last a lifetime. So, they hurried past the visitor center, no time to change. The car seat might be wet for a day, it really doesn't matter. Stepping onto the asphalt, glancing towards the gate, there he is and they are parked a short walk from him. Reaching into her bag for the keys, Clara tells J; "Just through it all in the back seat." It is understood. Too many times of embarrassment; fidgeting with that truck lock, no damsels in distress today. As pleasant as this walk down memory lane calms Clara's heart, fatigue wins. She drifts off to sleep. In her heart, Clara knows now, taking time this summer to make fun and be with J was the right decision. Thankful she savored it all.

Clara had been asking around, gathering information to the youth groups in the area. Millie at the office gave her the low down on a non-denominational church her family attends. What she is hearing conveyed the church leaned more towards the Pentecostal expressions of the Holy Spirit and it pleased her. In Trinity, there are churches all over. Not all flow in the Spirit. She is most comfortable, at home where the Holy Spirit was allowed out of the box and free to release the supernatural. Being in a church where miracles happen is normal for her. In Greenville Texas, where she grew up, the churches that did not flow in miracle were the talk of the town. Now forty years later, it is the other way around.

Peter and Paul had a say so in the Ross family finances. Peter would often rob Paul to buy something before Paul could pay a bill. It is Peter whispering in Clara's ear saying, "J needs new clothes." Paul would counter in a slightly louder voice and said into the other ear, "The electric bill is due." It is settled, next opportunity she would bring J over to the Boot Barn on Meridian Ave. But first, they would visit Christ Church on Sunday. If it were not for Sammy working and buying his own clothes, Paul's voice in her ear might have won out. Clara praises God for each and every gain. She misses David. The way he left inflicted a wound that is not yet healed. Can it be healed? Between school, sports and work, Sammy is seldom around. In his eyes she sees he has plans. In the quiet of the night, when there are no distractions to occupy her mind, thinking about David contributed to many sleepless nights. Hours of prayers being sent up for his protection. Not

knowing where he is and what is going on in his life brought about a deep pain only mothers understand.

On the passenger side of the car is Wiley Post airport. Clara is fine driving the local routes. Now, as they drive north on N Council Rd, they are breaking new territory. The well-worn travels on the eastside of Wiley, Warr Acres and the painful memories of their home on Painted Pony, a distant memory but too quickly painfully remembered. Millie's directions are clear and easy, drive to the north end of Wiley, make a right on Wilshire, first right pull in, church is on the left. What Millie could have said, follow all the cars that are going to church. They were not late for the service, but late to park. Most of the spots were full. Clara got one of the last spots before going into the adjacent business lot. First impressions time. The mother and daughter dual walk up to the church and turn to look into the others eyes. They feel something pleasant. There are greeters outside and inside. A welcoming station and people handing out bulletins. It's big. Hundreds of people. You can blend in or chose to be invisible, which they did today. The service is wonderful. God's spiritual life is here. Clara makes up her mind; they will give this church a try. First thing, youth group meetings. They are Wednesday nights. Before doing the grocery shopping Monday, she plans to stop at the Boot Barn. Only because she has a fifty percent off coupon, which they rarely do. This is cowboy and gal country, and the Boot Barn is one of the most popular destinations for western wear. With the coupon, she knew the prices would be out of her range. Not part of her normal everyday shopping habits, she threw caution to the wind.

The phones are lighting up Monday morning. Clara looks over to Millie with a questioning look and says: "What happened over the weekend?"

"There are talks about an oil embargo and it has stirred the pot, or should I say, oil drum." The oil business is a large part of the community's businesses.

"Why are they calling us? What do they think we can do?"

"Tell them where their bottom line is." Clara's expression says it all. Millie tells her, "There is a fine line between solvent and insolvent. They want to know if it is time to panic." When the phones slow down, their first opportunity, they grab the time to chat about Sunday. Millie surprises her with the first question. "Notice anything as you walked into church?"

"Yes, we did. Why do you ask?"

“We hear it all the time from newcomers. That pleasant feeling as they encounter the presence of God, feeling His love.”

“We both felt it. We’re going back on Wednesday night so J can try the youth group.”

“If she is as thirsty for the Lord as you are, she will love it. Those teens see miracles happen in their meetings. They are on fire for the Lord!”

Thirteen

Jessalyn loves the Boot Barn. People quickly think of Texas and cowboys. Oklahoma has its share of Cowboys and Cowgirls. All things Western can be found at the Boot Barn. If you are looking for Western Wear, it is a one stop shop. Walking through the front door, they go left where the jeans are displayed. In the girl's section a pair of slim fit and straight legs are in Clara's hands for Jessalyn to try on. On the way to the dressing room, they pass the blouses. Clara pulls a couple off the pole and hold them up to Jessalyn. She gets a look. "Okay" she said. Thinking J is old enough to make her own choices. J makes a bee line over to the Ariat brand blouses and the light blue denim tops. Her mother grimaces: they are expensive even at half off. She thinks *one won't hurt*.

Life is different than when she was in her teen years. Everyone was in the same financial position. Then clothing was purchased at the Five and Dime, Woolworths, if available Robert Hall. Trips to the department stores in the city were out of the question. Kids grow up too fast as all parents know. When needed, iron on patches were used to cover up or mend holes in clothing. Mothers were mortified to send their children to school with holes in their pants. Any little thing can draw the attention of their peer group and ridicule takes place. Plus, sending the message family's made enough money. As a parent, Clara learned if the children had a few piece of clothing, trendy stuff, helped to fit in any group minimizing the scorn.

Walking to the cash out, J's head turns to the back of the store. Boots! Hundreds upon hundreds of boots are back there. Her heart wishes for a new pair. It is out of the question. She knows. Just these two items is more than her mother can afford. God always made a way. Clara counted on it. So far, all the utilities get paid praise God. Slamming the car door, the only way to get it to latch, J is excited about her new cloths. Clara lowers her head giving an appearance of saying a prayer. The car starts. Whew. It's dark enough for headlights, as she turns them on, right head lamp winks out. J shouts "Perdiddle." A slang word the teens use for a car with one headlight. Clara's heart drops, just another thing to deal with. However, it is all internalized, so J doesn't catch on and ruin her excitement. Now to get the groceries.

Will it happen again? Just before opening the church doors, they feel it. The presence. Clara walks Jessalyn over to the gym to the youth group. Once inside, a girl comes running over and says, “Hi, I’m Kelly. Are you new here?” Jessalyn only nods yes. Grabbing her hand, she says, “Come on, I’ll show you around.” Off they went before Clara could say a thing. The sanctuary was half full, a good turnout for a midweek service. Everything seems to be working out. Millie’s information is accurate and even helpful. The spiritual climate in this place is energizing. Her burdens, spiritual, emotional and physical seem to be lifted in this place. Something she desperately needed. Each and every day she is expending more emotionally and physically than she had coming in. The lines in her face, the tiredness in her eyes told their tale. The invisible spiritual life in this place hit her like a dry sponge looking for water. She is pretty sure this will be their new church home.

Kelly this and Kelly that is the topic of conversation on the way home. A new best friend. “Mom” she says, “There is a ton of kids in this group. Will we be coming back? I only met five of them tonight.” Nearly one hundred teens attend. Shocking to Clara, nearly half are boys. And the talk comes around to them as she anticipated. With each passing day, her daughter is drawn to them. Not yet boy crazy. In her mind Clara wonders if a group like this would have helped her boys? That is neither here nor there. A rite of passage is taking place. She is no longer her daughter’s primary relationship. The time they spent going to the local parks becomes time they spend at church. Apart.

Sundays and Wednesday are the bright spots of their week. For Clara she is finding a network of support, her being a single mom and all. J is making friends. Clara isn’t blind, several boys make it a point to walk them to the car. As it turns out, there are benefits. Franky noticed the front headlight was out and offered to change it for Clara/Jessalyn. He said, “Mrs. Ross, it’s a standard bulb. I can pick one up and I’ll put it in on Sunday after the second service.” Not wanting to miss this blessing, Clara mentions the trunk lock. Smiling, Franky knew he could be a hero. “A little WD 40 lubricant can work miracles” he said.

The planned mission trip for the youth group became the frequent subject at the church. Of course, Jessalyn begged to go. Clara had serious concerns. Bad things recently happened in the family. Her protecting walls intact from further loss and pain. Fear rose up in ways she hasn’t felt before. J would be in a foreign country, so far away, it didn’t sit well with her and her stomach turned just thinking about it. She asked other moms in the youth group, consulted with Wilma and eventually she thought she could keep J near and

safe by claiming they didn't have the money for her to go. Mysteriously, someone sponsored Jessalyn to be part of the mission trip. Then it occurred to her, while in prayer time with the Lord, she had a word of knowledge. An inner witness. She's hoping J will not be able to part of the mission trip. More out of protecting herself from any additional pain if something should go wrong. It is really safer to keep her near. But the Holy Spirit pestered her to let J go.

Sitting crossed legged on the path, watching the events of Jessalyn life flowing before him as he peered through the spiritual veil separating the realms. The angel watched her progress in life. He was pleased. In a flash of light, a messenger angel arrived to ask: "Is the safety net in place?"

"Yes." Hearing the answer, in a flash, he was gone.

Teenagers! They can be loud. The laughter is a sweet sound. Their gear is on the bus and excitement is running full throttle. They have heard the testimonies of others who have been on mission on the edge of Matamoros, Mexico. Hearing stories of God's miraculous power, healing villagers stirred up their faith. The goal is to be used of God just like when Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples on their first missionary trip. He gave them His Authority and the young missionaries are just about to learn what that meant. Some of the teenagers, just like Jessalyn, it is their first time going on a mission. They have yet to see the displays of Jesus' authority.

Right now, a heated discussion is taking place just outside the door of the bus. It had been overlooked. On the form, in the medical section the church administrator saw one of the teens had a medical issue, Testicular Torsion. The father emphatically said he has not had an incident for years and is good to go. He said, "The release form is signed, I assume the responsibility, please let him go." With that, he nodded and waved Tim's forward. He climbed the stairs and found a seat. The decision is made, the doors were closed, and all were present. Parents are waving as the bus full of teens pulled away. Jokingly, Kelly started to sing the wheels on the bus go round and round when the rest of the bus threw things at her and told her to shut up. They are too old for such foolishness being mature and all.

In every long trip, excitement dies down and everyone settles in either by reading, playing games or the girls that never stop talking. Jessalyn sat next to Bill for most of the ride. They have been good friends since Jessalyn joined the group. However, it is a good point of view as she kept looking over at Tim. Wondering what all the fuss had been about before he boarded the bus. There are not many divorced families in Trinity. It is one of the reasons her and Bill get along. His family split last year. He understands what Jessalyn has been going through. She found it easy to talk with him, he is a good listener. Their family life is much the same. Kelly, seated behind them, is one of those high-volume word girls. Right now, she is talking with Sara about as fast as the bus is moving.

Approaching the border things got quiet. Crossing into Mexico is different than crossing a bridge, although it looks very similar. Creeping forward, as cars and trucks are cleared and permitted to cross, they progress. It is their turn; the team leaders got out. All eyes are on them. The border guard becomes very animated and verbal. He points to a pull off pad on the side of the road telling them to go over there and park the bus. Stepping into the bus he shouts; "Everyone, get your birth certificates out. We all need to go into the office." The driver gives him a concerned questioning look. Leaning over, the leader tells the bus driver; "They want to see our documents. The church forms, parents' permissions slips and each teens birth certificate.

"What? Why?"

"New rules" is all he says. A flurry of activity is taking place. Teens are not the most methodical creatures. Trying to find the birth certificates is a sight. Rob yells, "Once you have your BC, step out of the bus and onto the sidewalk. We will all go in together." Tim is the last teen to dig out his BC. Paper in hand, he reached up to grab the seat in front. Trying to hurry up, he twisted funny as he pulled himself up and out of the seat. He screamed out in pain. Doubling up in his seat; the leaders rush down the aisle to see what is happening. It took two of them to help get Tim off the bus and into the office. If things were not chaotic enough, the pain is so extreme, Tim fainted and fell to the floor.

It is chaos. Everyone is huddled around Tim. No one knows what to do. Girls are crying, leaders began to assess his vital signs. Too determine if any first aid needed to be administered. Suddenly, Tim became alert, in severe pain. If that wasn't enough, a Mexican woman briskly walks in the door. She pushes leaders and teenagers to the side clearing a space. She reaches down

her hand, placing it upon his chest, she began to speak boldly and confidently in her native tongue, Spanish. At the moment they didn't know she is praying for him. Those that spoke Spanish could tell, she is praying, or more like decreeing. From the tone in her voice, it is a heartfelt prayer. No one could believe what they were seeing. Tim got up! No longer in excruciating pain, bewildered he looks into her eyes. The woman, she warmly smiles, turning, she pushed her way through the on lookers and out of the office door.

For just a moment, Kelly is silent, speechless. Then mouths are going a mile a minute. Jessalyn felt panicky. Images of her passed flashed across her vision. She is having flashbacks. In her thoughts she told herself *this is not the same. I will be alright*. Stunned, one of the leaders had the presence of mind to go after the woman. Literally, only steps behind her. However, when he went out the door and looked in all directions, she was gone. There was no place for her to go to be out of sight, she had just vanished into thin air. The real shocker is when Tim told them he heard the woman pray; "In the name of Jesus, be healed." He goes on to say; "A pulse of power entered me and the pain stopped." What? Jabbering faces everywhere. The discovery is that Tim is the only person to hear her words in English. Now, it is nearly impossible to regain order. If they want to get to the mission before nightfall something needs to be done. A loud voice yells; "Christ Church, focus."

Tim's fate was sealed, he would be going home. His dad will be making the drive down to pick him up. At home it would be discovered he is healed of the Testicular Torsion and news of this would make its way to base camp in Matamoros. The faith level of the team is epic on hearing it. God is healing and they haven't even seen the people coming from the jungles yet.

It's dramatic. Hard to experience. Not what she had expected. Literally it is a culture shock for Jessalyn and the others in the group going on mission for the first time. They have never seen poverty like this in all of their lives. The houses were built of crude materials. Although colorful, it looked like a strong wind could blow them down. And the houses were very small. Matamoros is a different world to them. The streets are narrow. The cars are old. The Children run free and roam. Everything is tightly packed together. Business with rolling metal shutter above the doors; their night security. Block after block they saw things they have never seen before. For Jessalyn, there were times in her life, she is ashamed of the apartments she lived in. Never again would she feel that way, but grateful.

Chatter increased as they approached the edges of town. Their destination is within view. Meager structures, definitely low cost. The new

home for the youth group for the next week. Children yelled and screamed as the bus pulled into the campus. Grace came prepared. Opening a box, she directed the teens to pass out jump ropes and rubber balls. All to be a preoccupation. Tomorrow, they will setup and do puppet shows for them. To tell them Bible stories and share the love of Jesus. It will have to wait; it is too late and soon it will be dark. The unspoken rule is to end early so the villagers can make their way home.

It is very dry and dusty here. Devoid of plants, trees and ground cover. The buildings are shanties of corrugated steel roofs and wooden walls. The bus pulled into an open area of barren dirt. It wasn't much to look at. A small building that had a rear wall, roof and three open sides. This is where the services will be held.

Several adults came running up to the bus. Wide smiles; full of Joy. The welcoming began. Pastor Wilson greeted each and every one as they had stepped off the bus, thanking them for coming. Quickly, he pointed out where they would be staying. The rear door of the bus opened, and duffle bags were thrown to ground. Leaders had split quarter, male and female. Next to it is the girls hut and on the far side, the boys. Kelly and Jessalyn walked into the hut. All there are six sets of bunkbeds and a wooden table in the middle of the room. It is very worn and greyish in color. A single light dangles on its cord over the table. There is very thin mattress on each bunk to put the sleeping bags on. They will be roughing it for the Lord. What? They discovered, to their shock, no sinks, bathroom or running water in the hut. All of that is in another building. With a yell, "Christ Church" Bill got their attention. He said, "We are going to do a brief service tonight. Get settled and be ready for service in ten minutes."

Worship music is shared, the message was given and now it was time to release the teenagers to go and pray for the sick. They knew the drill, boys with boys and girls with girls. Music is being played to set the atmosphere for God's presence. In groups of two they prayed for the villagers. Shouts, cries and loud voice are heard as God began to heal. Jessalyn and Kelly placed their hands on a little blind boy. With their own eyes, they saw his sightless eyes align and the iris' begin to move. "Mama" he said. Dropping to her knees, she looked into his face, tears rolling down her cheeks. "Puedo ver" he said as she scooped him up in her arms kissing his face all the while saying, "Alabado sea Jesus." He moved his head to see into the faces of the girls. It is too much for his mind to handle in the moment. Tears filled his eyes; his mother smothered him in her arms.

Jessalyn stopped and stood still. Something is going on. Inwardly she feels a tingling in her hands, and it seems to flow out. Now she is looking around, she is frightened but tells no one. Dark shadows are leaving some of the people that are being prayed for. Something else catches her eye, just beyond the campus. Movement she thinks but brushes it off. Kelly grabs her hand, and they pray for the next person.

After the service, during mealtime, their talk is all about how God healed the sick and delivered people and those who were saved. Excited story after story is told. Unnerved Jessalyn detect movement around the compound. It is more perception than actually seeing a person or animal. Kelly says, "I got a testimony, Jessalyn and I laid hands on a little boy. He was blind. It was his mother who screamed. God healed him." With her flare for the dramatic, she brought out all the excitement and drama of the event. How she described the mothers overwhelming joy. Adding how the boy looked at everything. Grace is about to say something when she had second thoughts. Another time she will make it a teachable lesson. How God's gift of vision will change his life. It is the first time he didn't have to worry about stumbling or tripping over things.

"Let's call it a night" one of the leaders said. "We will have a lot to do in the morning." Sleep will not come easy tonight. In the girl's hut, slowly they drift off to sleep. Susan whispers to Ann who is in the upper bunk, "This hut is too creepy for me to fall asleep." Peering over the edge to see, she says, "Think about the miracles we witnessed tonight. Say prayers for the service for tomorrow and before you know it, you'll be asleep."

A deafening scream, a shrill scream startles everyone a wake. All eyes were upon Beth. Sobbing hysterically, Grace tried to comfort her, it wasn't working. It reminded her of night terrors some children experience. Turning she said, "Girls, pray." Grace sat next to her on the bunk, rapped her arms around her and gently rocked. When she stopped crying, Grace asked her, "What is wrong honey?"

"A man walked up to my bunk. I saw him, his face was gross. I felt an evil presence, I was frozen. But when he covered my mouth with his hand, I started to scream." Shivering, sobbing, Grace continued to console her. "It's a nightmare" she said to Bill who had rushed in after hearing the scream. She went on to say, "I can stay here for a while." He understood and left. "It's okay girls, try and rest in your bunk." But she saw a look on Jessalyn face telling there was another story. Once Beth calmed down, she walked over to her and asked if she wanted to say anything which thoroughly confused her.

Hesitating, she said, “When Susan turned the light on, I saw a black figure. It was right in front of Beth. It passed right through the back wall.” Grace called out to all the girls, “Okay girls, here is what you are going to do. One girl needs to be a wake and pray for God’s protection. After an hour, she will wake someone else up to take a turn. Do you all understand? Now, Jessalyn, you go first. Let me know if you need me.”

Grace has been to the mission before. As a leader, it is time to lead. Very petite in size, she is a spiritual powerhouse. After breakfast she raises her voice and calls out; “Christ Church, listen up.” Questioning faces are looking towards her. She said, “For some of you, last night is the first experience with spiritual warfare. It is not uncommon, when you see the powerful display of God in action that evil will try and stop it. Or scare you to question yourself. To move you out of alignment with what God is doing. I am proud of the girls for doing a prayer watch through the night. Now we know what to expect. We will see more wonders tonight. God is awesome.” With that the meeting was over, but not over. From that point on, the girls were not going to take any chances. They would do a prayer watch every night.

Jessalyn saw her chance. “Grace” she said. Stumbling to choose her next words, “During my prayer hour, I saw other things happening. What is going on with me?”

“It seems to me; God is giving you a way to see into the spiritual realm.”

“I am not sure I like this.”

“It makes it real to you.”

“Too real as far as I am concerned.”

“Let’s talk about this another time, Okay?” There is gobs of things to do, Grace rushes off to prepare. Jessalyn felt like she was left hanging.

By noon, the children were gathered and waiting. The teens played ball, soccer, jump rope and other games. Then it is time for the puppet show. Julia, spoke Spanish and gave the children a play by play of the puppet show. It is a salvation message. At the end, Julia asked if anyone wanted to invite Jesus into their heart and life and some of the children responded. She had them stand and come forward. Then she led them in a prayer. It was a joyful time. It is one of the reasons they had come.

The afternoon service is what all the teens are waiting for. As it begins, Jessalyn steps away from the back. There are more people here and the overflow bulges into the parking lot and out the sides. As the pastor is giving his sermon, he is very serious and animated. The translator does his best to keep up with him but before he is finished the pastor begins again. Jessalyn watches the faces of the people. She can see the burdened. Others have expressions of eagerness. Then the lost souls living in the void of spiritual life, yet seeking it. Looking for the living God they have heard about. Coming not out curiosity rather feeling a compulsion to attend.

It's time. The people stand, all the chairs and benches are moved to the side and Christ Church is released to pray. I surrender all is being played on a lone guitar. Kelly and Jessalyn approach a woman with a bent knee. She can't place her weight on it. However, Jessalyn see's expectation on her face. Kelly kneels down and places both hands on the woman's knee, praying. Jessalyn put one hand on her shoulder and then other on her head, she begins to pray. Why she did that is unclear other than feeling led to do it. The woman begins to sway like she is about to fall when she yells out in Spanish. Her leg pops out straight. Testing it at first, then she begins to run. Run she did. All around. Her hands are up and waving them around screaming all the while. It was a sight. Jessalyn looked for another person with anticipation on their face and pulls Kelly over to them. Again, a dramatic healing takes place. For no special reason other than curiosity, Jessalyn looks for a person with a burden look on their face. Both girls begin to pray and pray and pray. A shriek comes out of the person mouth, startling them. They both stepped back. Jessalyn notices a darkness flash upward. The person face changed. It now radiates the glory of God. One of the leaders rush over and they all prayed for the filling of the Holy Spirit. It happened with a rush of words and a look of surprise on their face.

Fourteen

“Angel, you will not believe it!” Jessalyn said. “I saw the power of God in action”. She noticed there is a difference in their surroundings. On the outer, cliff side of the stop, were two benches facing each other. He took her hand guiding her to sit down. The expanse of the canyon, the path, valley and other side could be seen at a glance. From this vantage point, their conversation was going to be face to face. Sitting down, the angel said, “Tell me all about it.”

“There were so many miracles. Tim, in our group, almost didn’t get to come along. At the last minute he got the okay and wow, did it not go as planned. He had an old medical issue that almost kept him from going. Guess what, his problem came back just as he was getting out of the bus at the border. I never heard a guy scream in pain before. It is hard to hear it, especially someone I know. Well, anyway, they got him out of the bus and into the immigration office. Two men had to help him get in there. Just then he screamed again and this time he fainted. Down he went, flat out on the floor. All of us gather around and everyone was talking, some praying when, in the door comes this Mexican woman. She pushed a bunch of us out of the way. Leaned down as Tim is coming alert, she placed her hand on Tim chest and started praying in Spanish. The tone in her voice is strong. She stood up, turned, pushed us out of the way and walked out the door.” The angel watched her body language, her arms went into motion to show him how the woman pushed people away. His expressions changed to meet each blow by blow of the story.

Jessalyn, taking another breath continued. “Well, a leader ran after her. He is hot on her heels. He wanted to talk with her, but when he got outside the door, she was gone. GONE! There is nowhere to go but she vanished into thin air. THEN, Tim told us his pain was gone and got up off the floor. We all told him we heard the woman pray for him in Spanish. He said, ‘What are you saying? She was praying in English; I heard each word. She decreed healing to me, and I felt a pulse enter me and the pain was gone.’ How can that be angel? We heard in one language; Tim heard in another?” He just smiled. She saw it was one of those times he has nothing to say and went on. She told him about all the healings that took place at the church on the edge

of the town. The people who were delivered and those who were saved. Holding back, finally she told him about what happened at night in girls sleeping quarters. Her tone changed from being joyful to deeply concerned. She said, “Angel, I saw stuff I didn’t want to see. I saw dark figures in the room. It is only when we stayed in prayer, they left. Well, they didn’t really leave, I could hear them outside. As long as one of us prayed they stayed out there. But some of the girls felt an ugliness come on them. Nightmares so bad one of the girls screamed and cried. What is that all about angel?”

“Good versus Evil.” Jessalyn wanted more, she knows it is all about how she asks the question. She is thinking. “Angel, I witnessed the power of God. Then there was the activity of evil attacking us at night. Why?”

“Spiritual warfare.”

“What does that mean exactly?”

“It is when demons take action to keep Christians from flowing in the Authority of Jesus.” Jessalyn thought for a second, then asked; “But why was it so real? We were experiencing it?”

“You were not warring against flesh and blood, but against powers and principalities.”

“This never happened at home angel. Why there in Matamoros?”

“In Trinity evil does not have a foothold. At the mission, darkness reigns and does not want the power of God on display.”

“But why were we attacked? Were just girls?”

“Fear.” Her eyes look to the sky. Her facial expression in disbelief. “Fear” she said. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“It is a powerful technique darkness has to stop Christians. Experiencing demons and the horrors in the experience is often enough to make anyone think twice about using the name of Jesus.”

“Honestly angel, I thought about wanting to go home early. However, seeing the miracles happen, seeing lives changed and people healed helped me to stay. Not like I could have left anyway. So, I guess I get your meaning of fear. I was fearful until I saw that prayer stopped the demons from getting into the bunkhouse. Ya-know what angel, that first night I felt spiritually weak. But by the end of the week, I felt strong in the Lord. And then, the whole thing about seeing things that were not being seen by others got me to want to know more.” They looked at each other for a moment. Jessalyn looked out

into the canyon and wondered. She said, “Angel, did the canyon experiences have anything to do with what is happening now in the mission field?”

“Everything on the path, in the steps of your sojourn, it is profitable for growing spiritually. The more you walk the path, the more you flow in the authority in the name of Jesus.” Jessalyn thought to herself; *I wonder why we are spending so much time at this spot. These benches and angel is talking.* He called her by name; “Jessalyn” gaining her attention. She thought *He has not done this before.* “You are not done with this spot” he spoke clearly, strongly. “What do you mean” she asked. The implication is that she will be going back and all at once confronted her fear of dealing with the demons again. For a moment, it outweighed the Joy of seeing God move. Stunned. She looked into his eyes when he said, “Grace is waiting for you.” Then with his outstretched hand, he shoed her back towards the spot. Incredulously she flashed him a look. She got up, walked over to the spot and after a slight delay, stepped in.

The Friday night service began. Enthusiasm swept the worship. People were singing very loud. Caught up in the spirit, hearts of gratitude ignited. They were focused on Father God and the good things He has been doing with week. This is the last meeting. They leave in the morning. However, this service the Joy of the Lord scales to new heights. The teens listen to the interpreter. The message is about the Grace of God flowing like a river. The spiritual life flowing in this word had people sitting up straight and leaning forward. Yelling, then a scream came from the crowd interrupting the service. Frantic words in Spanish were being spoken. The ministry team did not understand what was happening until the pastor told them. A woman yelled because she felt someone hit her hard on the back. In anger she got up to see who had hit her when she realized her severe back pain was gone. All those around her said they saw no one hit her. Tears of joy, being pain free for the first time in years, she knew God healed her. It is what she came for, now it has happened. The pastor, quickly saw the presence of the Holy Spirit is in the service, released the team to pray with the people. It is pandemonium. Later, after heaven had invaded the service, the pastor brought the meeting to close so the locals could return home.

After night fall, around the campfire, the leaders talked about what needed to be done for their return trip home. Then the chatter about what God had done dominated the conversations. In the shared experience, a bonding had

taken place within the ministry team. A closeness took place. For the girls, a dependency is gained through the nightly prayer vigil. Yet, there is one more night. Dread could be felt by the girls as they walked away from the ambers in the fire ring. In their bunkhouse, it is now a routine. The lower bunk near the door would be on prayer watch first. Then the upper bunk and so on until morning.

“Wake up! Jessalyn wake up” are the words Kelly whispered. “It’s your turn to pray” she said. Hardly able to get out of her bunk, her eyes burned, and she felt sick from lack of sleep. “Okay, okay” she said. Not really wanting to budge. Fear gripped her. Not knowing what she might see this time. Jessalyn had kept it to herself. From the side of her vision, she caught movement as it passed through the wooden wall. As she prayed, it is as if she could hear several people talking outside, but never able to make out a word. It is a long hour, she crawled back into her bunk.

Breakfast is over, last heart felt goodbyes have taken place and the bus is loaded up. There are no excited songs being sung as the bus pulls out of the mission and out onto the road. Before all six tires are on the asphalt, half of the teens are asleep in their seats. Reaching their first stop, they all need to immigrate back into the United States. Half awake, they file into the office, have all their papers checked and back onto the bus. Passing over the border, there is a glaring difference. America is a blessed nation. Freedom to live life. Good jobs to buy things. It is an eye-opening event for all the first-time teens. They will not see home the same way again. Life that was taken for granted is now expressed in gratitude.

It is late in the afternoon. Jessalyn, because of her experiences, is restless. She looked to the front of the bus and noticed Grace is sitting by herself. At first, she didn’t respond to the tug to go talk with her. It seemed risky to open up. She lightly bit on the inside of her cheek, got up, walked the aisle forward and said to Grace; “Can we talk?” Grace patted the seat next to her, an indication she is open for conversation. Small talk dominated the conversation, until Jessalyn softly bit down on her lip, then said; “You remember the first night, about the bad nightmares some of the girls were having in the bunkhouse?” Grace’s expression changed from friendly to blank giving Jessalyn concern, but she continued anyhow. She said, “I didn’t have nightmares, I saw things.” Now Grace shifted her weight and pivoted slightly to get a better look into Jessalyn face. She saw concern and fear. Placing her hand on Jessalyn arm to convey support, she allowed her to talk. In a lower tone, Jessalyn told her; “I saw dark shadows enter and leave the

bunkhouse until we started our prayer watch. Then I could hear them outside talking but I couldn't make out any words. What was happening to me?"

Grace has been a Christian for over thirty years. Being in a charismatic atmosphere, she has learned about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. She asked Jessalyn; "Have you read about the gifts of the Holy Spirit the apostle Paul talks about in the book of First Corinthians, chapter twelve?"

"Yes, I have heard sermons about the gifts."

"Did you read where the apostle says in chapter fourteen, verse one, to especially seek the gift of prophecy."

"I have not considered seeking it, or really prayed to receive it." Grace begins; "I look at the gift of prophecy in two parts. The spoken word given to people, by the Holy Spirit, to encourage a person or the church and then the Seer gifting. This part of prophecy allows a person to perceive the spiritual realm and see into it. I think you were seeing evil spirits trying to bring fear to you girls."

"Well, it worked. But by the end of the week, we all saw our prayers helped keep us safe."

"This is why we ask the church to pray a covering over us when we go on mission trips. To minimize the spiritual warfare, we will experience." Grace's expression changed to an inward thought. She said: "Jessalyn, I believe you are moving in the Seer gifting. Where God dreams and visions often operate in a person's life."

"Oh, I dream and in color."

"No, that is not what I mean. With God dreams in the gift of prophecy, it often feels like you are living the experience."

"What?"

"In this type of dream experience, God will give you a message, a destiny look ahead of your life or a revelation of who He is."

"What?" Her eyes widen, the expression on her face is confused. She has never heard anyone define dreams this way. Then she says, "I have had this type of dream all of my life. Are you telling me the way I dream is not the normal dreams people have?" A light is dawning on her and in a rush, memories are entering her thoughts. Grace continues; "With God dreams, a person feels like they are living in the dream. A seeing vision is when your eyes are open, or maybe closed, but you are awake, and you see a picture or

sometime it is like watching TV or a VHS tape.” Jessalyn is now, definitely uncomfortable. Turning her head, she sees Kelly is awake and says, “Thank you, Kelly is waving at me back there, got to go.” She thinks, *I got to block this out.*

The bus takes the exit to N Council Rd, leaving interstate 40, making a right turn. It is the last leg of their journey. Beyond NW 23 st Jessalyn looks to see apartment complexes she has lived in and schools she has attended since dad left them. Sour memories. Now the parks are another matter. At Rt 66 her taste buds long for Sonic’s ice cream and shakes. Voices are loud, Wiley is on the right. Their almost back. Cars are waiting in the church parking lot, families are gathered. It’s only been one week but it feels like a month to them. Teens fly off the bus. Susan pushes past Jessalyn to get to Tim first. Rapping her arms around him, she gives him a big bear hug. Jessalyn looks into his eyes to see his reaction and is caught by surprise when he looked at her. A smarm of butterfly’s filled her stomach and she had to look away. Oh, they had been friends, but in that moment, when Susan showed interest, something changed within her. Sure, as far as she was concerned, those eyes were always good looking. Now, in the exchange of glances there is chemistry. “J” Clara shouted. She had arrived a half an hour early. It is too quiet while her daughter was gone. She didn’t like it. Now, in a rush, Jessalyn raps her arms around her mom as tears well up. It is good to be home.

Retracing the route, she was just on, Clara is heading home. At Rte. 66 she makes a left turn, it is Sonic time and J bounces a bit in her seat. In no time, the Shakes arrive as J is giving Clara a play-by-play account of all the miracles she witnessed. She has a weeks’ worth of words that are flowing out of her heart. They are the best of friends. Clara has missed her. J held back on what she experienced at night for later. Now, she talks about all the joyful things God had done. In the back of her mind, she makes a plan to call her grandmother. Once it comes out about the shadows, Clara will tell J to call her.

Before Charlie even got out of the police car, Clara is out of her chair and briskly went out to meet him. She knew it was bad news and didn’t want Millie to hear anything. On the sidewalk, facing each other, Charlie gave it to her straight. Millie could see Clara’s face go pale. She places her hand over her mouth, her hand is trembling. Charlie holds up his right hand. To illustrate his point, he uses thumb and forefinger. Between them is the slightest of space. He says to Clara; “Sam is this close to going to jail. His friends are into serious crimes and Sam seems to be close by when it’s

happening Clara. If you don't do something right now, I will not be able to help him or you. He won't be going to jail for a few months; it will be for years." He goes on to say to her; "You have to do something right now, or it may be too late!" Millie sees Clara nod her head, yes. They separate.

Clara walks into the breakroom and grabs the newspaper. She lays it down on the desk. Feverishly she runs her fingers over ads. She reaches for the phone and makes a call, answering machine. She leaves her contact info. Millie asks what's wrong. Clara responds, "Please pray for God's favor." Between the phone calls, Millie does pray. Clara moves back to the breakroom, pulls the table over to the wall and the phone. She continues making calls. Millie can hear her talking but doesn't make sense of it all. Handling all the incoming calls, an hour goes by. Clara hangs up the phone and comes out, sitting in her chair. Slowly she turns to Millie; "Please don't say anything to anyone about this, please?"

"I won't" Millie tells her. "I have to move, I mean, right now. My middle son is in the wrong crowd. The only way, to possibly save him, is to move out of the area. I found a place in south Trinity. I am moving next week."

"But, what about school for your daughter?"

Crying, she says; "I know, it is going to be a mess, a nightmare. Sammy is a sophomore. I need to get him in all the school sports programs I can. Keep on him about his grades and keep him out of the Putman district."

Fifteen

“Angel, why didn’t I know about my dreams? About the God visions” Jessalyn asked. He replied, “It is the lack of reference.”

“And what does that mean.”

“It is all you have ever known.”

“Yeah, that part I get, what I do not get is why I did not know they were different from my mom, dad and my brothers. Even Grandma could have picked up on it.”

“It was hidden from you until it is time.” Jessalyn eyes flash up toward the sky and she thinks, *here we go again, a non-answer answer*. “Can you give me an answer I understand, please?”

“By the blessings of God upon your area, the Holy Spirit is it’s covering. You have been living in a region where there are many generational blessings.”

“Go on.”

“It is not until you were in the contrast of darkness, during the mission trip, that you saw the shadow figures.” He goes on to say; “Because everything is as usual to you, the Seer gift was hidden. Now that you have seen the actions of evil, you were made aware.”

“Exactly how long has this been hidden?”

“Fourteen years, three months and six days.” Doing the math Jessalyn looks right in his eyes and said, “That falls on my birthday.” She pulls it all together and says, “Wait, are you telling me I have had the Seer gift all of my life?”

“Yes.” Then he goes on to ask, “What is your name?”

“Jessalyn, why?”

“The meaning of the name Jessalyn is one who sees.”

“Who sees what exactly?”

“Into the spiritual realm.” This is too much for her and she just shakes her head. She turns and looks at the spot and asks; “Am I going back into it again?”

“No, we are done with this lesson, experience.” Looking up the path, she takes her first step and her outfit changes to all yellow. Bright yellow blouse, slacks and a yellow bow for her hair. As they began, along the inner wall are Tarragon plants filling the air with its sweet aroma. The incline before them is gradual and long. Jessalyn’s outlook is bright. Rounding the first switchback, she pauses to look out into the canyon and where they have been. Reflecting on just how far she has come. A bittersweet moment. Thinking about all she has learned. Knowing how much she has changed. Pivoting, she strides up the path when the rock wall recedes. *How odd* she thinks. At the next hair pin turn, the path falls away and downward. It has been hidden by the upward path until they rounded this last switchback. From this vantage point she can see two downward switchbacks and to her horror, there is a spot. Turning abruptly, she says: “No.” Her cloths change to the color of the path, a light brown. Again, she says, “No.” She collapse onto the path. “I can’t” saying in a pleading tone.

The angel sits down with his feet dangling over the edge. He waits. “I thought you said we were out of the bottom. That it will not be like that again” she said to him. He asked; “How many switchbacks have we walked up?”

She replied, “Twenty-four.”

“Beyond the next spot, what do you see?”

“Upward switchbacks.” Jessalyn has been following the voice of Jesus for some time now. It has been harder than she ever imagined. Yet, the last spot was the sweetest one yet. She is walking on air, metaphorically. Oh, so quickly the pain of the valley spots fills her with dread. It all rushes back. And there they sat.

She thinks, *it must not be good. Or he would be shooining me towards it. He is waiting, meaning he is allowing me to see my way through this. I know there is no going back or staying in one place too long. The truth is, I don’t want to go through more emotional and spiritual pain, I don’t. Just when I think I have this journey all figured out, it changes. It never occurred to me, the switchbacks might take a turn downward and then up again.* There the two of them sat. Scooting over to the edge, Jessalyn throws her feet over the side, swinging them from side to side. Contemplating. “Okay angel, what can you tell me about that spot?” He looked off into the canyon, not

saying a word. “It will go easier for me if I know what is going to happen. We are wasting time.” Still, he does not speak. She says, “How can I be willing to go through more if I don’t know what’s going to happen.” Crickets. “Come on angel, you have to give me something” she blurts out. Exasperated, she waits. Tears begin to roll down her cheeks. Even though the spot at switchback thirteen were some of the best times in her life, just the thought of difficulties become a major setback in her heart. She’s torn. Drifting into deep thought, she comes around to the call. If it were up to her, this would be it. However, she knows this journey goes beyond her reasoning. This she is learning. Then he says, “Trust. No matter what happens, Jesus is with you, He works all things out for good. You do love Him, right?” It is a self-evident answer. Sitting side by side, she lingers. The word; pleasing, enters her mind. Not by her own will, it is just there. Running with this word, she entertains it. Her thoughts start to search this idea, she thinks *Jessalyn, have you ever done anything to please your parents that you didn’t want to do? Of course. How is walking out your call upon your life any different? To please Jesus, are you willing to do it for Him?* Standing, her outfit changes to dark brown. Without enthusiasm, Jessalyn walks down the two switchbacks noticing the unusual plants. “Angel” she said, “What type of plant is that? I didn’t see it in the garden down in the valley?”

“Horseradish.”

“It has an odd aroma. Is it and herb? Is it used to season?”

“Yes. It is the root of the plant that is used. It is ground up.”

“What type of flavor does it have?”

“Bitter.” With this news, Jessalyn stops in her tracks. Looking towards him in utter disbelief, she says; “How can you guide me to go in there?”

“It is in the bitter experiences that brings on bondage.” Widening her eyes, raising her eyebrows to where white shows all around them she says; “Bondage! What kind of lesson is that angel?” The feeling of concern enters her mood. *Bondage*, she thinks. *I’m only fourteen, what do I know about bondage? She feels trapped between her calling and choice. If it were up to me, I would not do it. What is it about this journey? There is something about following the Lord that we do what we don’t want to do for growth we can’t see and don’t understand until we have gone through it.* Obediently, she turns, reaches out and give angel a hug for support, pivots and reluctantly steps into the spot.

The note is on the kitchen table. “Mom, I am over at Kelly’s with some of the kids from church” she wrote signing it, J. Clara trusts J around boys, besides Kelly’s mother is overprotective. Clara thinks, *that boy who changed the car headlight has captured J’s eye. Seems every time the group is together, he is there.* Since the mission trip, the group is inseparable. They read the Bible together, pray for each other and hang out the rest of the time. Clara thinks, *my sweet little girl is so unlike her brothers.* Immediately she stops this line of thinking. If she goes on, well, it makes the decision to move that much harder. She normally would make dinner. Instead, she walks over to the chair in the front room and sits down. Staring, mindlessly at the wall, not seeing the color the wall is painted, the photo’s hanging there, no she is deep thought. Making a mental to do list.

The phone ringing brings her out of the mental abyss. “Mom, I’m staying for dinner at Kelly’s” J said. She listens only to hear; “That is fine dear, see you when you get home.” She walks into her room and opens the closet. There are the collapsed boxes they use each time they move. Getting two of them out, she walks into the kitchen and tapes up the bottom. She starts packing the non-essential items. Crying more than she is packing. She has the cabinets open, making decisions on what to pack as time slips away from her. The front door opens, and J comes in kicking her shoes off and talking a mile a minute until. Yelling; “MOM, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?”

Swallowing hard Clara coldly states; “I am sorry J; we are moving on Saturday.” She can’t believe her ears. “MOM”, she screams. Throwing her arms out and down. Shaking, she says; “We cannot move.” Clara is silent. J, now ask; “Where are we moving too?”

“South of 23rd on Rockwell.”

“Oh my gosh mom, that is out of the school district.” she says.

“Yes.” Screaming again she said, “I’m on the student council! I work in the school office as an aid. What about basketball tryouts and the volleyball team? MOM, I have a life at school. I have good grades. You can’t do this to me!” Looking devastated, she asks; “Don’t I matter?” She knew the answer. Crying, J grabs her shoes off the floor, turns and walks out the door, into the dark. She doesn’t care. Clara could hear her running down the apartment stairs.

The picture Charlie painted for her; replays over and over again. Sammy’s older friend, walking into a mom-and-pop grocery store and robbing them. Hitting the elderly owner in the head as he ran out. It happens, this time,

Sammy is not with him. She is determined he will not be with any of those boys again. When she makes up her mind, nothing is going to change it. That is why they are moving to the extreme southern part of the area. She thinks *Thank you God that Sammy loves sports and working part time. That is how I will keep him busy. Lord, please go before us and open good doors for him. It is his idle time. Somehow, he gravitates to mischievous friends when he has too much time on his hands.* Wiping the tears away from her eyes, Clara, walks out of the kitchen, down the hall and into her bedroom.

Slowly closing the bedroom door, there in the dark, blocking out the noise from apartments around her, she sits on the edge of the bed and enters replaying everything in her mind. They are all there, all the possibilities looming before her. She thinks; *I've got to sort this out*, as her emotions run wild. The tears will just will not stop. Waves of fear wash over her. It is one of those times in life you look to God to lead you through. Because you can't see a way out of the problems. Reaching inward, she recites psalms 34:19 "The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from all of them." Knowing it is going to be hard. Trusting Him for the outcome. But right now, Clara knows she is hurting J, her little girl. She begins to avalanche into self-pity rants she's capable of, but she forces herself to not go there. After the divorce, she spent too much of her life there. The facts are, she is raising children on her own. It's hard. Reigning in the spaghetti streams of what if's, her focus is clear, getting Sammy through high school with as little damage as possible. Guiding him as long as she can before her role ends.

Wilma has been a strong role model in her life. Born and raised in Texas, you learn to meet all that life throws at you. Her parents came through the Great Depression, the second World War and the Korean Conflict. They prayed hard, worked hard. It is how Clara's parents spent time looking ahead of each child's life. Seeing their children's likes and dislikes. Listening to their dreams. First building within them the foundation, faith in God. Loving Jesus as their savior. Learning to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Following the call of God. Allowing Him to live out the plans He has for their children. Clara calls upon the strength she witnessed in her mother.

Love. Because of her mother's love, holding onto God, she has seen impossible things happen. Way beyond her abilities. Love is what keeps her moving forward. The bond and commitment to her offspring is unwavering. Time and time again she has gone further than she has ever thought she could. The emotional swings, the relentless tiredness and endless things to do. Giving of herself when nothing is coming in. If it were not for the ladies

at church surrounding her with love and caring, their support and most importantly their prayers is how she is surviving.

Sitting on the swing, Jessalyn cannot believe what is happening. The park closes at dark, but she has seen people here playing in the dark anyway. She kicks off and swings up high. Trying to block out the world. Escape. Looking at the belly of a landing planes, she thinks about the mission trip. Wanting to go again. Wanting to run away. Trying not to be mad at mom. How she wants to talk to Kelly. To tell her how unfair her mother is being. To sit next to Tim. She always feels safe when he is next to her. In the darkness, in the intensity of the moment, Jessalyn begins a new mindset. Not that she could ever imagine the possibilities. But it happened. It is the first moments; feeling hatred towards her mother.

Sixteen

I just cannot say, she will get over it and go on, Clara thought. *I know she is hurting and someday I hope she understands why I did this.* It was the fastest move they have ever done. J did not say ten words to Clara since that night. Little did she know her relationship with Sammy and J would juxtapose. Sammy is all for the move, J is not. He knew the new school had the best athletics department in the region. His little boy dreams, as far as Clara thought, of becoming a Baseball or Football player took a big step forward at the new school. Jessalyn is on her own in a new place, no friends, totally alone. Everyday contributed to her ill feeling toward Clara. Where she would have planned programs to participate in at the old school, now she took on a defeatist attitude. Why bother. The kids she hung around with, those living somewhat close, were from the church youth group. Sammy's friend, well they were trouble. Jessalyn friends became her lifeline, a new surrogate family. Tim went from being just a friend to becoming her boyfriend, inseparable.

Bending down to put the crock pot in a cabinet, Clara is thinking, *is this move eight or nine? I can't remember.* Her mind began to replay thoughts. *So many times, I second guess myself in my choices. Charlie convinced me it was vital to take steps to protect Sammy. Lord: you know I didn't see coming what took place with David. There was no escaping the fact he was unhappy. Why Lord, he still puzzles me. Am I that bad of a mother? Did Bob's abandonment warp him to blame me? I know I was hard on him. J is my easy child; David is a complete mystery. Sammy, like David easily can get into trouble but at least I can read him a little. What goes on in that mind of his. Lord, you know, if I can keep him involved, he does not act out. That anger the boys carry get released one way or another, regardless of how much I try, I am not enough.* Wiping her eyes, she continues to get settled in the new place.

Opening another box, it occurs to her, she is alone, still. Usually J is right there, by her side, talking and connecting. Clara reflects on their school registrations. Getting Sammy enrolled in sports shocked her. It is his senior year. It is hard to get on the varsity team if you don't come up through the ranks. However, she learned Coaches talk about their players. Sammy had been the type of player all coaches hope for. Sure, Clara cheered each time he

hit the ball during the baseball season. Or the tackles he made while playing football. She had no idea how good he is playing in these sports. He is her boy, and she goes to the games to encourage him never noticing his over the top abilities. Really, what does she know about sports? Keeping a roof over their heads, food to eat, clothing for her growing children, occupies most of her thoughts and prayers. She almost enters the abyss of the what ifs. If Bob had stayed around. Helped financially, took even a little responsibility, it would have helped keep her from constant exhaustion. Right now, there is no time to do self-talk about doing her best. It's a tight rope walk each and every day.

Jessalyn is surprised when Clara just dropped her off at church on Sunday with instructions to get a ride home from Kelly's parents. She had called early asking them to bring her home after church. J felt no guilt when inwardly she was relieved at not being in the car on with her on the ride home. Clara left the church parking lot making a left-hand turn onto Wilshire. At the light she made a right onto Council road headed north. It is as if the car was on auto-pilot. The next thing she knew she was in Martin Parks lot. Like a zombie she walked over to the trail and down to the creek. So many memories. Looking for a seclude spot she sat down on the bank. Most times the flowing waters brought refreshing. Today she is all in her mind.

It has been horribly hard, not knowing where David has been. The most dread times, the first moments lying in bed for the night. Nothing to occupy her mind it drifts off to the problems. The regrets. It would be far worst if it were not for her lady friends at church and their prayer support, she knows it. Far too many nights she thinks about her lost child. Where is he? Is he doing okay or in trouble? Praying God protects him. However, she got the news. David is living with her X in-laws. It is good and bad news to her.

There on the bank of the creek where there were wonderful times with her oldest son. She enters into deep feelings. She thinks *how could they do this to me? How could they not tell me he is with them? Lord you know, I have never thought of myself as being in a mixed marriage with Bob and his family. But God, they are so different from what I know. Good people, I thought, until this news. To make a decision like this and not even have the courtesy to tell me.* Shielding her face to hide the tears, they just won't stop. She is mad, angry, hurt, livid all at the same time. In her mind she plots against them. Wanting to pray God would bring her justice. All the time wanting something, anything to place the blame on to get out from under this crushing pain. Endlessly, the repeating loop of unanswerable questions and the desire to escape it all, haunts her. For a second she thinks of running

and is instantly she is discussed with herself. How could she do such a thing. Just run away, let Bob's parents raise Sammy and J too. In everything she has experienced in her relationship with God, that is not an answer. Holding on to Him and allowing Him to lay out the plans He has for her. It is taking everything she has to follow, and she knows it. *Lord, how do I get over this betrayal? Again?* She inquires through prayer.

Quickened by the Holy Spirit, she sees she is looking at the small immediate picture. In the big picture, David is being taken care of and building a life. God is providing for all their needs. She is in a very good church community. Has a good job. Her son Samuel is in a better position. J is connected to godly people to help. *Why does it feel like I am living life walking up stream in a river when the waters waist high she thought? Does it ever stop? Does it ever get better Lord she asks?* Shadows lift above the other embankment. Hours have gone by. Aching from being in one place too long, she walks back to the car. Totally drained. She knows a call to Wilma will happen soon, just not today.

On the way home, Clara returns to thank God for psalm 34:17. She repeats it out loud. *The righteous cry, and the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. Now Lord, you promised it, I am holding you to it.*

“No, my mom has never done this before,” Jessalyn tells Tim as they walk around his neighborhood. She pours out her heart to him. “She is doing some really weird things. Ya-know Tim, this is the first time I have moved, and believe me, we have moved a lot, that it doesn't feel like home to me. I love my brothers, but they mess my life up. That is why we move so much. David, I haven't seen or heard from him since he left. Just like Dad, he's gone. You see where mom is, it is home. But right now, I am so mad at her, this apartment is anything but home. I can't even think about her for long without getting a literal headache. I am getting a lot of these lately.” He lets her vent. They have an odd relationship. It is not as much about their mutual attraction. It is having the other one know and understand about the supernatural events God released in their lives. They can talk about it and the other person openly accepts them. Not so in all their relationships. Tim's healing is a miracle. But try and explain it to people who have not seen Signs and Wonders before, there is rejection and awkwardness. Jessalyn seeing into the spiritual realm, well, she doesn't go there often. If she opens up it is because she really trusts that person.

Seventeen

The light is flashing on the new answering machine. Out of necessity, Clara had to buy one. Colleges, Major league Baseball teams and other sports departments are calling to offer Sammy tryouts. The mailbox at the apartment will be filled with envelopes address to him. He is having the best year of his life. It gets better. Wherever he applied himself, he is succeeding. He is Senior Class President and all school king. The pinacol is, being drafted, right out of High School by a major league Baseball Team. Life at seventeen held a promising future for him.

Clara is dumb founded. Seated at the kitchen table, she reads over all the inquires. College coaches for football, track, basketball and baseball all wanted her son to tryout. How did she not know? Mentally she is berating herself. Then, a surge, humbling, sweeps over her. He knew. God knew just what to do. She could not and would not take credit for the move to the new school. The world has opened up for her son. In her heart is gratitude. Parents want a better life for their children then they have lived. It is what Clara has been praying for and now, in the midst of this rising storm of interests, she sees the realization for her son.

Letting the letters fall from her hands, spontaneously she convulses in a sobbing fit of tears. Her chest heaves with each breath. She chokes to inhale in the rhythm of sobs. So deep is her release. Subconsciously, a release is taking place. The fear, intense fear she has held internally for the last year. Praying, working and holding on to God that her son would not ruin his life in a bad choice. Charlie had painfully made her aware. She could feel all of her fear leaving in the sobs. A peace settled over her.

Finances are running low as always. Clara had promised herself to never get into debt. Breaking it, the credit card saved the day. When she applied for and they accepted her is a total surprise. She held it in reserve for emergency. This is not an emergency but an event that must be lived right. Now, Sammy has a new suit he will graduate in and use for college acceptance or major league draft event. J needed a new dress for her graduation from eight grade. The question is, is she going to grow any taller. Although J is excited about getting a new dress, there is a chill in the air. Fifteen dresses later, they found the one. An Empire style dress, dark pink in color, a high waist with bare

shoulders that goes to just above her knee. Or room to grow. The preferred girly girl look she loves.

This spring, Clara carries an outlook that has eluded her for decades. A sense of pride. Two graduation, both in the same week. She has a mix of emotions. This last year has been a disaster for her and J. She spends most of her time over at Kelly's, Susie's and Tim's house. Whatever they are doing, J is not getting in trouble like the boys. But Clara misses her. Then on top of that, once Sammy graduates, he is moving to the training camp in Florida. He will be eighteen soon and playing baseball for a living and has a promising career ahead of him. Once he is gone, she will be alone. Not something she has planned on. For right now, J lives there but is not living there. It is more like a bed and breakfast. However, in this moment, she allows herself to feel proud of her children's accomplishments.

Just like the rapid wind that always blows across Oklahoma; Sammy's graduation day arrived. Clara and Jessalyn are seated in the center auditorium near the back. The commencement begins. The superintendent of the school opens. Clara feels a rush, as he calls for Samuel Ross to come forward. In silence, he walks up to the podium. Being class President, he is to say a few words to his fellow students. Clara puts her right hand on her upper chest. Stifling back the sobs, she listens to her baby boy address the auditorium with confidence and poise. She listens to him as he admonishes them to embrace their future, work hard and give God thanks for His blessing upon their lives.

Barely able to take a breath, again Clara and Sammy are seated in J's school auditorium. Arranged alphabetically, she is near the back of her graduating class. Clara watched her as they filed in. Proud of her baby girl. It is a bittersweet moment. If they had not changed school, it might have been J who is called up to address her class. Her accomplishments in volleyball and basketball brought notoriety. Her position as aid in the office helped her to be known by the school staff. Jessalyn was very well liked by the children at the school. But in this new school, she was nearly invisible. It is heartbreaking to her. Clara is hoping, with at least four more years, that this fence can be mended.

Graduation Caps fly into the air. Jessalyn has graduated in the upper twenty percent of her class. Running to her friends, a hug fest begins. Several her youth group go to this school. The joy is spread around. Of course, she looks for Tim first. Kelly is here and others. Jessalyn opens the buttons on

her graduating gown. She thinks, *I cannot let my beautiful dress go unnoticed.* Just as she hoped, it turned several heads.

Truth be told, this last year, Jessalyn attempted to make a bad choice now and then. Something always came up to interfere with it. When she is at her weakest, and it is so obvious, God blocked her from taking a bad path. It has come to the attention of Grace at the youth group that Jessalyn was struggling. She knew that Jessalyn had been ripped from a school she loved. And Grace knew Jessalyn is stuck in hating her mom because of what has happened to her. She has heard it from a few. It is not gossip, it is concern, so much so, it was time to talk to her.

One of the great things about youth group, the teens are free to be themselves and Grace likes seeing them that way. Then the night came, calling Jessalyn over she asked her if they could talk. Shocking her, totally unaware a talk is needed. Grace laid a silent time bomb in her path. She asked her; “Jessalyn, will you be going to the upcoming dinner?”

“Yes, I can’t wait.”

“Good. I have an assignment for you. Seek God. The goal is to have a pure heart before God. In your prayer time, ask Him if you are carrying any sin in your life.? Any unforgiveness. We as leaders do this often. That is when we see the best miracles happen whether we are ministering here at home or on a mission trip. Will you do that for me?” Jessalyn nodded yes, turned and went back into group.

The whole next week, as she laid in bed before falling asleep, she would focus on God. In her mind she thought, *Father, I am so excited about seeing you work miracle in our group. I want to be used of you like when I was on the mission trip. Grace says I need to ask, it is a halfhearted attempt, do I have any sin in my life?* The unforgiveness part is a no brainer. She is not sure she is ready to let go of it, just yet. It has totally taken over her life. All of her idle thoughts always drift back to it. Running through the unfairness. How could she do this to me scenarios. The weight of the anger is crushing. It boiled down to Clara not considered her or caring about how it affected her. The; *I don't matter* feelings always surfaced. But she wasn't there that day Charlie visited Clara at work or nor did she tell anyone. She didn't see the fear and pain in her eyes. Jessalyn follows Graces advise.

Dread filled Clara's heart. It is time. It is a quiet ride in the duster. Arriving at Will Rogers Airport, Clara and J are seeing Sammy off. He is heading for training camp. Her second child is leaving her protective umbrella. Is he

ready? It is a big world out there. It does not help, knowing the league will be a surrogate family to him. She doesn't know them. It is out of her control. These boys of hers tend to rip the reigns out of her hands. Clara gave him a final hug. A kiss on the cheek. Their calling his section to board. Sammy, filled with excitement, gives his sister a firm hug. It is sad his brotherly prank will never happen again. He walks through the jetway. The cord to Clara's heart is stretched taut until it breaks. Tears of sadness roll down her cheek.

Just one gate over, there is a happy reunion. A wife and mother is home. Her husband and children are there to meet her. A bouquet of flowers waiting for her. She has come back from a mission trip of a lifetime. An exhausting flight home, over many countries, returning home from Africa. She has seen the manifest power of God and been forever changed.

Unseen by human eyes is a reunion of angels. Greetings are exchanged, quick stories are shared. It is the angelic gathering of the two families. The Ross and Holmes coincide at the airport. It is no surprise to the angels, it is destiny for their paths to cross, just not yet. Arielle Holmes and her family head to baggage claim carousel, Clara and J start their walk to the parking lot. Riding down the escalator and out the doors, they passed the statue of Will Rogers, mounted on his horse, lassoing rope in hand forming a big circle, frozen in time. He is a legend in these parts. Clara puts the key in the ignition, a chug and a rumble, it starts. Clara tells the car, "Okay Duster, take us to Sonic."

Tim's mom is having the youth group over for dinner next week. Jessalyn is looking forward to it. Her nightly prayer time seem to be getting heavier. Like the burden she is carrying. She wanted it both, to be used of God and to be mad at her mother. It is too heavy. It came to a breaking point the night before the dinner. Something had to give. Did it come with a conscience decision? No, it is more like it is time to lay it down. A new mindset immersed.

At Tim's house, Jessalyn has become like another member of the family. It is natural for her to be there. People arrived. It is a yard party. All members accounted for, they all sat down to the three long folding tables and chairs. The meal is going to be centered around BBQ roast smoked butt. The recipe calls for Horse radish. Holding hands, they give thanks to God. Just before they pass the dishes around, Tim's father, seated at the head of the table, stands. He said; "I want you all to think about the goodness of God. Thru Jesus, we are receiving physical, emotional healings and deliverance from spiritual bondage. This meal includes Horse Radish that is called Maror at

the Jewish Seder meal. It is to remind us all of the bitterness that any type of bondage brings to our lives. Like the night before Israelites began their Exodus, before leaving Egypt they celebrated the Passover meal. We all need to remember how bitterness and unforgiveness places us in bondage. Once God delivers us, we must never return to it again. Let's eat!"

It will not hit her until later. Being mad at her mother, what she is feeling has been bitterness and she didn't see it. This last year has hurt her in many ways. The awkwardness of walking the school hallways, being the odd girl out. Not being in the inner circle of activities but drifting from class to class. Words are at a loss here, to describe just how badly it feels. Carrying every day, the emotional physical pain. A response to her ill feelings. She been afloat aimlessly between home and school. It is something Jessalyn decides she never wants to do again. Not that she would articulate the intense anger had to end. My life is consumed with it and I don't want to live this way anymore. The youth group has been her safety net. Her behavior, this last year, has left a bitter taste in her mouth. Spreading the horse radish on the meat, Tim's father cautions her to go lightly. It only takes one taste to discover why. Taking her first bite; instantly her eyes water. Her sinus open and her nose runs. Opening her mouth to catch a breath, other around the tables see the humor in it. All she can say is "Wow." Taking her knife, she scraps the horse radish off of the rest of her meat, she does not want a repeat experience. Grace, looks down the table, smiling at Jessalyn. She is hoping for her to pull all of it together and gain the fullness of this lesson.

Walking up the stairs to the apartment, it hit her, how does she change her actions towards her mom. Slipping the key in the lock, she opens the door. Clara is sitting on the couch in front of the TV. ALF is a silly, slap stick comedy program Clara enjoys. Mostly because she laughs, and God knows she needs it. With Sammy gone and J off on her own most the time, she's alone. J plops down on the couch. Laughing at all of ALF's attempt to get a cat, not as pet, but his favorite food, it is laughable. ALF, is an abbreviation for Alien Life Form. On his planet, cats are the finer foods. HUH, ALF's favorite expression. During the commercial, J asks her mom; "Have you ever had Horse Radish?" It was the ice breaker they both needed.

That night, lying in bed, Jessalyn asks God to forgive her for the bitterness she felt towards her mom this last year. She said, "Lord, please show me all the sins in my life. Amen." It has not happened for a long time. But she went into a God dream. One of those dreams she is living out. A bigger than life experience. As if in the third person, she watches herself walk up to a person, somewhere in Mexico. It is a man in his forties. The man is on crutches. He

is missing part of his right leg from the knee down. She notices the look on his face. The clothes he is wearing. How at the beginning of the prayer time, he surrounded by people praying for him? Her dream ends there leaving her with many questions she didn't have before she had this experience.

The angel steps away from delivering God's dream to Jessalyn. He is with her always. Except for those time he is called to the Throne Room of God. It is the two pleasures of his existence he cherishes. Opportunities to be in the Throne Room of God is eternal. Working on earth, having charge of one of God's children is temporal. It is an extreme privilege to be assigned labors on earth. He knows legions of angels in heaven are still waiting assignments. This season for Jessalyn is coming to an end. While she sleeps, his mind drift back to the bible story of Balaam the Prophet. How one of his fellow angels stood in the donkey's way to inhibit him from taking bad actions that would ruin his life and affect the advancing Israelis. He too has stories of the times he stood right in front of Jessalyn blocking her way. The hand of God is upon her. His laws are written upon her heart. She lives according to God's standards for a purpose. Not for now, but for later. That is why he redirected her path. Opening up evil doors would affect her gift, confuse her understanding of her gift. In his peripheral view, the realm of the spiritual path draws near. This lesson is coming to an end. He will be with her, in this realm until she graduates. Then they will both merge on her spiritual path.

Eighteen

The Emergency Broadcasting Warning System sent a Watch alert over the Television and Radio station all throughout the Oklahoma City Metro Area. A serious storm front will be passing over the area.

Clara steps out of the apartment and onto the walkway to assess the sky. Gray cloud cover is already over them. It is when the purple, pink color clouds bring fear. However, the weather service has picked up on atmospheric conditions that has set off the Tornado Watch but for right now, no Tornado Warning. She looks towards her car. It's not much, but it is working. Her thoughts move towards how much it will cost her if there is a bad hail damage. Returning to the TV, Clara sees the weatherman displays the current Doppler Radar image. This technology has been a God send to this state and others living in Tornado alley. He tells everyone, the storm has weakened, and the Watch is now cancelled. Rain would be expected to blanket the area.

Clara has seen her share of storms in her life. Natural storms and relationship/life's storms. Standing in front of the bathroom mirror, there is no denying it, she has aged. Brushing her hair, mindlessly, until she notices it. A grey hair. For what it's worth, she gets that strand of hair and plucks it out. Hiding the fact life has moved on and she isn't what she uses to be. At times she wonders if she will be alone or might she meet someone. Taking in a breath, relaxing, it is J that needs her. Two are out of the nest, one more at home. Just like today's storm passed over and the dangers held in the storm circling Sammy's life; it too has passed over. No damage done. People. Isn't it our nature to take credit for our accomplishments? Especially if we have weathered the storms of life and come out on the other side in good standings. Except, Clara knows, it has been all God. She is just along for the ride or life.

Jessalyn sits down right in the spot. She has unfinished business. Running through her mind, whirling about, are all the events that have taken place. *Why*, she thinks. Looking up into the angel's eyes, holding up the palms of

her hands, using body language to convey, I am not ready to talk. She goes into inner reflections. *I hated what happened to me. My life is turned inside out and upside down. All because my brother gets in trouble. I did what is right. I worked hard at school. I had friends. Played sports. I preformed top in my age group. I got good grades. I was achieving better than either of my brothers and my life is uprooted. And that is not the bad part. Attending in the new school, I had lost all I had gained in the old school. The worst part, mom didn't even consult me in all of this. As if I didn't matter. I was left with two things; we were still in Trinity and my friends from youth group.* She sat there quietly.

Guilt rose as she thought, *if only Sammy had run off like David had done, I would not have the worst year of my life.* She leapfrogs forward to the ending. Her brother is now in the minor leagues. Jumping back, reflects on how much she hated her mother for abandoning her life. Thinking, *how she drifted from life at home to life with her friends. Staying away from the apartment. It felt better to be away than to be there. Sammy knew what is happening to me, but he showed no feelings one way or the other. For him it is all about working towards the big leagues. Obsession, to how much she hated her mom drove her to aimlessness. It had to stop and where is God. Why isn't he helping.*

Even though her eyes were open this whole time, she was looking inward so deeply that her surrounding went unnoticed. Reaching the bottom of the litany of horrible events, she looks up and sees the horse radish plants along the switchback walls. Jumping up to a standing position, shocked expression on her face, she looks up at the angel and then back to the plants. Stepping out of the spot and over to the plants, she leans over to touch the leaves. She says, "Maror." Her inward look changes to a look of revelation. "Wait, wait, wait, are you telling me, this plant is a sign?" The angel only smiled. She goes on to say; "I saw it as a plant, but now I know about it from experience. This whole lesson is about the bitter taste hatred brings to a person's life. Learning how it took over all my thoughts and brought me into spiritual bondage." Looking up slightly at angel she said, "Ya-know what angel, it is heavy. Not physically heavy, emotionally and spiritually heavy. I was looking for a way out when Grace told me to seek God to show me my sins." Pacing back and forth, waving her arms up and about, processing all of this, she says again, "Wait. You mean God is with me through all of this? Oh, I know God is with us, but this seem personal, like God is really with me. Really, I got to think about this."

“Okay angel” she said, “Jewish people celebrate a Passover meal and Maror is used to remind them of the bitter taste they experienced while they lived in slavery. Let me tell you angel that horse radish will open your sinus’ and you will cry.” They both laughed. “Really angel, it is so bad I don’t want to experience that again. Bitterness and too much horse radish.” The angel looked towards the upward switchbacks and she understood. As Jessalyn took her first steps, her clothes changed. She is wearing green jeans and a teal blouse with her hair in a ponytail. An image of the bench where the angel’s wings were fully open flashes in her mind.

Contemplating her experiences, she saw how one person’s gain can be another person’s loss. How her family, or what is left of it, has incurred loss after loss and blessings to fill the voids. She has always had a roof over her head, a bed to sleep in and never went hungry. But something always happens. Trauma of some sort shows up without notice. Drama, drama, drama. My life has been a soap opera. As my world turns, catchy title. In the world, it has taught her one thing, don’t let your guard down. On switchback thirty-three Jessalyn says; “Angel, have you ever eaten catfish?” Like, where is this coming from, right? It is a rhetorical question because she continues, “Mom brought me to the diner for lunch on Friday. It is catfish Friday. The diner on 39th street is right next to the barber shop. You have to get there early, or they will run out. People will come from miles around. We got a table outside. So, while we were waiting, we watched all the happenings on Main street. Well, that’s what we call it. It’s a great people watching spot. Well, our order came out. That first bite is awesome. A crunchy outside and moist meat on the inside with a sweet tartar Sauce. Hmmm. Hey, angel, do we ever eat here?”

“Yes, what would you like?”

“Cherry’s, Bing Cherry’s.” He motioned for her to sit down and swing her legs over the side of the rock ledge. He did the same. In a reverent moment, he is looking upward; then she heard him give thanks. He put his hands together and when he opened them up, there where Bing Cherry’s. “Wow” she said. You mean all of this time you could do that?”

“Yes. You read the story where Jesus five thousand people with only five loaves and fishes.”

“Yes, I have.”

“Because Jesus did it, I can too.” Placing the cherry pits lined up on the edge, she enjoyed their sweet taste. Looking out over the canyon. Remembering all

she has learned and experienced, right now, she is savoring the sweet taste experienced knowledge has brought to her. “Angel, what is up above us?”

“A plateau.” Glancing over to the opposite side of the canyon, she remembers the beginning of her journey. She was so young then. Now at fifteen, it seems light years from back then. “Jessalyn” the angels said shocking her. Mostly because he doesn’t speak much. He asks; “Did you have a favorite experience while we were in the canyon?” Thinking a bit, she says “Yes. It was in the valley where we were in the stream. I was sitting on the rock in the middle of it and you were over on the bank. I was listening to the birds, watching the tall grass sway in the stream, I splashed water on you. I liked your shocked look.”

“Now, what part didn’t you like?”

“It is when I wanted to kill myself. I didn’t like who I was or the life I was living. I couldn’t escape the pain. Angel, I was my father’s princess. Then I found out I meant absolutely nothing to him. It tore me up inside. I didn’t see any way out except to end it. But then, Grandma Wilma helped change it all. Just think of all I would have missed angel if I did it.” Jessalyn perked up and said, “Angel, I have to tell you, I like being around boys. At first, I would listen to them, but then I met a boy who listened to me. I felt good inside. Do you know why?”

“Yes, he showed that he cared about you. It brought value to who you are and it brings good feelings.” Reverently he looked upward as if asking a question of God. Then from above the canyon a wind began to blow. Louder and louder until it is blowing over them. A stream of wind hit her right in the chest, and she took a deep breath. Her back straitened and her face radiated. She said, “Angel, oh the love. Is this how much my heavenly father loves me?” He only smiled.

Right now, getting out of the canyon is not a priority. Basking in the love of God is the most important thing. This connection with Him took precedence over everything. Closing her eyes, she allowed herself to be introspective. Reveling in the enhanced emotion. Opening her eyes, she said; “I know it is the same canyon angel, but it looks different.” And there the two of them sat. Angel felt enjoyment. Jessalyn received a taste of the Fathers heavenly love. The love he has lived in for millenniums. He is grateful they now have God’s manifest love as a shared experience. Odd, for most of the journey, the call hurried them forward. Right now, they lingered.

Together they stood up. The trail is again a delight. Slowly, step by step they climbed. As they neared switchback thirty-eight the air carried the sweet fragrance of flowers. Quickening her pace, Jessalyn reached the plateau and gasped. “Angel” she said, “It’s covered with flowers.” The path disappeared on the edge of a beautiful flower garden. Rushing in, stunned by all the colors and elegance she twirled around. Like a bee, she went from one flower to the next. Touching the pedals, feeling how soft they are and smelling their aroma’s. In the center of the garden, it a large circle with an ornate pearl white bench. While Jessalyn looked at each and every flower, angel rested upon the bench. The Call is still before them. This place is a weigh station to the journey. Jessalyn outfit changes to a white dress with black shoes. Straightening up, looking at him, she insists angel come over to see the clump of flowers. “Aren’t they so pretty” she said. “What is their name?”

“Zarmomiums” he said. Looking perplexed, Jessalyn says to him, “Is that even a word?”

“Not in your language.”

“What do you mean, my language?”

“In heaven there are many wonders that cannot be expressed in earthly terms. Here on the path, you get a glimpse of the things to come.” They moved from flower to flower as she asked angel its name.

Drifting over to the bench, together they sit down. Jessalyn takes in all the wonders around her. “Angel” she says loudly. “Down in the ravine, it is dark and scary. Hard to live out. Hard to be obedient and follow. I had no idea; this would be in front of my life.”

“Eye has not seen nor has ears heard, neither has entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love Him” the angel said. Jessalyn knew there would be another spot. Even though they are on a plateau she is feeling as if she on top of a mountain. *It feels good to feel good* she thinks.

Nineteen

She just could not help herself. Jessalyn leaned over the display and picked it up. “Oh, it is so cute” holding it up for Susie to see. “I just love this one” she told her.

“Come on Jess, is there a puppy dog nick knack, you don’t like?”

“Do you remember the little girl that played in the ET movie?”

“Yeah.”

“That scene where ET hid in the middle of the stuffed animals?”

“Yeah.”

“I might have had a bunch of stuff animals like that girl, but all kinds of stuffed dogs, if I didn’t love going to concerts and listening to music CD’s.” Placing the stuff puppy down, she continues, “Don’t you just love listening to Petra’s music?”

“Oh, oh, The Road to Zion’ is my absolute favorite, I play that song over and over again” as Susie begins to hum the tune. Jess, you watch to see if anyone hears me. I’d die of embracement.” Jessalyn knows that is not true, Susie is always humming one song or another.

“It’s one of my favorites songs too, sometimes, just as I am falling asleep, I love to listen to ‘Take Me In’, that Kutless song.”

“What? Jess, it starts out with hard and loud guitar. How in the world can you fall asleep to them?” She lifts her shoulders in one of those I don’t know expressions. “Enough window shopping, let’s go.” The girls left the store empty handed. Only for lack of funds. On the way back to Susie’s she asked; “Are you and your mom going shopping for new school clothes? Ya-know, we start in less than six days. You’re a Freshman now, you have to dress the part Jess.”

“Mom and I have got a system when it comes to buying clothes. We are very good at ‘Hunting for bargains’. “Really, you always look awesome Jess.” In the Ross household, it is a necessity to hunt for bargains. A tightly guarded secret. No one needs to know. Extra money is not just tight; often it is a race to the currency exchange to pay the utilities to keep them on. Conversation

drifted onto boys until they reach the house. Once inside, they smelled dinner on the stove. “Oh-no, what time is it?” Jessalyn asked.

“Four O’clock” Susie said. “I need to run, I almost forgot. I am working at the buffet tonight. I start in an hour.” Run she did. It is six blocks back to the apartment and if Clara is not home to drive her, it is four blocks to the buffet. It is almost an Olympic record. It could have been considered good training if she was on the track at school. Who knows, the Ross Children have always excelled in sports. Flying up the stairs, unlocking the door, mom’s not home yet, answering machine is flashing but there is no time, she began her prework routine. The goal is to look a bit older, and it is working so far. Washed, cleaned up and dress in her hostess outfit, she relocked the door, down the stairs and off to work.

The only time you were ever allowed to come in the front door, your training day. From then on, all employee’s use the rear entrance. It’s Tuesday night. One of the quiet days of the week. With only minutes to spare, Jessalyn walks in the rear door. Off to the left is the hallway leading to the office and the timecards. On the right is the kitchen area. Puffs of steam linger around the ceiling; the food will be hot tonight. August in Oklahoma is always hot. In the hallway it is not much cooler. There are three timecard racks. They go alphabetically. Reaching up to the righthand file, she grabs the one marked; Ross, Jessalyn. The rule is, only punch in five minutes before you shift. Time, 4:54 pm. Punching her card, she walks through the swing door and into the air-conditioned dining room.

Her extroverted bubbling personality, friendly smile and pleasant outlook showed she would be a natural at being a hostess. Youthful exuberance didn’t hurt. She would watch out the window, towards the parking lot. Notice the number of people coming to the door. Grab the same number of menu’s, which is more about the drinks and a children’s menu and met them as they walked in. “Evening Folks, may I seat you at a table?” she would say. “Please follow me.” In most cases people were okay with where she seated them. It is the drama she didn’t see coming. First important lesson distribute the people evenly across the number of stations. Otherwise, she would have a disgruntled waitress in her face.

Pocket money. Free to dream of things she wanted. “You have no idea how good it is to have spending money” she would tell only close friends. People in Trinity did well financially so most of her friends could not grasp what it is to be broke. Now that she is working, on top of the dream/wish list is dancing lessons. If only they were part of the high schools’ programs

she mused. Her money often went for group activities, concerts, musicals at school, dinners, music and once and awhile, a dog figurine or stuffed animal. They will be the closest thing she will get to having a pet. Jessalyn loved old movie posters. Yak, Yak, Yak about her love of the poster became like a telegraph line from her friends. They would say, “Hey Jess, did you see the poster, Gone with the Wind, over at the retail shop on 39th? No one really knew the extent of her collection. It is a cold day in Oklahoma before she would have someone over. If they were invited, they would see she wallpapered her bedroom with them. Movie Posters are her weak link. She can’t pass them up.

The school schedule had come in the mail. Excited and nervous, Jessalyn read the list of her new classes. Its High School, the big time now. Included in the envelope is a layout of the school and classrooms. Looking it over, figuring it out, she saw that it would be a game of hopscotch all day long, with only one long jump at the end of the day. First step, finding her division room. The starting block to the new season in her life. She’s nervous. What student isn’t. Clara drops her off, encourages her with a blessing and the day has begun. In her new clothes she looks good and dressed to blend in. Walking through the doors for the first time, noticing an aroma, all schools have it, a smell of books, floor cleaners, so on, sets a vivid memory in her mind. It’s loud. Busy. And why does everyone seem to know I am a freshman? Entering her division room, quickly assessing it, she releases a breath, two friends from the youth group are here too. Taking the open seat nearest them she sits down. The teacher speaks up and introduces herself, she says, “Hello class, I am Mrs. Parro. When I call your name please raise your hand.” All but one freshman is there. Beginning to get into the details of High School life, the door swings open, a skinny guy walks in like he doesn’t have a care in the world. He takes the only open seat, right up front. The teacher gives him his first warning. Jessalyn thinks *it was his attitude that gave him away. Not a good way to start your first day.*

PE is the class she has been waiting for all day. Her last class. A list of required clothing and shoes are handed out. The teacher/coach goes through the details. Lockers were discussed. “Jessalyn, can I see you” the teacher called out. She is more than nervous now. The teacher says to her; “I heard you are a good forward in basketball, and I see you are signed up. Good. We need a good forward. When the season starts up, the first practice is right after this class. I will let you know when we will begin.” In the meantime, practice. This felt good for her on two levels. To play again, last year was a

disaster she doesn't want to think about. And to knowing the coach thinks she is good player.

Now she knows where her first paycheck will be going. To buy her PE stuff. The gym clothing won't be hard to buy, there is no shopping involved. The shirt and shorts are all the same. Grab your size and you're done. It's the gym shoes. Top of the line gym shoes are not even considered. It will be about the cost and then the fit. The phrase, Bargain Basement is the buzz word for sale items. It's one of those odd saying, because there are no department stores in Trinity with a basement. Just down the street from school is a store that sells the clothing. Second stop will most likely be Payless Shoe even though she would love to go into Running for Kicks, everything sports related shoe store. If necessary, she will play the card mom always says yes too.

"Millie? Can you believe these phones? As I end one call, it rings again." Not waiting for her to answer, she is now on a call. Clara writes up the note, grabs the receiver and says, "Hello, accounting firm, this Clara, how can I help you?". The cause of all these calls, Middle East squabbles on the price of a barrel of oil, again. Iraq is accusing Saudi Arabia of unfairly dropping the price of oil to increase their sales. The threat of war has everyone in the oil business nervous. Prices dropping is not good for Trinity oil companies and war breaking out... And it couldn't have come at a worse time. It is the end of some companies' year to year cycle. The accountants have their hands full preparing corporate statements and not checking on bottom lines and margins.

During this season, Millie and Clara would alternate staying late. Clara enjoyed the extra income, but J is playing basketball. She knows her daughter will be expecting her to come home as early as possible to bring her to the game. Warmups start an hour before game time. Tonight, it is job first and game second. Not that she will be late for the game, however she might miss some of the warmups. It's been touch and go for them these last few months. Clara has been very careful not to do anything that would send the message she is not important. It will take time for their relationship to be healed. There is no way Clara is going to send, she is not important message ever again. Right now, J is her whole life.

J is standing at the door with her gym bag by her side. Halfway down the block she sees the car coming and steps through the doorway, down the stairs and runs up to the car. Clara will have to grab something to eat at the booster's club's concession. It's a routine now. Through the door, J goes into the locker room, Clara buys something to eat, gobbles it down and finds a

seat in the visitor's side of the gym. Standing at the bottom of the bleachers, she looks up to where the best view of the game can be seen. She opts for the seats directly behind the visitor's bench.

The team manager pushes two racks of basket balls onto the court. Within minutes bodies come running onto the court and J looks to see where her mom is sitting. She smiles. Basketballs are pulled from the racks and twenty balls are being dribbles and arcing towards the hoop. Then the warmup drills commence. Referees take the floor and the announcer calls everyone to stand. He tells the crowd who will be singing the anthem and please remove all hats. Clara has attended countless sports games supporting all three of her Children. She still gets choked up when the anthem is sung. In unison, a roar goes up and everyone sits down. J's not in the beginning lineup. Being a freshman, the upper-class girl, sophomores, gets more playing time. Unless they are behind in points and running out of time. Jessalyn has a sixty percent ratio on three-point shots.

Clara muses how she has had three very athletic Children. In her childhood organized sports were nonexistent for girls. Discretionary money was very tight all around. Bikes and clamp on roller skates, jump rope and games like, hide and seek, your it, red light green light, Simon says, kick the can were played in the neighborhood. Being the last kid on skates, doing the crack the wipe, is how she got the scar on her elbow. Her thoughts drifts back to those times. In her mind, she hears the song; Brand New Key when she thinks about those days. How she loved that song, even though it came out in 1971, it constantly reminded her of wonderful childhood memories. In her mind she hears it. *I got a brand-new pair of roller skates; you got a brand-new key...* One time around was nostalgic. Two times and she knew the tune is stuck in her head. Yuck. Then J took the floor.

Her favorite position is forward. She is good. Down by nine in the last quarter, J takes the floor. They need points and during the set-ups they try and feed her the ball. The shot is a turnover. They go into a full court press in hopes of stealing the ball. Clara marvels at their stamina. On J's third shot she makes it and the crowd roars. It is what she needed to pump her up. She made the next three shots, and the team is back out in front. A coach calls time, J is out, and a sophomore is in. The horn blows, the game is over, the home team wins by six bringing them to score of 6 W- 5 L.

This mother/daughter duo is living life on the run. Youth group, Basketball, Pom Pom Girls, Volleyball and always looking for when she could sign up to be part of a school play. Oklahoma of course. And, squeezed into

the scheduling is work. Coming in the apartment front door, first things is listening to the answering machine. Yep, with a smile, it is flashing. Pressing the play button, it said: “You have one message.” The message said, “Jess, you’re not going to believe it. Degarmo and Key are going to be in concert in Trinity.” It is Ann from the youth group. She listened to the details knowing it is a priority. She loves them.

Oh my gosh. It is passing to fast. Clara steals a look at her child’s face. Not pausing too long. But she can see it. She is maturing. Growing. With her boys, it was always difficult to read them. J is the other end of the spectrum. She understands all of her likes and dislikes. Clothing tastes. Keeping her eye on clothing sales for the tomboy in her and the frilly dresses she loves. Clara regrets, feels bad, but if she wants a new pair of cowboy boots, it will have to be out of her own. She notices the look towards the Boot Barn each time they pass the store. Always seems to be an extra bounce in her step when she is dressed girly and wearing her cowboy boots.

Here is where she misses the boys, she could count on them to know about mechanical stuff. With a little nest egg, it’s time to retire the Duster. It has been the blessing of God that car has kept going. He has resurrected it from the dead more than once. It is time to find a new car. But what does she know about the issues? What to look for in a Pre-owned, hah, used car. By the grace of God, she was able to get approved for a small loan and the nest egg money for the down payment, she can swing it. The financial leeway came with only raising one child and having a smaller apartment. When she is on her lunch, she would look at the dealerships on 39th street. One thing she wasn’t counting on, car dealers. Scoundrels. They talked to her as if she had EASY written across her forehead. She can’t get their voice out of her head. “Hello little lady” she wanted to smack them one, but she is a good Christian woman.

She had plans for the upcoming summer and it included having a new car. With all of J’s extra-curricular activity’s over for the year, they would have to carve out some time to go new places. Maybe even take a vacation. Car shopping in Trinity isn’t working. Within her price range, it is the scaled downsize cars. She is older. How nice it would be to have a car that would be easy to get in and out of at her age. New cars are out of the question. Walking up and down the rows of cars, it is going to come down to a car built around 1986, or older to be in her price range.

USED CAR FOR SALE! Of all the times Clara has been at church, she nearly never goes down the church office hallway. J is buying a ticket to

Degarmo and Key. While she is in line, the bullet board caught Clara's eyes. Bill Matthew's is selling a 1987 Ford LTD just a bit above her price range. She wonders *could a deal be made?* Coyly, Clara takes the ad off the board and stuffs it in her purse.

It sounds solid; listening to the car door when it closes. The sound of a well-made car. Old habits die hard. As Clara turns the key to start her new car, in her mind runs the litany of dialog she would run through when starting the duster. *Oh Lord, please let it start. I have a full day.* Waiting to hear the tired groaning noise; instead, the car started with a pop and a whine. The whine is the sound of the starter being engaged too long after the car engine is running, rubbing the starter gear over the flywheel. A very unpleasant sound.

Bill and his wife came down on their price when they heard Clara's story. "I got to tell you this" Bill said. "I had just put that for sale note up after the first service. We must have passed each other in the hallway." They all laugh at the timing of God. For Clara, it is a new lease of life. Her daydreams, taking a driving vacation, day trips and down to mom and dad's are now within her grasp. She is a bit concerned about J's full planner. She is glued to her youth group friends, kids at school and the sports team. The unspoken concern, she is now riding in the cars with the teens at school. The facts don't lie. Fifty percent of driving teens, ages sixteen thru eighteen have a collision. To make matters worse is the lunch time rush. There is no cafeteria in the High School. The lunch area is over at the dreaded middle school. She wouldn't be seen eating with the children. It is out of the question. She would die first before being seen eating there. Knowing the guy or girl with a car at school took first priority. Amazing how many kids can fit in one car when your headed out to lunch.

"It will begin soon" said the newly arrived angel. He had come from the throne room with this message. Jessalyn's angel would be at the ready. Beyond her vision but never beyond ministering to her, he watched.

Twenty

It has been the best year of Jessalyn's life. Her spirit, heart, started to relax. You might wonder if time is bringing about healing for her. It is what happens when losses, drama and traumatic events stop. It is not a conscience act. More like in the reprieve of difficult living, you get a breath in. For most of Jessalyn's life, chaos surrounded her. Things were out of her control. In this season of stability, her emotions emerged from their self-imposed protection. No longer did she live to just make it through the day. She misses her brothers, but they have been replaced with boyfriends. They were jokesters until they found out she could dish it up as good if not better than them. It seems she has it all. Jessalyn is intelligent. Athletic. An academic leader in her class. Loves being part of a play at school. Whatever she becomes involved in, she achieves in it.

Freedom! This new season has arrived, and, on its wings, she can be herself. Not pulled into a shell to survive. No. Now she is thriving. No longer a slave to bitterness. The fruit of forgiveness is evident. It is hard for her to explain to others. Her life seems to be on a path, guided by God. She feels it. Jessalyn is the same person, whether she is at church or in the public school. Living out her faith. It's the last week of school. Clara hears someone running up the stairs, the door fly's open, it's J full of life. Dropping her backpack on the floor, she plops down next to Clara who is on the couch. Talking non-stop, gives her the low down of the day. It is a choreographed dance they do on Wednesday nights. Talk on the couch, move to the kitchen while making a meal. Pause while getting ready and then continue in the car.

Walking towards the church doors, conversation turns to the upcoming concert. The connection is broken as soon as one of her friends is seen and off she runs. Pulling the gym door open, Clara can hear the worship band already ushering in the Spirit. It's the spiritual vitality, the living water of the Spirit that sweeps Jessalyn's spirit into heavenly realms. It took time, to allow the Holy Spirit to lower the protective walls that had hardened around her heart. Scary at first, she realized she wouldn't die if she felt the pain she has been carrying. The tears of release have become welcome tears of joy. In His presence, things melt away. She feels light. Good. Refreshed, not that she would be able to verbalize it to someone.

On the last day of school, no fanfare is played. Quietly she passes from being a freshman to becoming a sophomore. The last passage is the basketball team celebration dinner. Held at the team captain home, the house is full. One step in the gate to the backyard, she surrounded by her teammates and dragged into the group. Someone yelled, three point is here. It is the best party ever.

Stepping through the spiritual veil and into the world is Jessalyn's angel. Along the fence he watches knowing there is a direction change about to take place. Swept up in peer acceptance is the doorway. Rachel drags Jessalyn by the hand, pulling her towards the lower level of the house. Just then, angel places his hand upon her shoulder, and she saw. There in the recreation room, a cloud of darkness engulfs everyone who enters. Fear and panic surface at the same time. Yanking her hand from Rachel, her face pale, she runs. Vivid memories from being on the mission trip flashed before her eyes. Her stomach wrenches. The fight or flight syndrome hits her. Her heart is beating out of her chest.

Oh God, please let mom be home. On the second ring, Clara answered. "Mom come get me?" she asked in a desperate voice. In just minutes she is on her way home. She told everyone she is sick. And in some respects, it is true. The sickening fear of being caught in darkness and sin, she is repulsed by the evil concealed in the darkness compelling her out of there. The taste of horseradish fills her memory. The bitter experience to bondage is terrifying. She lost a year with her mom. Not again. She loves being in God's presence. She cannot afford to lose Him again. That night, lying in bed, she trembles. It is not going to be a problem. She knows how this will play out. She will play basketball next year.

"Okay, what happened there that had you panicked J?" Clara asked her. "Mom, remember how I told you about the darkness trying to get into our bunkhouse while on the mission trip?" J asked.

"Yes" she said. But then paused allowing J to speak without her jumping to a conclusion. "One of the girls", not wanting to say her name, "Grabbed my hand so I would follow her. Well, she was bringing me into the recreation room in the lower part of the house. It has an outside door to the backyard. But when I got close to the door, Mom, it is filled by a dark cloud. I watched a boy step in and he disappeared in the cloud. It felt just like the darkness on the mission trip. All the fear, all the panic came back. I had to leave. I knew it is God showing that something bad is happening in there." Pulling into the apartment parking lot, Clara turned the car off and as she is doing it began

to talk. She said, “J, I am proud of you. You are strong enough to say no to your friends when you know it is not right. I thank God He has strengthened you to be able to stay true to Him.” And so; it goes. Being in the inner crowd to self-imposed exile. Jessalyn downplayed the hasty retreat to not alienate her teammates. She wasn’t cold or distant, it is necessary to disconnect from their social activities.

Closing her bedroom door for the night, Clara went right to the edge of the bed and knelt down. She prayed with moist eyes, *Dear Father, thank you, thank you for saving J. I know your hand is upon her. Thank you for keeping her on your path. She is like her grandmother. The prophetic side, seeing you in ways others don’t. I only have her, choking up, stifling back the tears, for a few more years. May she be under the shadow of your wing. Let your angels surround her. Keep her safe from evil. Open her eyes to all that you have for her in life. In Jesus name amen.* Lights out, getting into bed, before falling asleep, she runs the near miss through her mind. She thinks, *it is time to see mom. I think she can help J understand her gift.*

Dread fills Clara’s heart. Finances! The wiggle room came from the overtime during the rush at work. Her heart wants to go see her mom and dad. It’s not the trip. It is the time off work. The vacation pay is not much, enough to keep bills current, but not enough for extras. The money spent on Sammy, now goes to make the car payments. Thirty-two more too go. Three years is the length of the average car loan. Going through the morning routine, making breakfast and lunch for herself, she hears that soft voice. She hasn’t heard it for some time and she almost missed it because she is used to not listening. In mid stride, Clara stops. Changing her focus to inward and the Holy Spirit, she asks, “What did you say?” Again, she hears, “I have the provisions for you!” Now outwardly she asks, “What provisions are you talking about?” But there is no answer this time. Odd, that momentary connection with the Holy Spirit has brought her peace. She sometimes forgets she is not alone. Jesus is making a way.

J reads the note on the fridge next to her work/life schedule. It read; “J, get the fourth of July week off work, Mom.” It’s been a long time since Clara has celebrated the 4th of July in Greenville. They do it up big, of course, it is Texas style. The parade down main street, the smell of food being barbequed over at the park pavilion. The judging contest for the best chilly in town and to finish it off, fireworks. It will be good to be home again. She knows Wilma will slip back into the mother role. Harry will spoil them both by bringing them over to the diner in town for their famous breakfast plates. Like a

smooth-running Oklahoma Oil Well Rig, everything fell into place, Clara is going home. The plans would soon be set into motion.

She is waiting for it. Whisking passed, the blue information sign positioned alongside the interstate J says; “Mom, I got to go.” The sign read; Rest Area 2 miles ahead. Exiting the Interstate, branching in the directions for cars only, Clara parks right into front of the building. J’s head is on a swivel. Feelings rush back, memories flood back, good and troubling. Coming out of the building, Clara heads to the car and grabs the cooler and snack bag out of the back seat. J is already looking at the park. Impression? The swing doesn’t seem as high as the last time she was here. Reluctantly she sits down on the seat and pushes off. Déjà vu flashes into her mind. Clara is unaware as she goes about preparing a mini picnic. J’s mind struggles. *It was going to be the last time she would swing, here at this park. Or for that matter; anywhere.* Those were the thoughts she was having the last time she sat on these swings.

She’s too young to know the workings of God. How, He takes bad experiences in our lives, sets up the nearly same traumatic circumstance that trigger out memories and emotions and turns them around for good. “J, come on an eat” Clara calls. One last big swing and J fly’s off and into the air. A perfect landing. She sits, somewhat instinctively, so she can gaze at the swing still in motion. Clara is talking excitedly about the 4th while J is looking inward. It’s been five years. She was dead to the life then. Feeling her stomach twinge with pain at the thoughts. Trying to grapple with it is more than she can process. When, she thinks about Tim. The youth group, basketball, frilly dresses, acting in the school plays, Martin park, stops at Sonic’s, the mission trip and how good life is in Trinity.

How can she talk her way out of this one? Tears roll down her cheeks. It never occurred to her what she would have missed, if she carried it out. “J, what’s going on with you” Clara asked in a very concerned tone. Clara is in her own world five years ago; she was just trying to survive herself. So many things got missed and overlooked in critical times. She didn’t know. J responded in an exasperated tone; “Just things mom.” Clara let it drop for now.

Turning onto main street, Clara started down memory lane. Passing all the shops, some still in business, others closed. She told their stories to J. Making a left onto Lee street and downtown Greenville, Clara’s eye lite up. She pointed out the Texan Theater where she saw her first play outside of the local school production. On the other side of the street, the JC Penny’s.

“There is Courtney’s Café” she said. Fond memories filtered through her mind. “J, you should have seen the parades. They came right down Lee street. They changed the parade route after I left. You’ll see. It is now on Park street.

Turning on to Stonewall, making her way onto Wesley, Clara waves her right arm saying, “Here is Park street, we’ll be around here on the 4th.” Two more blocks and the final turn. For Clara, it is homecoming. Lost in a rush of emotions, it felt good to be home. The doors slammed closed as Harry and Wilma came out in a hurry to greet them. For a few days, the nest won’t be empty and already it feels good. Harry has a surge in strength with the appearance of being the provider and protector. Wilma, well, she revels in the atmosphere of relationship. It is a hug fest.

“You two are in the bedrooms upstairs” Wilma said. Clara noticed the change. Did she miss it during her calls home? Or did her mom not mention it on purpose. Her folks are in their seventies. Did something happen they didn’t tell her? Did one of them have a fall and they didn’t tell her about? The house was filled with aromas. Yes, dinner is in the oven and cookie dough on sheets ready for later. “Get yourselves settled” Harry said pointing upstairs. “We eat in fifteen minutes” Wilma told them.

Holding hands, they said grace together. Clara’s taste buds are salivating. It would be extravagant for her to buy this piece of meat. Brisket, slow cooked with Wilma’s secret rub spices alongside a bowl of sweet barbecue sauce. Prayers prayed, Harry sliced thick pieces and asked for their plates. Mouthwatering, tender to the chew, Clara savored it. “Mom, this is so good” she said, with her mouth full. It’s been more than a decade since she has had Brisket. On the side, baked beans and mashed potatoes, gravy and their choice of sweetened or unsweetened tea. A meal to die for is how Clara said it. Wilma said, “Jessa dear, would you go put those cookie sheets in the oven for me?” Without hesitation, she is on her way. They could hear noise in the kitchen, Wilma asked Clara, “How’s things at home?” Knowing there is a second, she said, “She’s having the best year of her life” as Jessalyn rounds the corner and into the dining room. Stories filled the air until the cookies were done, this time Wilma disappeared and came back with a pyramid of chocolate cookies on a plate. Not your normal desert.

Mother and daughter retreated into the kitchen to clean up while Grandfather and granddaughter went into the living room to watch TV and talk basketball. He said to her, “What is this I hear? They call you ‘Three Point’ on your team at school. Jessalyn blushed. She responded, “I’m only sixty percent from the corners.” He asked questions about their plays,

win/loss column, favorite moments during a game. However, he did leave out questions about the Pom Pom squad. He would leave that up to Wilma. There is that question in Clara's mind. Why did her folks move to the downstairs bedroom?

They were up and out by 8am the following morning. Harry asked Clara to drive them downtown. He wanted to ride in the LTD. "Smooth riding car" he commented. He may not always communicate it; he is very proud of his daughter. Turn onto Lee. Pointing out the stores that brought back memories, he said, "Turn right and pull in the parking spot in the back." Clara had hoped, it is Courtney's Café. Harry talked to the hostess and returned saying, "It will be a few minutes." It is the 2nd of July. Most people are off this week and the café is crowded. When asked if they wanted first available, he said, no. They would wait for a window table looking out onto Lee street.

Clara and J sat next to the plate glass window. It is one of the few times Jessalyn has been in a restaurant. The menu at the Buffet was short, it's a buffet. Here at Courtney's, there are two pages of choices. Harry already knew his choice. Wilma gave him the look when he blurted out, "Now Wilma, it's a special day, don't start." Clara glanced over the menu to see if she could tell what is going on. "Can I help you folks?" the waitress asked. She looked like the miles she has ridden. Many days since she has seen her prime, just happy the place is full. She took their drink orders, three coffee's and one water. While they waited, Harry started. "Jessalyn, take a good look out there." Through her eyes, she saw, parked cars, traffic, stores on the other side and aging buildings. "Then he said, let me tell you what I see."

He took a breath and the waitress showed up, he burst into a laugh. "Can I get your orders folks" she asked having just placed the drink order on the table. Jessalyn, apple cinnamon pancakes with whip cream. Clara, stuffed French toast and Texas slices. Wilma, two over easy with corn beef hash, white toast, buttered. And Harry, four biscuits and gravy. Wilma gave him her best exasperated look, he only smiled. Taking a breath, he said, "Now darling" returning to the conversation he was about to have with his granddaughter, "I see a five-year-old girl sitting on my shoulders. There are so many people you can't walk. From the brick walls to the edge of the street people are packed in like hogs at a feed trough. It is Greenville's Centennial Parade, 1950. It is the biggest deal we have ever had. The flag honor guard led it out. The men all took off their hats, everyone cover their hearts. In the middle position, the Stars and Stripes. On the right, Greenville flag and on the left, the Texas Lone Star. It was a proud day for sure. The newspaper said

we had fifty thousand folks, fifty thousand, can you believe it. Well, those fire truck sirens about drove me,” he chuckled at his own humor, “They about drove me deaf. We saw marching bands, beautiful floats, Long Horn steer led on a rope looking as gentle as can be. There were fancy cars, all kinds of groups, and the politicians sitting in the convertibles. It must have been two hours long.

The food arrived, looks were exchanged as everyone’s hunger is about to be satisfied in a wonderful way. Harry, well he drifted off to the textile business being the Greenville and the Oil boom. Just like any well, it begins to run dry. Slowly one by one the mills moved, and the town began to fade. “Look around in here” he said. “There are plenty of good ole boys that will tell you about the glory days. I had my days. Fixing those big machines kept us going. It is the experience I knew that carried me to the end.” The walk down the nostalgia street is good for Jessalyn to hear. Knowing her roots. Her foundation. While he ate, Wilma spoke of church, family, friends and neighbors and the revival the swept through town. Harry broke in and asked his wife, “You going to eat that second piece of toast” to where she shook her head no. He grabbed it and sopped up the rest of the gravy on his plate. “Harry, if you had told me what you were planning” she stopped short, they were in company. It was the best of times.

Sitting in the overstuffed chair, facing the window and out towards the street, Jessalyn is reading one of the Nancy Drew books she found on the book shelve. Wilma came in and leaned over. She asked, “You never told her?”

“No” Looking concerned. “I’m not going to say anything. It is up to you if you mention it to anyone.” Breathing easier. So far, this trip is a roller coaster. Come to think of it, she has only been on a roller coaster once in her life. Anyway, it is the hardest, the first time she walked up the stairs and past the banister grandpa Harry reconstructed. It is one of the things taking place in this town. Restoring the original luster to the homes. The best part of this visit, feeling the loving presence of God and the love of her grandparents.

July 3rd had its own surprises. In the morning, the adults were sitting in the kitchen, over coffee, talking when they called Jessalyn. “Jessa honey come in here” Wilma said. Jessalyn thought *adults, I just can’t figure them out*. There the three of them sat, each with an expression something good is going to happen, which unnerved her. Wilma spoke up, “Jessa honey, we missed your birthday.” She handed her a card and said, “It comes with strings attached.” Jessalyn thought, *Okay, this is a first*. She would have given it more thought

but all she needed to do was open the card. It surprised her; she is excited. This doesn't happen often with her. Gifts just don't come her way. Ripping the envelope open, she pulled a birthday card out and a fifty-dollar bill fell out. Too stunned to speak, she said, "It's too much and started to hand it back when she was met with looks. "Read the card honey" Wilma said. The handwritten note inside the card said; "To only be spent on a new pair of Cowboy Boots." Tears welled up in her eyes. Jessalyn gave grandpa a big hug, then moved onto grandma. Looking at her mother, Clara said, "We will go there as soon as we can." It is understood she meant the Boot Barn on Meridian.

Harry is out in the garage moving things around immersing with four aluminum chairs. Leaning them against the fence, he turned on the garden hose to get the dirt and spider webs off of them. Wilma, she is packing a snacks and cool drinks in the picnic bag and cooler. Harry shouted towards the house, "Wilma, you better put a rush on it if we are going to get the shady spot." In Texas, summer shade is like finding black gold. It will be the first-place people gravitate too.

The nudge to hurry paid off. It is only a two block walk over to Park Street, the new parade route. They were near the Methodist church, right across the street with the park right behind them already scenting the air with mesquite wood and BBQ cooking. Every open space filled in. If you were not right on the curb, someone would plop down in front of you. On their left is a commotion. Four people trying to squeeze into a spot for two. Miffed, then annoyed, Wilma turned to give them a hard look when she saw it is her childhood best friend. So shocked, so surprised, Wilma, calling her by name she said, "Is that you?" Two female voices elevated as childhood friends recognized each other, a reunion began. Jessalyn had never seen her grandmother slip into the girlish part of her life. She took it all in. When they calmed down, introductions took place.

The angel stepped up behind Wilma and placed his hand on her shoulder. She turned towards Betty and said, "Tell my granddaughter about when God healed you. She's been on mission, seen God at work, but tell her your story." Bodies shuffled about as Jessalyn sat next to this elderly woman. She started; "Well darling, I was born with two clubbed feet. Oh, I got around with momma's help. But it was hard on her. There was this revival meeting, out east and momma spent money we didn't have so we could go there by train. I remember it like yesterday. Da presence filled the tent. Them preachers worked us all up. Calling people up, momma dragged me up there. I would have been too afraid to go on my own. Them grown men, placed their hands

on my head and shoulder and prayed up a Texas size storm.” Clara and Wilma are fixated on the two of them when she continues. But nothing happened. Three days we went to meetings. On the third day, my momma felt the tug when they shouted the altar call. ‘All you sinners wanting to be saved come on up here and get saved’ he shouted.” Momma, she no much as looked at me and took off almost running. I stretched my neck to look when three maybe for grown women surrounded me. Strangers! They put their hand all over my body and on my feet. Just like a lightning from a storm, a flash of power, no one could see, but believe me, I felt it struck the top of my head and went right to those clubbed feet. They were on fire darlin!” Chucking, she continued. They started screaming together. My feet started to change and shift. Them gals were a praying for this and when it started, they scream.” Laughing out loud. “Well, momma turned to look and saw all the commotion was about me and she ran back. By the she reached me, God was done.” Betty swung her legs up for Jessalyn to see. “Look girl what God has done! I was healed hallelujah. That day changed my life.” Praising God and giving her testimony never goes old. Wilma leans over to Clara and whispered, “The story has changed a bit over time” ending with a chuckle. Knowing the call on Jessalyn’s life, Wilma took advantage of a God ordained meeting. She wanted her to see healing from the other side, the person healed prospective and how life changing, returning to normal affects them and it is powerful. Fire Engine sirens started blasting, the parade is beginning, and everyone looked to the east.

Hats off, hands over their hearts, people stood and paid honor to the flag. Right behind honor guard is the High School marching band. Children and adults alike stepped into the wonder of their towns parade right to the end where all the politicians rode in the convertibles to encourage the voters. Pockets were filled with candy thrown from the floats. The poop cleanup crew followed taking care of all the deposits made by the horses and other animals. Harry told them, “Yep, it’s a smelly job, glad they are doing it” ending with a bit of a laugh. Wilma shot him a look to keep him from saying more. No one loves his joke more than he does.

All in all, it was a great fourth of July for everyone. Tasty green chilly they bought at the park, burned the tongue. It had big piece of steak in it, hardly the chilly Jessalyn would recognize. They got, ribs, brisket, pulled pork, roasted corn until they were all stuffed. Harry said, “Just roll me home” his way of saying he was full. Once home, they rested until it is time for fireworks. Making the short walk back, they are seated in the vast lawn in the park, people chatted and waited until dark. “Clara” Harry said, “They play

music with the fireworks these days. It's a hoot. But when they play that song by Diamond, America, it will bring tears to your eyes. It's what this great country is all about." Night fell, the crowd got quiet, and then the first whoop could be heard followed by an umbrella of red, white and blue screaming sparks. All eyes watched as if they were all wide eye's children, ooo's and ahhs could be heard. All too fast the grand finale took place. It had been a day to remember America's roots and how far we have come. God is good.

Twenty-One

They met, just inside the front door, in the foyer. No words are spoken but they are clearly talking to each other. The angel spoke; “Every time I think about your assignment I marvel at our God’s creativity. It has been eons and still new things come into being.”

“It is my joy to help Jessalyn develop her gifts. I relish our time on the path. When she is being stretched; I see and feel her pain. Knowing it will all work out of good; I have to look to the lesson at hand, how she is learning and being groomed.” In the pause of conversation, smiling, placing his hand on the other angel’s shoulder, he said; “That time she experienced Maror, telling me her story, I did want to laugh. Even her indignation towards me when she made the connection it is horseradish growing along the path. That look on her face was priceless. She knew; I knew and said I did nothing to warn her. Well, there are just some things you have to experience. I was very pleased she brought it all together. Soon, she will learn that God speaks to His Children in a lot more ways than they comprehend. OH, her eyes were opened that day as well as her sinuses” he said with a chuckle. He looked towards Harry and Wilma’s bedroom and his companion began. “Their oneness is strong but not without faulters. Harry’s faith is firm; however, he is less inclined to step behind the veil. Now Wilma would aggressively, with reckless abandon, willingly venture into God’s supernatural. Those few times she stepped outside of God’s Word brought the reality of evil. Experiences she would rather forget; they brought to her solid maturity. She learned her first step is prayer for God’s guidance and then she takes action. There are those moments; I hear it coming and step back. The time the Holy Spirit prompts her into intercession. Her heart is engaged, the words spoken in unknown tongues, the Holy Spirit flows from this realm through Wilma and into the world, releasing provisions of God. I never get tired of seeing it happen. She is a powerhouse intercessor.”

In a burst of light, a courier arrives. His message is coming from the Throne Room of God. Tonight, is going to be busy in this household. Three messages will be released. It is seldom seen when three generations are under the same roof in this family. Both angels turn to the new arrival and give him their attention. He in turn greets them beginning, “In the glory of our lord, all praises and honor to our God.” They both bow their heads in acknowledging Father God. The couriers face is filled with excitement. To

look at them from human eyes, which rarely happens, they are perfect in every way. How their facial features congeal is in stunning beauty. A completion without flaws. Hair that shines and seems to hold a style to their personalities. Each angel's eyes are a different color. Their irises told a story of their own. Taller than most human their height gives them an appearance of strength and power, however, in their humbleness comes the authority they carry. The assignment at hand is now understood. In a flash the courier is gone, entering the incredible speed of thought travel.

It is decided they would begin ministering to the first-generation believers. Leaving the foyer, passing through the dining room and the half bathroom they enter the bedroom. Harry is closest to the half bath due to his frequent trips during the night. In unity, they will minister to Wilma first. Both angels enjoy release revelations into their dream state. Stretching their hands toward her emotional heart a flow emanated. Now they both looked at Harry where one angel waved his hand over his head opening his spiritual ears for a moment and would immediately close when he is done. In an audible voice he said in a strong manner; "I have the provisions for you. Don't be afraid to be generous." Startled awake, he couldn't decide how to respond. Wilma gets these kinds of things not me. But it shook him. Not sure if he should play, he is asleep or respond somehow. Finally, he got up and went to the bathroom.

As the angels moved on, Harry laid in bed awake thinking about what just happened and what it meant. Ascending up, through the ceiling and into Clara's room, they positioned themselves on the side of the bed she is closest too. They both extended their hands to her side and released strength into her soul and in response Clara took a sharp deep breath. This vacation is a needed rest; a brief relief from carrying her responsibilities and load in life. However, the toll is becoming serious. Without intervention, illness lurked near. She needed to be strong for J no matter how tired she felt. In life, the rejection of a spouse, estrangement from her son's is a constant drain. Holes in her heart that need mending if only she knew how. Out in the world; three pieces of her heart and soul wander. Extensions of her emotional umbrella detached not by choice.

Passing through the wall and into the hallway with three-foot-high wainscoting, they move with enthusiasm towards Jessalyn. They are about to release her destiny dream. This is the second time she will see what lays before her with exceeding more detail and power. The end of the age is quickly approaching. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit foretold by the prophet Joel is being released become operational. Jessalyn's angel knows it

will make for interesting conversation when they meet together on the path. Right now, both angels will play a part in her experience. As if a solid object, like a bed, were smoke you can pass through, one angel steps into the bed to be on the opposite side. Reaching down they take her hands, and a dream begins. Although she is asleep, she is wakened spiritually as waves of the spirit wash over her.

She is peaceful even though aware she is in the atmosphere very high and going higher all the while drifting south. In the moment it doesn't matter. Her eyes see the beauty before her. All of Oklahoma is in her view. Looking left, past the angel, giving him a smile, she sees land as the curvature of the earth comes into view. Looking west, it is the same. She gasps as she sees the waters of the Gulf of Mexico. Saying; "How beautiful." Tears form in her eyes. Positioned above the center of the Gulf, it occurs to her, a desire surface. Knowing her thought, the angels respond because it does not alter the message. The trio rotates three hundred and sixty degrees. Never in her life could she imagine the scope and beauty, the world God has made is a jewel to behold from this prospective.

Although she is not good at geography it is known to her, they are approaching the Yucatan Peninsula. Deep green swatches of ground cover fill her vision. Cities, and villages and off in the distance, hills and mountains appear. They come to rest above Cancun. Quickly now, heading west just above the trees as if flying in a plane, they stop and descend into the trees. Below is a remote village. Missionaries are holding a healing meeting. Praise and worship is streaming into the heavens on the way to the throne room. Human hearts are worshipping God. From the road, a one-legged man, makes his way into the meeting. He enters the rear, sits down and places his crutches beside him. Hearing the message that God loves him, his hardened heart softens, and the tears begin to flow. Down his cheeks and onto his shirt is wet. As Jessalyn looks around, she notices there are several angels at this meeting and marvels. One of them stepped up to the missionary couple leading the mission. Simultaneously they both turn to look in the direction of the man in the back. Together they walk to the back and begin to pray for the man. Screams are heard. It became chaotic. Jessalyn saw angels ministering to the man. More screams. Then he stood on two legs.

Instantly the angels release her hands, Jessalyn's experience came to an abrupt end. There in her bed, motionless, asking herself, "What just happened?" It is more than a dream. How, can this be. She knows, she lived this, but how. In the moment, she has no way of knowing it is a destiny event. This dream experience has deposited a desire, a longing to see

supernatural miracles come into existence again. In the days to come, she will pray God will bring it into her life. Thoughts drifted to being curious about the missionaries. As the angels stepped away; she returns to a light sleep.

Wilma is enjoying cooking breakfast for her family. A healthy home cooked meal. As Harry reaches for the coffee, she attempts to talk but holds back. Risk is involved. She waits but not too long they will be up soon. Giving him a warmup at the kitchen table she said: "Harry, it is their last day with us. I would like to take Jessa downtown on a shopping spree." She waits for the objection that come with a request like this. They are both retired and living on a shoestring budget. He takes a breath and then looks inwardly; it confuses Wilma. Not what she is expecting. In his mind the message is replayed. Getting his unusual grin, he tells her; "Okay." That is it. Dumbfounded, she doesn't know what to say. Instead, she walks over and kisses him on his bald spot.

Jessalyn held her breath as she listened to her mother object. "Mom, I won't hear of it! You and dad are being generous just by having us. I know it costing you extra money for us to be here." Back and forth it went, as J's heart rose and fell with each exchange, until. Wilma and Harry, in a united front, standing side by side, they gave her the look, *you are not going to win this argument daughter*. To which J's heart leaped. She hurried up, cleaned up and got dressed, ready for new clothes and of course, the one-on-one time with her grandmother. It is ten o'clock when Wilma is out the door with Jessa talking up a storm in the excitement. Just the way Wilma loved it.

"Dad, do you mind if I leave you to yourself for a while, if you promise to be good?" A poke at role reversals. He is about to say something in rebuttal when he decided, in good fun to play along. "Oh, I promise not to do nothing that will stir up a hornet's nest and get you in trouble with your mother" he said. She knew he would most likely read the paper, fuss in the garage and then take a nap. "I feel like taking a walk over to the High School."

"Well don't be gone so long I need to come looking for you" a poke at the little girl she is to him, in his grin and sparkling eyes. Clara like this bantering. Slowly, Clara closes the screen door in a moment of thoughtfulness. Of course, the hinges were as loud a slam, so it really didn't matter. In her childhood, going out the front door is not allowed. Harry called out, "While

you're gone, maybe I will oil those hinges." She knew it is wishful thinking on his part. All those years of fixing machine has done him in. He would rather do anything than to fix stuff. Using tools, took a toll on him. His grip didn't have much grip in it. Although you would never know it by his speaking. Harry would often say, "I'm gunna be fixin" that is, the precursor to actual work. When a Texans begins with, I'm fixin, it is the buzz for I think I will think about fixing it.

Walking south Clara has a briskness in her step. At home she is on the step saver program. Too tired to take any unnecessary steps. Her first thought as she turned the corner, how effortlessly she walked. It felt good and having several days to rest, it must be making the difference. She didn't need to know the name of street; she is on autopilot having walked this route for four years. Today she can call it, memory lane. Like a gentle breeze, a continuous flow of thoughts drifted back to her mind. Passing places where memories immersed.

On the west side of the High School is where everyone entered in the morning. Feeling queasy, unsure what to allow herself to revisit, she moseyed up to the front door and rested on a wingwall. She is swept up in a moment of Déjà vu. The feeling of being in school rushed up from within and felt incredibly good. A feeling of being home. Tears filled her eyes. It is so wonderful, and I didn't know it. All my needs were met by my parents. A good home, home cooked meals. Clothes all the kids were into and shoes to match. Knowing now, she always felt safe. The tears changed as she felt the loss of the feeling of home. In a panic, she turned thoughts and memories back to not lose this precious gift.

Clara sat there in a loss of time. Clarity enters her mind. She is realizing how much love surrounded her in the teen years. As her thoughts, eventually drifted to the athletic field, she had to go there. Numbness at first, her legs came back to life from sitting so long, she made her way to the rear of the building. Passing through the opening in the chain link fence, up to the track/football field, there the front bench of the bleachers beckoned her. Bounding up the steps to mid bleacher, she sat down as the sun approached noon. Pleasant flashback came to mind. Four girls giggling as they talked about the boys trying to win for the High School's pride. Life is innocent. Boy girl interaction, the possibilities and eventually the attention of one Gary Sloan. Short lived flirtations. Being the object of his attention wasn't so bad. She has forgotten how it felt good to feel good about yourself. In a moment of curiosity, Clara got up, walked down and onto the field. Doing a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree turn. *Do I? Why not? No one is here and no one*

is looking. Clara spun around letting her arms fly out. Free. Until she got dizzy. Making her way to the track, slowly she walked a lap for old times' sake. Thinking about the classes, the groups she is in and where she volunteered. *My my, how times have changed. If girls were allowed into sports activities then like today, I may have run on this track. I would never have imagined four years could go by so fast and be the best years of my life at the same time.* Clara she thinks, *Today, is the collage of the best of times.*

Rejection, it has been a constant companion for her, pushed memories into the recesses of her mind. Like how it felt to know you are loved and are lovable. Again, the tears flowed. Something is changing right here and right now. Triggering devices have been going off ever since she entered onto main street. Of all of them the biggest is her daughter, being in High School and now having the time of her life, the best years of her life. She sees herself in the reflection of her daughter's life. Her hands fly up to her face as the sob overtakes her. The sacrifices, the pain the suffering the struggling and how she endured it all so that J could be in a place to be free. She didn't say it, but she allowed herself to feel it. She's done a good job. It has taken its toll, everything she has, every ounce of energy, stubbornness plus what God blessed her with and more, all done out of love.

The sun drifted into the afternoon side of the day. Heading home, filtering through her mind, in her heart how good it felt to feel good about herself. Life looked different, felt different. Felt wonderful. Just as she had expected, Harry is asleep in the overstuffed chair in the living room. She didn't dare open the front screen door. Sneaking in like a kid, into the kitchen, looking for the sweet tea and food, he continued to snore, and she knew she had done it. Savoring everything, even an intense look at the layout of kitchen to remember. Somethings are in place just as her childhood recollections conveyed to her, they had never moved. And the new items. Up the drive the sound of the car brought her back to reality. A bittersweet moment. Really, she wanted to remain in the feeling of being home but knowing new clothes and stories would be flying everywhere, she got prepared. The only memory lane she did not allow herself to do down, where Bob Ross entered her life.

At the slamming of the car door, Harry woke up, snorted something or other and then realized girl talk is going to fill the kitchen. He hurried in there for a drink and snacks and cleared the area to the front porch. Clara met them at the door, took a few packages from Wilma and the trio descend into a fashion show. Time flew by, Jessa tried on her outfits and reveled in being

the focus of the attention. Pulling his pocket watch out, Harry began to fret about dinner because it is five o'clock and they were still yacking up a storm fussin and all. The screen door sang out its protest, unoiled, Wilma said to Harry, "We ain't near done yet, best you get downtown to Ballads BBQ and get us Pulled Pork & Fixin's. Get baked beans and potato salad for sides. See if they got root beer sodas. By the time you get back the table will be ready, and we can dig in." Harry is a grinning. He is on his own to decided what ad on from the menu he will get. He likes this kinda deal.

He read the paper while they made up his order. Until Grey Reeves plopped down next to him to shoot the breeze. In the day, they worked side by side fixin textile machines. Probably the only two old time mechanics left in Greenville. They talked the talk as only they knew. Brought back to life the old stories of the toughest problems they fixed with everyone else is stumped. Shade tree mechanic's they were. Instinctive sense, by the way the mill sounded they could tell if there is trouble. Their talents got them through to retirement. "Pulled Pork dinner" is called out and Harry said goodbye to Grey. Nothing finer than bringing back some good times.

Immediately after Harry said grace, loud voices are heard out the front and back doors. Shopping tidbits, Clara's walk on memory lane and of course, highlights of their God stories are swapped into the night. Jessalyn usually just listen, but because of her mission trip she had stories to tell. Praise God for His healing power south of the border. She recanted Tim's healing and pangs of missing him surfaced. She hoped to see him tomorrow if it were only for a short while. It is a last night and they turn it into a late-night talk fest. Until Harry and Wilma knew their limit.

When the house drew quite another conversation began out on the porch chairs. Both angels had their own, back in the day talk. To them, having earthly assignments suits them. Having charges during the church age brings them a sense of contributing to the Kingdom. This whole family is elevated spiritually this week, a rare event in a world where the Lion is roaming seeking to whom he may devour. Simultaneously looking to the right, dark figures approached. They skirted the property on purpose. Four faithful Children within; release provisions to overtake any challenge and they knew it. Back to conversing, they leaped forward in hoped events, they saw what life will be like for this household if they hold course. Stay in alignment.

As morning broke, breakfast on the stove, Clara and J are getting dressed and bags packed. They carried the bags down the stairs, placing them by the front door for a hasty departure. Not. Wilma will give them a queen's

meal, then the sendoff. She's wondered if there might ever be another time like this under this roof. Harry's cholesterol spiked to his delight. It's been years since they have had restaurant bought food to this extent. He got up, walked through the bath and to the front door. He opened Clara's bag and dropped a card in it. Returning to the bathroom, flushing the toilet entering the kitchen he got another cup of coffee, feeling a bit sheepish at his success.

It is a tearful departure. Even Harry's eyes filled with tears as everyone hugged. The trunk full of bags upon bags. Clara pulled away from the curb and onto the street. Working her way to the gas station for a fill up and then onto the interstate for the ride home. They sat in silence in the reflection of the week running through their minds. How badly Clara needed to come home. Listening to the rhythm of the highway, two hours pass by. Off in the distance is a blue information sign telling there is a rest area two miles ahead. "J honey, do you need a stop?" she asked. J only shook her head no. Her mind drifted off to getting home, calling Tim and thinking about school. Familiar scenery cropped up as they neared their sphere of life. The time of being taken care of is coming to an end as the weight of returning to normal life hits Clara. Their home, thank you Jesus for seeing us safely back.

Twenty-Two

First in the door, J looked too the answering machine and yea it is flashing. Dropping bags on the couch she nearly breaking her neck to get to the machine. Well, that is the way Clara says it. "You have ten messages" it told her. Pressing the play button, it began to tell its story of being alone for the week. It said, "Sunday" and then the message began; "Jess, there is another concert coming. We got to go. Call me." The call is from Kelly. Message two, three and four are junk calls. The message said, "Wednesday, Clara, are you home? I can't find the file for the Nazarene School. If you get this before Thursday call me." The machine continued with two more junk calls and then it said, "Friday, Jess, it's Tim" she took a deep breath. From the other room came a voice, "Don't return his call until you are done unpacking. It's not going to kill you to wait." Millie called one more time and the last call was from Wilma wanting to know they got home safely.

Taking two steps at a time, J brings up the last load from the car. Wheeling into the apartment letting the door slam, fast walking to her room, plopping stuff on her bed, she races for the phone. Dialing as fast as her fingers would let her, it rings. "Hello, this is Tim" he said hoping it is her. With reserved excitement they made plans to meet away from both homes, to talk. Garrison Park is their destination a block away from the library. J grabbed to bottles of water, threw them in her backpack yelling, "MOM! I'm going to meet Tim over at Garrison" and she is out the door before Clara could say a word.

Running is out of the question. A girl cannot be all sweaty unless there is competition involved. Besides, she didn't want to be first and be waiting on him. Of course, the swings were open if they decided to brave the heat. Who in their right mind would be in the park when it is ninety-five in full sunlight, in the wind? She's having butterflies in her stomach. Still. She had missed him. Sitting on the pavilion table, in the shade, always the first choice, Jess blurted out; "I got so much to tell you."

Unpacking the last suitcase, Clara saw the envelop. Surprised, she picked it up. It is light yellow, it's a Hallmark Card. A Thinking of You type of card. In Wilma's handwriting it read; "My precious daughter. One of my hardest things in this life has been watching you struggle taking care of your children. My heart aches and my heart is filled with pride at the

wonderful job you have done and are doing. No matter what life has thrown at you, you have risen to meet it. The greatest joy? Your steadfastness to God.” Uncharacteristic, Harry wrote a line in the card as well. In his chicken scratch she read; “Clara, two things I don’t say enough. I’m proud of you and I love my little girl.” Choking back the sobs, she is filled with emotions. Good emotions. Not like the heavy relationship trials she has had to endure. Tears. *Thank You Father God for my loving parents* she whispered. Looking once more at the card, she read the caption inside, it said; “You are loved.” Then behind the folded insert with the flower print, were two hundred-dollar bills.

Jessalyn turned to Tim, taking a breath said; “Hey, I need to go over to the buffet. I just remembered. Mr. Evans told me to check my schedule when I get back.” Hand in hand they walked. This in itself is a major milestone for Jessalyn. To risk. Unlike herself to trust. But she is on top of the world right now. She carried the backpack now that the bottled water is gone. Really, the buffet is two blocks away, too hot to hold hands. A wave of heat from the kitchen hit them as they walked through the backdoor. “This way” she said. Opposite the timecard rack is the employee schedule. Running her index finger over it and she sigh, then she says: “Only three days.” She would be working Tuesday, Friday and Saturday. Pivoting, almost as if she had forgotten, how could she, bending the timecard forward and there is her paycheck. Excited, she plucked it out, bent it in two and stuffed it in the rear pocket of her jeans. Poking her head in the office to say hello to Mr. Evans and tell him she saw her schedule, she asked permission to use the phone.

Clara answers the phone, “Hello.”

“Mom, it’s me. I’m at the buffet getting my schedule and paycheck. I don’t have to work till Tuesday.” Clara walked over to the fridge and said, “Okay J, what days to you have and the times?”

“Tuesday, 4 o’clock, Friday the same and Saturday at 5.”

“Okay, you are on the calendar. Be home by 5:30 for dinner.”

“Mom, I’m with Tim” as he looks towards her with interest. “Can he eat with us?”

“The answer is no, don’t even think to try and change my mind, you saw this place. I got cloths scattered everywhere, it is stuffy in here and it is not cooled down yet.” She knew that tone. Anyway, she would see him at church tomorrow. On the walk home, startled she said, “Gosh,” she forgot about Kelly. “Tim, what concert is Kelly talking about?”

“Petra” Then the chatter is centered around the details. “I have news” Tim said. “I have been cleared to try out for basketball this year. And I am going for my license soon and if my parents let me take the car, we won’t be doing all of this walking.” Again, she thought *things just keep getting better*.

They arrived at church later than usual. Once through the church doors they went their separate ways. Opening the gym door made noise which mortified J because everyone turned and looked. Tim is up near the front and held a seat for her. No way she was going to walk up front while the youth pastor was giving his message. She sat down in the last row and immediately deflected Tim’s questioning looks. Right there in her seat, she tuned out the service and drifted back to Greenville. In her mind she began to replay the conversation she had with her grandmother in the restaurant that finish off their shopping spree. Really, what did she mean? Living life following the Holy Spirit. Perusing Him and expecting Him to show up more in my life. And how does she see things about me I can’t even see? What in the world are visitations? On and on she went, going over their talk as Wilma opened her mind and spirit to things that could be.

The second the service was over, Kelly ran up to her and she said: “Spin around girl, I want to get a good look.” J had worn her new sundress and matching shoes. She had hoped someone would notice. Notice, a whole room of boys noticed. Under her breath she whispered; “Thank You grandma!” Kelly grabbed both of her hands and started her diatribe of news and plans monopolizing all of her time. Tim is put out. When she looked in his direction she wondered where the butterflies were. Kelly loudly said: “Come on with me.” Holding one of her hands, tugging her hard and almost into a run, dragging her along to the church office corridor to a flyer posted on the bulletin board concerning the Petra concert. One snap of her wrist and Kelly gave her the piece of paper where they could both see the details together. Horrified, J said in a shocked embarrass voice; “Kelly!” Slapping her hand and looking around to see if anyone saw her do it. In a huff she said, “I’ll put it back up. But you got to remember bring money on Wednesday to buy your ticket.” With that accomplished Kelly excitedly introduce the next most important thing, boys. Now there will be no stopping her until J’s mother hunted her down and they headed for home.

It is only an eight-minute ride home. Clara had made a right-hand turn headed east and immediately J knew there is no chance at stopping at Sonic’s. At the north east corner of Wiley’s Airport, Clara made another right. Deep in her own thoughts, she went over her friend’s reactions to her on the trip home. Her related story of the parade, home cooking, walk down

memory lane of her High School and the gift she found in her suitcase when she got home. It felt so good to be in a stretch of life where things were building her up.

The rhythm of life returned to normal for the mother daughter family. It is Wednesday, in the chaos of getting ready to head to church, a yell came out of J's room echoing down the hallway and piercing through paper thin walls to the apartment next door. "MOM! When are we going to buy my new boots?" *Shoot*, Clara thought, she had forgotten all about them. Thinking in a hurry, turning to look at the calendar she responds in kind shouting back; "It will have to be tomorrow or Saturday." Saturday is an eternity away, she yelled back, "It's got to be tomorrow mom." One of life's joys for Clara is bringing happiness to her daughter. Thursday night she had plans. They could wait, growing girls do not. It is her last baby. Now a sophomore in High School. Three years and who knows what could happen. She is her reason for living and living is what they will do.

Tim's eyes are on the gym door. Pretending to be engaged in the conversation about cars and making money, he waited. As she walked in the door J headed right to Kelly and Sally instead of him. He is hurt, again. What is going on. The trio rushed out of the door and over to the church office window to buy the concert tickets. Huddled together, reentering the gym, words were flying about their favorite Petra song and the Road to Zion is one of them. Making a beeline towards Jess, he asked if anything is wrong to where she said no, and they went off together. But he could feel something is different from Saturday and he knew it. What is it? After the service, Kelly, Sally, Tim, J and others gathered together making plans how and where they will meet for the concert. Tim's observations troubled him. Right now, they were part of the group and not an item they were on Saturday. And why is she not looking me in the eye?

Good to her promise, they went right over to the Boot Barn on Meridian. The Tomboy in J came out as she quickly walked into the store, past the registers, made a slight right and headed to the rear of the store entering Cowboy Boot heaven. Aisle after aisle of boots are on display in racks fifty feet long and six feet high. The smile on her face is gleeful, quickly morphed into shopping mode. This is serious. So many choices. There are so many makers to choose from and she is grateful they had all the time in the world. Her size brought about a hundred possibilities. Polished boots, suede, brushed, embroidered. There are circuit boots, round up, roper boots. Then there are silver, tan, brown, black boots, pointy and squared toes. Glancing at some pairs and staring at others. The extraverted boots got just a look.

Simpler styles got most of her attention. In her size, she eyed them all over. The hard part is within her price range. Grabbing a pair, she looked at her mom and rushed to the bench at the end of the aisle to try them on. Fingers in the bootstraps, with a snap, she had them on. Tight neck but, as she walked around, they felt good. She kept looking down as if in a dream. Quickly she took them off and didn't put her shoes back on, rushing to her next choice. In her heart, she saw the pair with embroidered floral arrangement on the boots. She really liked them, but they were too much.

Clerks can tell when a sale is going to take place. He briskly walked over to give his aid, for several reasons. He is wearing the best western wear bought at employee discount prices. Complete with a black Stetson Cowboy hat. "Howdy miss, do you need any help?" he asked. In a nano second, she went from shopper to observer and blushed. Clara, chuckled. He saw she is shopping in the lower price range but wanting to make an impression. He said, "Let me show you the clearance section. We are closing out brand name boots at a sixty percent off. That widened her eyes. She followed him, in here socking feet and two rows down to the display of discounted boots. She gasped and motioned Clara to come over and see.

There is a pair of red leather, snip toe, embroidered boot. Snatching then off the rack, she hustled to the bench to try them on, a quick pull and her heel went right in. It is modest in style and very good taste, well made and one of the popular brands. She looked at the boots, walked around forever. Looked into the mirror, shifted right and left. Going over in her mind which outfits they will look the best in. Walking up to Clara an asking her opinion, walked some more the whole time the clerk stood nearby. Excited, she looked for the tag and gasped. Seventy dollars on sale, regularly One hundred and five dollars. Now Clara is not happy with this clerk and doesn't care how much charm he is exuding. It is a slick move. He knew it, J loved this pair of boots. In her heart she wanted them. She only has fifty dollars to spend. It is clear, they were too expensive and now dying inside. Slowly she took them off and the sale is about to be lost when mister slick says, "Hey, don't you work over at the buffet?" The wheels in J's mind spun wildly from being a shopper to she is noticed. What! He noticed me at work and again blushed, but he jarred her mind. She just got a paycheck. Walking over to Clara, they talked under their breath. A deal is struck. Never in her dreams would she have thought to have a pair of Cowgirl boots so nice. Once they were home, she would call her grandparents and tell them all the details but only Wilma would hear about the clerk.

Twenty-Three

The first five notes were played on the lead guitar, then the bass player joined in, the sanctuary went up in cheers. Petra is performing at the biggest non deformational church in Trinity. The opening song is drowned out by the screaming teens, a thousand strong. The band played on, knowing eventually they will want to hear them. Everyone is on their feet. At first, they were jumping in excitement and then began to sway in unison moving to the music and lyrics meant to worship Jesus. Jessalyn, Kelly, Sally, Tim and twenty-six others from the youth group are filling two complete rows, center stage, ten rows back. It is first come, first serve seating unless you could run. The doors opened; the sprint is on. Kelly leaned forward to see the other girls faces and in loud voice said: "Don't you just love his voice?" referring to the lead singer John Schlitt. Both girls just shook their heads yes.

It took some time to get her hair just right. Her bangs to the right style and all of her hair sprayed to hold with an over adequate amount of hair spray. She looked her best. Tim is a head taller than her and is dress almost the same as if they planned it that way, minus the hair spray. Tim and Jess were standing next to each other. She wore a light blue Demin shirt, short sleeves and the new regular fit jeans her grandmother bought for her in the shopping spree. She didn't like tight jeans or the slim legs. They just didn't feel right. She tucked the bottom of the jeans inside her new boots, you can't show them off if they are covered up by your jeans. Anyway, the best part of the boot would be covered up, the embroidery.

Petra is anointed. Sweeping all into worshipping our Lord. The crowd is fully engaged. Between songs the lead singer would give testimonies that stirred the hearts of Believers. He said, "Jesus is my everything," you could tell he meant it. Why else would the presence of God fill this place? Turning around John looked at the guitar player and he nodded, instantly the room knew the song, a hush fell. "There is a way that leads to life" the first line in the song, Road to Zion. Why is this song so loved? It softens the heart and walls come down. In the second stanza, their harmonizing voices elevated the song so beautifully. What is it about this song? Tears well up in Jess's eyes, she looks into the face of Tim and the softness of his expression. In a moment of tenderness, he wraps his arm around her and gives a short squeeze. He feels things are back on track, Jess is concerned she is too vulnerable and allows the squeeze but quickly leans out of it. Ninety minutes

disappeared; the performance is coming to an end. Shouts go up from the crowd for more, more, more. They had begun to walk off the platform, shouts grew louder. Petra fans knew they had not played the two new releases. John Schlitt asked the crowd, "Do you want to hear Chameleon?". A roar went up. Everyone settled back to enjoy. Then a chant went up. "Beyond Belief, Beyond Belief" their newest song. This time it is really over. The youth group turned to their friends, everyone talked about their favorite songs, music, player, instrument and on and on until they had to leave. Parents are waiting in the parking lot. Kelly, Sally and Jessalyn had come together; Kelly knew her mom is waiting outside. Tim, Jessalyn parted on a up note. Then once in the car, the girls talked about every aspect of the night. Lying in bed with the concert ringing in her ears, she replayed the night. When she got to Tim and the squeeze, in her mind the words her grandmother told her came up, "You are called for a purpose."

Life again revolved around the calendar. A strong magnetic clip held it to the top door of the refrigerator. At eye level for quick reference of scheduled events. Or with a grab could be on the counter to write on it. During the school year the calendar holds their lives together. For every ten notes J put on there, Clara had one. Some might say Clara is Jessalyn's personal chauffeur. Not true. Babies grow up too fast. She is just meditating on a scripture, James 4:14; "Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." Clara is nearing fifty years old and where did the time go. All too soon, she will have too much time on her hands. For now, it is all about her little girl and making every moment count.

Jessalyn, enthusiastically jumped into the new school year with great anticipations. Her life is focused on three main things. Drama class, Basketball in the fall, working three days a week for her spending money. Sure, she sees most of the other kids have allowances. Appreciation for how hard her mother works and amazingly how she stretches the money, she is grateful for a mom totally devoted to her. J doesn't think Clara knows, the times she saw her at church, surrounded by a circle of woman praying for her. Hearing her cry's and releasing all the emotions in her constant war to make ends meet. God has been good to them. They have everything they need.

Drama class is the last class of her day. She lives for the end of the day. Rushing down the hall and into class, she wonders what they will learn today. It is so odd. Really! You could see the introverted and extroverted kids on the first day. Why were the introverted kids here? It didn't make sense at first.

Not sure she could verbalize it. But they are changing because of what happens in there. Take for instance the abstract exercises. Mr. Williams clears his throat, a sign to quiet down, then instructs us to get in a circle. Mind you, the chairs are pushed to the walls already. “Okay class” he says. “We are going to play do as I do exercise” we all looked puzzled. I love Mr. Williams. He’s fun. Makes the class fun. He goes on, “Now class, repeat what I do, then let’s go around the room counterclockwise and each person do their own example for us to follow.” Then, with a look of I forgot to tell you, he said, “Oh, no words. Just sounds and actions.” Now some are nervous. The focus will be on them when it is their turn. What will they do?

Mr. Williams takes a breath at the same time tilting his head back, pushing his arms and hands forward let’s out a yelp. Giggles and then in unison we all mimic him. Bill is on the hot seat, but he loves to be flamboyant. He hops up and down twice and spun around shoving his hands like to say; tah dah. We all laughed; he has that effect on us. I can see why he is in this class. A born entertainer. Jessalyn had no time to think before it is her turn. She does what is natural. Acting like she dribbles a basketball twice and sets up for a shot ending with a swishing sound. Beverly, a bit shy, shifts her weight to the side, places her hand on her chin and lets out a “Ummmm.”

The first complete cycle, they all know what is expected and the atmosphere of the room is relaxed. They are all here to learn and it is great, acceptance for each other is an encouraging aspect to be crazier. Inhabitations fall slowly, but they fall. For Jessalyn, being in her youth group, working at the buffet and being in sports has already conditioned her to be herself in front of people. But! Learning to act is to draw from a well from within. Tapping into emotions, displaying the right actions to go with them and drawing the audience into the play at the same time. All together new.

Trinity Oklahoma is known for having a church in every bedroom community. No one gives it a thought. They all go to church somewhere in the area. It is once joked, if you throw a rock you will hit a church. Bill, in Jessalyn drama class attends the Nazarene Church on 39th street. Not far from Sonic’s. It’s big and they hold drama’s and plays several times a year. It is where Bill got his first taste of acting in the Christmas Pageant. First a stand in, then a role with no lines to a piece with a speaking role, a Shepard at the manger. The culture in Trinity is their Faith. Right now, they maybe in a public school but the majority of people are godly. It’s a given. Maybe that is why the wacky exercises are fun. Definitely character developing.

Rushing outside, Jessalyn is looking for Clara. On Fridays, they go right home so she can get ready for work. Parking in the apartment building lot, J bounds up the stairs two at a time. Unlocking the door, she rushes in to the hot apartment. They don't leave the air on during the day when no one's home. Through the door, J's goes right to the bedroom to get ready. Now, Clara comes in, turns the air on to catch a cool breath from climbing the stairs. She maybe lean, but these are the only stairs she climbs, and they take her breath away. She notices. J didn't go straight to the answering machine that is blinking. So, she did. Pressing the play button, it says: "You have three messages." It goes on, "First message; Mrs. Ross, this is the bank, we need to talk to you as soon as possible, call us or come see us please." Clara makes gasp and thinks *what now*. "Next message, Clara, this is the rental office, we need to do an inspection on your unit this week, call us or stop by the office. Next message: Jesse, it's Tim, call me. No more messages" and the machine give out a final beep. Turn her head towards the noise coming down the hallway she says with a loud voice; "Tim called." No response.

"Dread!" Clara mumbled under breath. She will have a pit in her stomach until Monday when she makes the calls. "Come on mom, I'll be late" J said halfway out the door. Grabbing her purse, off they go in a whirlwind. Pulling up to the back door of buffet, Clara gets a whiff of freshly cooked food and it hits her. She's hungry. Running it through her mind, for just a few spare dollars, she might park, go in and have dinner. Breathing room. Is it too much to hope for? If J was not supporting herself by buying her own clothes and things teens really need to have, like Concert tickets, she would not see ends meet. She's not whining, all's good, most of the time. Forced to park at the far end of the lot, climb the stairs, first thing, sit in the chair and get a breath. *I need exercise, Lord knows I need it. Maybe I will push myself to walk to the park and back before going to pick up J* she thinks. Opening the fridge, slim pickings. Frying up an egg for a sandwich her eyes drift over to the counter where the mail sits. As much she does not want too, she has to pay bills. Before she sits down to eat, she turns on the TV for company. A full glass of sweet tea, egg sandwich in hand, the easy chair is calling. Here is her choices to programs to watch; The Cosby Show, Full House and Golden Girls. The Cosby show is fun, the family is older, Full House, those sweet Olson girls, their lovable, and the Golden Girls are too close for comfort. Clara can't even think about living alone or with a few women. That show would bring her to choke on her dinner. Full house it is.

Sweet mindless relaxation. Thirty minutes of escapism. Reality. Bills. Placing her dishes in the sink until later, it's time to see where they are

financially. Living paycheck to paycheck, seeing God work miracles, there is a little desire for a cushion. Some savings. Opening the bills, placing them in an order of which needs to be paid first, she opens the check book, ready to write the first check. A perk of working in Accounting, knowing and keeping a balanced check book. The electric bill is first. She writes the name on the check, enters the date, enters the amount, signs her name and begins to record the check number and it doesn't line up. A check is missing. Her right hand comes up covering her mouth. A sick feel sweeps over her. What check is missing? How could I do this? What did I use it for and how much? In one move, she stands up pushing the chair back with her legs. She knew. The medical exam for J to go back to school. Cascading thoughts run through her mind. *Oh My Lord* she says in her mind. *The bank, if the doctor's office check cleared first* her mind shuts down. *Lord, what am I going to do?* She pleaded. Checking and rechecking, yes, she is overdrawn.

Racing through her mind, what's the plan? She usually writes the checks, and if there is not enough money in the account, she waits until the next paycheck, deposits it and then goes to the currency exchange to pay utilities, or the rental office and or post office. The fine line of timing. Looking at the clock, it's time to pick up J. Praying the whole way over there for God's help, the passenger door opens, and Clara says, "How was work dear" in her usual cheery voice. J gives her the play by play to the seating people from church, her old basketball coach and the obnoxious couple who didn't like any tables she brought them too. She said, "They left mom, do you believe it, they just left because they did like any table that were open. You know that is part of my job to help the customer feel comfortable. It is embarrassing. Oh, it was a scene I will remember." Lying in bed, Clara poured out her heart the Lord. Well after midnight, she prayed. Then flipping to thoughts like *How could I be so stupid*. This hit her right in the vulnerable spot opening old wounds. It hit the void. The spot where wayward children are missing. It was a deep shaft that could not be opened.

Saturday is filled with chores and work for J. *Throwing yourself into cleaning is good for the soul*, she thought. Grabbing her favorite man, Mr. Clean, she cleaned window, mirrors and counter surfaces. A fresh clean smell. Always under her breath, she was praying. Turning her focus off of God and back to the problem, *Now I am short for the month. This is where all the grey hairs are coming from, I am premature grey, gads* she thinks. She's doing a good game of camouflaging what's going on and keeping J out of it. J believes she is listening, but she is really distracted. It is the same on the way to church.

Clara didn't sit in her normal place. The ladies would have read her like a book. Her mind is lost in space and time. Ask her what the message was about, she couldn't have told you. A tap on her shoulder snapped her out of it. "Dear, I know we don't speak, but I see your heart for the Lord. Probably why He woke me up this morning. He gave me a Word for you" she said handing her an envelope. "Read it later honey" she said as she patted her on the arm. Then said, "It will be alright, dear." She stuffed it in her purse just as J rushed up to get her. Normally it is the other way around. That night, after J went to bed, settled in her easy chair, reaching for her purse, she held the envelope. For some time, she held it. Then tore it open. Pulling out a folded piece of paper a check fell out. There goes that hand again, up to her face. This time not in fear, but in tears. Unfolding the note, it read; "Clara, you are one of the strongest women I know. You are a mother through and through. What you won't do for your girl. The Lord woke me up at 3 am sharp. I heard Him well, He said you needed eighty dollars." Choking back sobs, she didn't want to wake J, the tears flowed as her weighted heart softened. In her mind she said, *Father you heard me.*

"Millie, I have to run errands" Clara said and headed out of the office. Inside the bank, a voice said, "How can I help you?" then directed to sit in a nearby chair to wait for a banker. Nervous, knowing she didn't have a lot of time, a man walked up, introduced himself and brought Clara over to his desk. Mrs. Ross, your check for your car payment bounced. Now, with an overdrawn check, the charge is fifteen dollars, and you were thirty-five dollars short in your account to make the payment on the car. You owe us fifty dollars. Can you pay it today?" he asked. Reaching into her purse pulling out the check, they made out a deposit slip, minus the charges, giving her a cushion of thirty dollars. Next stop, the rental office. "Mrs. Ross, when can we come in and do an inspection?" Clara, asking for evening hours, the only slot that was open is a week from Wednesday, church night. She thought surely Kelly's mom would drive J. "That will be fine. How long does the inspection take?" she asked. Twenty minutes is the answer. A never-ending litany of life tasks.

Once in the office, Clara went into the break room, grabbed lunch sack and began to eat at her desk. That is when Millie remembered. "Hey" Millie said. "My friend over at the Mexican Restaurant is looking for a waitress. She told me she needed someone she could trust to come in on time and work three days a week. I told her about Jessalyn. She said the jobs is hers if she calls her tomorrow." It is a little bit further from the apartment, but she

would be getting tips plus and hourly wage. J jumped at the chance to make more money.

Twenty-Four

Twenty-five dollars mom, I got twenty-five dollars in tips tonight. J is hopping in the seat of the car making the whole car bounce up and down. “Mom, people were so good to me. I dropped food carrying it to tables, spilled drinks an oh, it is a balancing act let me tell you, still people were generous to me. I was horrified until I remember Mr. Williams teaching us in drama class ‘When there is drama you don’t expect, try humor to level it out’ and mom, it worked.’ I would smile and say, I see we need a do over and they were kind. Mom, I want to give it to you.”

“No way J. You earned it and anyhow, you are going to need new basketball shoes in a few months. Use the money for them.” J knew this was true, but she insisted until finally Clara relented and said, “Okay, I will use it for groceries.” Another small financial cushion for Clara.

Going home the week of the 4th of July is the beginning a new cycle for them. Upward! There were the unexpected dips in the road, however, in Clara’s unshakable faith, God smoothed them out for her. Sometimes immediately and other times testing her resolve. Either way, God came through. 8:28, is a verse she holds onto when it looks bad. Romans 8:28, “and we know that in all things God works for the good for those who love Him.” Now, keeping a close eye on J and Tim’s relationship, she now wonders if it was just a summer love? She knows her daughter. And something is off. But literally there is no time for her to have a relationship. Too close to fast is a dangerous and glaring red flag. That flag is down, not sure why, she knows it’s a good thing. It is a good thing Clara has one of those spaghetti minds. One where she can keep a dozen thoughts flowing. Right now, the noodle that had her concerned about Tim is not at the forefront.

Millie looked over at Clara, crossing her arms over her chest and posed a question, “Have you noticed that George comes into the office to ask his questions? He seems very interested in you!” Clara blushed. *Lord, how long has it been? I haven’t blushed in decades* she thought. Millie, in true Millie fashion, pushed back in her rolling office chair, making her way near to Clara, started into all the possibilities furthering the color in her cheeks to rise. “Stop it” Clara said, in a girlish way. Of course, she didn’t. She is having too much fun. Clara is saved by the phone. It’s didn’t stop her from feeling good.

She is noticed. Even if she knew there is no time for a man in her life, this whole thing felt wonderful.

It seemed like life couldn't be better. Another test of sorts. Living out the same dedicated life to the Lord when desperate times are not knocking on the door. Clara felt things were going right especially when sitting down for their occasional dinner together, J said grace over the meal with gratitude. Of all of her friends at church, school friends, she is the only one living in an apartment. Being driven around in a, some would call, vintage car, our worn furniture, she's grateful.

A transformation took place in the drama class. Introverts were now extroverts. They were all into acting and using outward expressions bringing out the character they were playing. They had grown close as a group. Odd, it is unlike any other class. A shared bonding is taking place. In their casual conversations, meeting in the hallways they talked. Could this happen in a math class? No. Nor the others, it is unique. And how the walls and barriers came down. That is how the acting is to be. Creative, tapping into inner self, emotions, feelings being accessed. Opening up. Then the day came for the need begin closing down and keeping some distance. It is Becca. Running up to Jessalyn in the hallway, she said, "Here's how I survive" secretly showing her a small packet of pills. Saying, "I have way more drama at home than in Mr. Williams class." *Oh no* Jessalyn thought, *not again!* "Becca" she said, "Don't show me stuff like that, I don't do them." It is not the same afterwards. Jessalyn liked being in a close group, but why? Why do these paths to destruction keep appearing? From then on, Becca worried about Jessalyn keeping her secret. Looks were exchanged, innuendos whispered. There is no cloud of darkness to warn her. No feeling of evil being near. Her boundaries were already clearly defined by earlier experiences. Perpetually the words of her grandmother rang out loud in her mind, *you are called to a destiny*. Okay, the class is tainted but undaunted by the experience Jessalyn engaged in a love of her life, acting.

This year it would not have to be Kmart where Jessalyn bought her basketball shoes. Running for kicks is an all-sports, shoes store. It is shoe heaven. Stepping into the store is a first. No pinching pennies; just watching the dollars. Walking past the top of line shoes, she wanted a good pair, not to be extravagant. In Kmart, the shopping is over in minutes. Lack of options. In here, it is going to take time. In her price range, J and Clara examine the brands. The sale person, can you believe it, sale person helping you to buy basketball shoes, they dove into the advantages to each shoe model.

Schedule in hand, J takes down the calendar and sits down at the kitchen table. Practices starts next week lasting two weeks and then their first game. It is going to be busy. Entering her first practice in the first week of October and games end in mid-December. Uniforms arrive in a few days; J will have all that she needs. She can't wait! "Mom, I got it all written on the calendar" she said. Then from down the hall comes, "What about work, all those days on there too?" Clara said. "And, what about work? You have any conflicts?"

"Mooooom, I got it all worked out with Mrs. Rodriguez, don't worry." Walking down the hall and into the kitchen, Clara said, "Let's go over this now, you know I will forget when we get busy." J gave her a look and knew there was no getting out of it. Handing Clara, the calendar, the schedule and saying when she is working, answering each question, is a bit enduring.

The stories that kitchen table could tell. Once there were five seated around it, middle leaf in. One by one, a chair is put in the storage locker each renter is given until now only two are used. The family conversation during dinners. School work being done. Games being played. Coffee with friends add up to the worn and faded stain, pen marks in the wood surface, permanent markers spots. Yeah, if the table could talk, which stories would it tell? Of love and fun? Or strife and arguments? Right now, it's not giving up secrets. Like the night J was invited to be on the Varsity team. Meaning, she would play two games a night twice a week. It is a really big deal, an honor for a sophomore to be on Varsity. Well, Clara is about to dig her heels and brace herself for a battle. Until she thought about it. Same building, same night. If she didn't do well on Varsity it would mean more bench time. It must have been the conditioning with her boys. Keep them busy and out of trouble. With J, it wasn't trouble she was worried about. The table heard all of Clara's phone calls to Wilma asking for advice recorded by the coffee stain nearest the phone.

"Gather round" Coach yelled. Twelve girls are on JV team and fifteen on Varsity. "Listen up, here are the starters for our first game JV." he said. Jessalyn is one of them. Every girl gets to play. It's a good rule. Basketball is a team sport, no superstars or the whole team suffers. No ball hogs either. Cohesion fails when one player wants to do all the scoring. "Okay, let me see you do some layups" the Coach called out. Girls lined up on the right and left of the basket. One girl dripples to the basket, makes a shot at the same time the other girls get the rebound and then goes to the end of the shooting line. Everything is being evaluated. Ranking on skill is taking place. Placement on this list is important. Why? Time on the floor is everything. Yes, every girl

plays, but good players get more time. “Ross” the Coached called out after the practice. “Your second string on Varsity. Are you up for this?” he asked. “Oh yeah Coach” is all she said. After practice, Jessalyn got the cold shoulder from the sophomores. The freshmen were not at the party last year. It wouldn’t take long, once the team jelled, that she is labeled the black sheep of the team. First Becca, now this. “Water off a ducks back” is what Wilma would say to her about times like this. “Just let it roll off your mind and keep walking the path of your destiny. High School is over in a blink. Keep your focus on the long journey my girl.” Guiding thoughts from her loving grandmother. Sure, their treatment bothered her. It’s the dark, hidden side of Trinity. Evil has a foothold the churches are not overcoming. The World is slowly creeping in.

It is tight; full schedule to December fifteenth. End of Basketball season. Sunday is church. Monday, basketball. Tuesday Work. Wednesday church and youth group. Thursday Basketball. Friday and Saturday, Work. *Gee Clara thought, not much time for boys.* In fact, there is no spare time. That boy crazed daughter of late, is too busy and she liked it that way. This year, Clara brought a carry bag with her to all the games. It held a cushion for the bleachers and a book during warmups. Live and learn scenario. Gabbing a hotdog now and then as time permitted. All is well.

The proverbial shoe dropped on December 1st. To Clara, it felt hot inside the car, but she dismissed it. Really all she ever does is short drives. But, as she is passing Will Rogers Gardens, steam fogged up the inner windshield. In a panic, unable to see clearly, she makes a turn onto a side street to wipe the glass. Steam pours out from under the hood of the car as she brought the car to a stop. In her mind she says *Father God, what is going on?* Rapidly her mind jumps into what needs to be done here. This is new. In all of her car experience with the Duster, this has never happened before. A police car pulls up behind and the officer gets out. Together they watch steam rising into the air. “Pop the hood ma’am” the officer said. That is what she did. With a pop it raised up. Reaching in he slid the second latch over opening it all of the way. Now a small cloud of steam appeared. “Tell you what” the officer said. “I’ve seen this before and I’d bet my Sundays tithes” little chuckle there, “That your water pump is the problem.”

“Is it a big problem.”

“No, if it is the water pump it can be a quick fix, probably one day. But with these LTD’s they may have to take the radiator out first.” Clara wore worry on her face. The office spoke up. “Do you have an auto mechanic for repairs?”

Clara shook her head no. “Tell you what, best guy I know of is Tony’s car repair over on 39th, on the south side, two blocks east of the Nazarene University. How far are you from home?”

“A few blocks.”

“Okay here’s what you do” slamming the hood closed. “Roll your windows down, I know it’s a bit chilly, keep your defroster on high and drive it home and I will follow you. In the morning call Tony’s telling him I sent you and he will fix you up. Now, with a water pump, you can do really short drives. It will save you towing fees. You got all of that?” he asked. Nodding yes, together they limped the car to the apartments lot where they parted company.

What would she do without good friends and her church family to help her out? Making a few phone calls, she arranged pick up and drop offs for the next few days once the car is in the hands of Tony. Single mom, one income, walking a financial tight rope month to month she is concerned. Pulling the car into Tony’s is unique for 39th business. It has a corrugated sheet metal fence surrounding it. The building is made out of cinder block construction, with a flat roof. The building and the fence were painted the same color, gray. Motor oil stains cover the ground. Walking thru the glass door the sounds of work is taking place. Air tools buzzing, metal on metal sounds ring out. The smell of new tires and unpleasant odors permeate the air.

Yes, Clara is out of her element. Totally vulnerable, totally ignorant to mechanical things. Inside there is a desk covered in papers and parts and who knows what else. The counter seems to be where business is conducted. Stepping into the office/customer waiting area, from the first bay in the repair shop, Tony makes his entrance. His first words to her, “What kind of car do you got.” He’s got a dead pan look on his face as he waits for her answer. “LTD” she says.

“What’s the year?” he says. Fumbling to remember and then telling him. “So, you’re the water pump car, right?” Now she is stunned, *how did he know* she thought. A hissing sound came from the shop area as the air compressor kicked on. Talking over it, he said, “What number can I reach you at?” She gave him the accounting office’s number. While making out the work order, grease on his hand, rubbing off on the white paper is typical. It must have been worse than usual because he reached around grabbing the rag in his back pocket to clean up a bit. On his left hand is a band aid. Calluses covered his palms. Deep lines were ingrained in his skin.

Sticking the pen back in his shirt pocket, where the whole allowed it to go in, Clara couldn't help to see the mechanic's uniform. He had stuff in each pocket, and the shirt and the pants matched in color, gray. The shirt tails hanging out. He is begging for a new look or at least a new uniform, this one looked like the oil stains on the ground outside. On the top of his head, he wore a hat. It looked like a baseball hat J wears except the bill was missing. "Okay Mrs. Ross, I'll give you a call when I looked it over. Be about an hour or so" and with that Clara walked outside to her ride. She did a quick assessment to see if she got dirty.

Four o'clock the call came from Tony. "Mrs. Ross, its good and bad news. The water pump bearing is shot. You are almost out of antifreezes. Your hoses are brittle, and I can poke a hole in one with my finger. The good news is I have everything you need in stock. Now I'm gunna tell you ma'am, Jimmy told me to take care of you."

"Jimmy" Clara asked.

"Yeah, the policeman who came up to you yesterday. He sends work my way so I listen to him when he asks for a favor. Here's the break down. You need new hoses, a new fan belts, a water pump and gasket, and several gallons of antifreeze." Clara raises her hand to her mouth; Millie knows somethings up. He goes on, "It's the labor, with these LTD's, it tight in there. I gotta pull the radiator to get to the water pump. It's gunna cost you two hundred fifty to three hundred dollars to get the job done." Clara turns pale. "I ain't making no money here Mrs. Ross. It is a god send Jimmy came upon you like that. It would be more if he wasn't in the mix." Hanging up the phone, Clara is in shock.

She didn't have the money, plain and simple. She didn't know what she is going to do. Over and over, she ran scenarios through her mind on how to get the money. Her back as been up against the wall before. She is tapped out. That small cushion in the bank is a drop in the bucket. Last resort, no she's not ready to go there. They have been really good to her. Clara has too make it. Determined not to call her parents. In her mind, she made a promise to herself not to ever consider it. This is different. Clara will pay her back. They need to talk.

More than willing to help, J will give her paychecks and tips over to Clara. But it is not enough. She is going to be short. One hundred and seventy-five dollars is what she is coming up too. Now what? Two days later the call comes from Tony, the car is done, come pick it up. True to his estimate, the bill is two hundred and fifty dollars. The shortfall is seventy-

five dollars. “Tony’s” Clara heard. “Tony, this is Clara Ross, I have a problem.” Her gut is twisting inside, nearly to tears, a quiver in her voice. In Tony’s mind he is thinking, *here we go*, he’s heard it all before. “I only have part of the money” Clara said. “Come pick up the car when you have all the money.”

“You don’t understand, I need the car, I have to have the car.”

“Sorry Mrs. Ross, this is business, I need the payment in full.”

“Can I make payments?”

“We don’t do that here.” The phone is silent. “How much you got” he asked.

“One hundred and seventy-five dollars” she said.

“When do you think you can have the rest of it.”

“Two or three weeks.”

“I’m stickin my neck out here. I got family, I got bills, I got workers. You swear, you will have the money for me in three weeks?” He didn’t wait for an answer. “I know you are a god-fearing woman, pay me the money you have, come get the car and I’m holden you to your promise.”

Twenty-Five

It is as clear as the handwriting on the wall she thought; she liked using that bible story as an expression. Pasta, pasta and more pasta, mom can make boot leather taste good. It's a gift due to creative cooking when you only have pennies to spend. I got an idea. Thank God Mrs. Rodriguez gives us a meal to eat when we are working. Take out! I'll get my meal to go and I can share it with mom. She lets me order off the menu, but I have only order little items as to not cost her so much. Nacho's! That's it, Nacho's. It is a huge appetizer. There are times two people order it as a meal, I warn them it is a lot of food. Tonight, I'll ask her if I can get it to go and mom and I will feast on it.

It's been eons for food to be the pressing need. Ever since her brother left for a life in baseball, money stuff has been better. Bouncing towards the car with a bag in her hands, J joyfully plopped into the car and says, "We eat like queens tonight." Clara could smell the aroma and it is good. "Sit down mom, I'm serving you tonight." Loving it, Clara takes her seat. J picks up a small note pad saying, "Senhorita, can I take your drink order?" Holding back a laugh, Clara looks around and grabs an old magazine for a menu. Looking intently at it, she says, "I would like ice cold water please. Extra ice."

"Se, coming right up." Cracking open a new ice cube rack, ice cubes are making a tinkling noise as they are dropped into the glass. Stepping over to the sink, turning on the tap, she fills it with water. Making the two steps to the table she puts the glass down. Fully engaged in her role as waitress, she asks, "Have you selected your meal for tonight?" Holding the magazine with her left hand, pointing with her right, she says, "Yes, I would like your Nacho appetizer, please."

"Wonderful choice. We have the best Nacho's in all Oklahoma City area." Taking the menu, J pivots, takes the two steps to the counter and begins to open the bag. Effort is needed in dividing the Nacho chips now covered in cheese, tomatoes, ground beef and other decorative vegetable to fill two plates. Returning to the table with a plate in hand she asks, "Will the Senhorita be dining by herself tonight?"

“No, my hija will be eating with me.” J is shocked her mom knew the Spanish word for daughter, she had only just learned it working in the Mexican restaurant. They both laughed. J grabbed the second plate, got a glass of water and the talk of the day began. All theatrics aside, they had each other and that is all that mattered. “Ummm,” followed by loud crunching sounds while Clara’s feasted. J watched in silent curiosity to see. It is a fake out. Clara picked up a jalapeno and just as she was about to place it in her mouth, eyes wide looking at her hija she said, “Not in this lifetime.” And they burst into laughter. Spicy foods and Clara do not blend well.

It is great to have the car back. But the repair has shattered the financial balance. The teeter tauter is down on the side of the car repairs, while up in the air is food and other non-essential items in the budget. “Mom, we got to do laundry” came the shout from J bedroom. Clean clothes are now on the essential list. *Why do I stare at this dark ceiling? I can’t see anything* Clara thinks. Not trying to worry, knowing the Lord will take care of them, she laid in bed, when she gasped. *Christmas!*

Basketball season ended on a high note. J is at the peak of her game. JV starting lineup and second string on Varsity. The final night, it is a full court press. The coaches are hoping for the final win. Jessalyn loved being on point in the JV team. Racing the arc of the three-point line, getting the pass and looking for the opening. Swish. On Varsity she played mostly as shooting guard. Feed the open player is the name to the game. Then, there it is. A tell. Waiting for it, Jessalyn timing is right on. The other teams point guard is doing it every time. In a flash, Jessalyn hit the ball out of the point guards’ hand, races the length of the court and it two points. She loved those moments.

Clara pulled off of 39th and into Tony’s. Stepping out of the car she is concerned about getting oil on the bottom of her shoes and tracking it into the office on her return. It’s the same. The smells, sounds, uniform and beanie cap. By the look of Tony, it is a rough life. The smile on his face welcomed Clara. “A woman of your word” he said. “What you got for me?” Clara handed him an envelope. He opened it, counted the money, looking at her he said, “We be good.” Robbing Peter to pay Paul is a juggling act she hopes stops soon. Tony reaches out his hand to finalize the deal with a handshake. Clara about died.

Jessalyn twirled around in a circle. Her bright blue sun dress fanned out. Angel, angel I have missed our times together. Now running up and down the beds of flowers. “The colors angel, there are so many wonderful colors” she told him. “I have never been far from you Jessalyn” he said.

“I know” as she bumped up to his shoulder. She’s grown. Flower beds as far as the eye can see. Shifting colors flash through the clouds on the horizon. A yellow finch darts past them on its way to another feast. She in the moment. The time here will be all too short. It’s understood. Until! Turning abruptly, she narrows her eyes looking at him. “There’s a path angel” she said. A blue hue rests above the path as it appeared. Walking right up to it, pivoting, placing her hands on her hips, she addresses the angel. “What’s this about?” she questions him.

“Change.”

“Oh, I know about change.”

“Temptations always come. In the downward times of life to break you. In the upward times to misdirect you.” Taking her hand, no awareness of motion, they now stood on the edge of the plateau and the valley below. “What do you see?”

“Angel I see many things in the valley below.” Right then, columns of light came up like spotlights. “Now what do see?” Thinking, wondering if this is another test. Then she understands. “Those columns of light are where each spot is on the path.”

“What took place there?” Oh, no. Here we go again. Trying to think spiritually about life’s experiences. Shifting her weight to the left, then the right, sighing, about to give up it hits her. “Choices and Changes took place there angel.”

“What is the result of those choices?” Oh gee, raising her eye browse. Blurting out she said, “I got to move forward on the path.”

“Choices based on God’s principles, the tough choices that brought you to new heights took place in valley. They are now in your character.”

“It’s in the past angel” she said as a ploy to escape the memories. “That past has prepared you for your future.” He goes on to say, “Where are you today.” Glancing once again into the valley, along the wall, she sees the switchbacks.

“We are on the plateau.” Again, without awareness of motion they are before the path leading away from the flower beds and into a forest. Questions, it’s all about how to ask the questions, she remembers this now. Thinking, she is poised to ask him. “Angel, why is the color of my dress the same color as the hue in the clouds above the path?” Pleased she has put the two together, he says, “You will learn to walk by the spirit, not by sight.” Not sure why, this idea excites her.

They began to walk. At first, the trees were few, spaced and away from the path. Gradually the number of trees increased until they bordered the path. Under the arbor canopy, the blue clouds were blocked out. Within sight is the spot. Sure, there were trees around. But no ominous features to warn of impending struggles. Just trees. Stopping short, taking in her surroundings, looking for clues, finding none at the moment, Jessalyn looks into the eyes of her companion. “I thought so” she said. “No information there. Any parting words angel?” she asked. She didn’t think so. She stepped into the spot.

Clara is sitting in the comfortable chair wearing her pajamas staring at a television set that is not on and she is in the dark. It’s 2 o’clock in the morning. She can’t sleep. She bursts into tears. Stifling the sounds not wanting J to know. The hallway light comes on. “Mom” she says. “Mom, is there something wrong?”

“Everything fine honey, go back to bed.” Well, you know that is not going to happen. With a concerned look on her face, J said “Mom what’s wrong.” *Is it a time to be strong for her*, Clara thought, or to be vulnerable? “We’re not going to have a Christmas this year,” she said. “I can bring up the decorations from the storage locker tomorrow mom” J said.

“Thank you honey that is not what I mean. There is no money for gifts J.” It dawned on her. All of the money went for the car repairs. The wheels in J’s mind are turning. “Mom, that’s okay” she said. Sad, but all things considered, they have everything they need. In that instant, the excitement of Christmas lost its sparkle. Oh, not the spiritual side of the Holiday. The looking forward to mom’s surprises on Christmas morning. She always out does herself. Clara reached out her hand grasping J’s, she said, “Jesus is our best gift ever.” It

may have sounded like a cliché' in the moment. If it were not for all the times, He provide for them in his supernatural ways in their times of needs. They had each other. Besides, they always enjoy going to the Christmas pageants the local churches put on.

“Line two is for you” Millie said. “Hello, this is Clara Ross, how may I help you?”

“Mrs. Ross, my name is Brian. Your name came up to my wife and I. We own and operate “Fragrances of the World’ here in Shepherd’s Mall. If you are interested, when the store closes on Christmas Eve, you and your daughter may come into the store and pick out one gift each.” Stunned and speechless Clara holds the phone to her ear, but nothing is happening, and Millie has a strange look on her face. “Mrs. Ross, are you there?” Brian asked? “Yes, I am here and yes I am interested” she said.

“Great” he said, and they discussed the details. Doing a slow turn towards Millie with her mouth slightly opened, Millie knew this was going to be good. Between taking calls and writing notes she filled her in. Hank, the senior accountant, came up front wanting all the current messages. He would be taking work home again tonight and needed those messages to get ahead for the holidays. His expression is stark when he saw how many there were.

Walking in the store, Clara and J are met with many grand aromas. Walking to the man at the counter, Clara asked to see Brian. “I’m Brian, how can I help you?”

“I’m Clara Ross and this is my daughter Jessalyn” and with that he took a big breath, widened his eyes tilting his head back just a bit. Smiling widely, he told them to have a seat by the front door, the husbands bench he called it. The final customer is served, walking them to the door, he locked it behind them which Clara thought it curious. Turning to them he said, “The store is yours. Please come over and meet my wife, Rose.” With that the introduction took place. Clara noticed how nicely she is dressed and how she carries herself.

The store has many glass showcases. The walls are lined with them and in the center of the store is an oval display with two rows of cases with a walkway in the center. Rose addressed them. “We are so glad you came. Let me show you items you can choose from” and she began with Clara. “On this wall, are fragrances very popular” as she highlighted several brands. Brian

brought Jessalyn over to perfumes the young girls have been buying. Rose opened a case, reached in and brought out a decorative bottle of Nina Ricci's L'Air Du Temp perfume. Taking the cap off, placed her finger over the top of the bottle, she tipped it back to wet her finger and righted the bottle placing in on the showcases. Reaching out for her arm, Rose dabbed her finger on Clara's wrist. Almost awkwardly, she smelled it, not being used to this fine treatment. Such a wonderful fragrance and twinges of being an alluring woman in the singles arena. Rose moved onto the next item. Brian and Rose treated the Ross woman as if they were the most important customers. Their service to them is as much a gift as the perfumes. The most elegant shopping either of them has ever experienced. At the end of one hour, choices were made. Wrapped in fine paper it is nearly over when Clara asked how they knew about her. Brian told them when they had enquired at church who they could bless, their names came up. "But Brian, Rose, I haven't seen you at any of the services, saying the name. "Oh no" Rose said. She went on to say, "We belong to Calvary Chapel just south of the Mall."

"But how" is all Clara got out of her mouth when Brian said that is a story for another day. Once at home, they sat at kitchen table, while J ate Ritz crackers with peanut butter, they relived their time in the store. Totally shocked by it all and yet one of the best Christmas's ever. They received a gift of perfume and a gift having a story to tell for lifetime adding the kindness shown to them this day.

Her mind is made up. The beginning of the new year, Calvary Chapel would be their new church home. Anticipating a fight from J about the change in church she is met with support. Shock of all shocks. In her heart, Jessalyn knew change was coming. It always does. It is a very good decision. At the end of January, a deacon on the benevolence board approached her to talk about meeting with her to discuss finances. He wanted to have a sit down with her, being a single mom an all. Her heart sank like a rock in a pond. "I'll let you know" is what she said. The more she thought about it the more she thought how could it hurt. Even though working for the accounting firm brought about a lot of financial knowledge, maybe just maybe God is up to something. She gave him the call, set up a time and dread it afterward. She will be vulnerable, and she didn't like it. But she is tired of living on a dime to spare.

One a night when J is at work, Clara met with the benevolence board. Once inside the small office, introductions were made. It started. Clara, this is Margret, Phillip and I am Jacob. Then they settled into small talk, then big talk. Clara laid her financial life out. “Wow” is not a word she is expecting. “How do you make it Clara” Phillip asked. “God” is her answer. “I am going to go over all your information. The board meets in two weeks. Then we will see just how to guide you” he told her. Scratching her head literally, Clara thanked them for their time, then drove to pick up J.

Three weeks later, right after church Phillip came looking for her. Handing her an envelope he told her it is what the benevolence committee recommendations. She stuffed in her purse, shook his hand, thanked him then left. Nervous to open it up, seated at the kitchen table, resting her arms on it looking at the sealed envelope. Whirling around, opening the silverware drawer, grabbing a knife, she opens it making a sharp clean edge. She unfolds the business letter.

The heading; Calvary Chapel, subtopic; Benevolence Committee, the body of the letter begins. Dear Mrs. Ross. The committee is prepared to help you in the following ways. 1) The outstanding loan on your car will be paid off. 2) We have a two-bedroom apartment available. A property management manager is on our staff. He is telling us the rent saving to you will be \$100.00 a month. 3) We will provide the labor to move you and pay for the rental truck. Please contact us once you have decided if you will accept our help. Closing with, in the name of the Lord Jesus, Calvary Chapel Church. A dam of pent-up stress burst out of Clara as she sobbed uncontrollably.

Moving in winter is not the favorite time. Regardless, their new beginning is set in place. Day after day, life progressed. In a flash, J’s sophomore year is now over. It felt like a carefree summer for Clara. On Sunday afternoons they took trips to nearby places. Sleep came easy for her now being able to pay the electric bill with the added cost of the air conditioner. Still concerned about her boy crazy daughter, it is slow going with J making new friends at church. For the first time in many years, Clara had breathing room. It felt good.

Twenty-Six

It is a simple suggestion by Mrs. Blackwell. “Jessalyn Ross, you look like you have what it takes to be a Pom Pom girl” she said. “I know you are very good at basketball; you have athletic skills and strength. Are you ready for something new?” she asked. Continuing, “We have one spot open for a Junior girl. This is not cheerleaders. We incorporate dance in every routine. Are you interested?” Jessalyn is sold the moment she said dance! She would still be at the sporting events, on the field or on the court to support the school teams. Just like that, basketball is over and Pom Pom’s began. Not that she is looking for a place to dance. It is her love of dance that silicified the deal.

A new challenge. That is part of the fun. No matter what she jumped into her outgoing personality, team player mentality worked to her advantage. From the first practice to the first event, details registered in her mind. Oh, it wasn’t just about learning the choreographed dances. It is what pom pom’s were used, the uniform selection, the music and the position in the group, who leads, who followed. She loved all of it. And of course, new friends.

Jessalyn is in the zone this year. Upper classman, feeling at home in this school. Being an over achiever and loving it. She took for granted how she could juggle ten things in her mind all at the same time. Classes, activities, work, church, friends and always looking to squeeze in more. When someone offered to have peeps over, she said yes. Usually there are more boys to girls, the right formula. Roger, Bill, Andy, Jessalyn and Kelly are the core of rotating group that hung out together. Most of the it is at Kelly’s house where her mom kept a close eye on things, but not always.

Natural leadership oozed out of Jessalyn. She asked who is going, what to bring and made a signup list. Hanging out meant food and sodas. Kelly’s home is a split-level home. From the kitchen you could look into the rec room half a floor below. The kitchen is the staging area, naturally due to the locale of the food and the rec room the brawling arena. In group think, tonight it is game night. Bill yells out, Risk and he is immediately shouted down by the others. “It’s too personal Bill. Everyone gets mad while there losing to you” Kelly said, and she is right. No one wanted to place Risk with Bill ever again. Maybe it wouldn’t be that way, except he liked to play pounce on the land he

just concurred, and it irritated them all. After twenty minutes trying to decide, it is settled. Monopoly. Everyone has a fair chance to gobble up property. It is understood, whoever has the most money and property at 10:30 pm wins. Of course, there is an argument about who gets what piece and why is the hat so popular? A constant flow of takes place. Once you move, it is to the kitchen for a refill or more snacks. Back to the table where serious purchases are taking place. The girls always laugh when one of the boys gets sent to jail.

Stability is not the norm for Jessalyn. However, this season of her life is welcomed. Hard on Clara though. She is taking the second seat in her daughters' life, as it should be. With the dawning of J's friends getting a driver's license, her days of being the primary chauffeur ended. Another milestone to many she knew was coming and didn't like. J has been her whole life. Now her daughter is gaining and living a life.

All the excitement is over the homecoming football game. The Pom Pom squad is ready. Everyone is always pumped for the first game of the season. Clara wouldn't miss this for anything. They rode together, entered the outdoor stadium going right to the squads reserved area for the girls and parent. The announcement given, everyone stood for the national anthem. Hats off, hand on hearts, no matter how many times you hear it, it is still moving. Game time. Both teams take the field, and the noise is deafening. Numbers yelled out, the ball is hiked, and helmets make their crashing sounds. Everyone loves the big plays. Small town Friday night football. The best entertainment around.

Five minutes before half time and the squad runs out to the running track where they get ready. Warm cloths coming off; the scramble is on. Mrs. Blackwell opens the container to the pom poms and fifteen sets of hands reach in. They're ready, but nervous. The whistle blows, no score, half time show begins. Jessalyn felt the cool night air on her skin. Effortless, she jogged to mid field. In position they stood. First, they looked for family and friends and then, their eyes were on the announcer's booth. Like, it is an eternity, someone finally found the music. The loudspeakers came to life and fifteen girls gave it their all to rousing cheers. They moved as one and in fluid motion. With each move, Jessalyn knew where she needed to be corresponding to the girl on either side, which constantly changed according to the choreographed dance. Now halfway through she is breathing hard, it is vigorous. Just like that, it is over. Weeks of practice, learning and in five minutes the limelight is turned off. The crowd cheered; they ran for the sidelines. For the rest of the night, they would remain on the sidelines doing

thirty second bits while the teams are between plays. Half a field away, the cheerleaders preformed drawing in the fans to bolster the players. On the final whistles, home 9, visitors 6. Their first win of the season.

Clara met J at the opening of the fence where everyone exists the field. Here is the part Clara is not use to yet. J going over to Kelly's riding in a car with a fairly new driver at the wheel. She prayed for these moments God's angels surround them. With heartfelt reservation she let her go. J would change over at Kelly's and in a group, not paired off, to her relief, the kids hung out.

They were all pumped up, the home team won, the pom pom girls did their best and people took notice. Second fiddle to the cheerleaders, often a joke of the school, but not tonight. Talking, snacking, jousting the air is filled with the best of times. Kelly had made plans for tonight. She had the new Amy Grant Concert CD. Jessalyn and Kelly are talking in the kitchen. Jessalyn had one eye in the rec room, while Kelly talked a mile a minute, as usual. She saw an expression change on Jessalyn, paused looking downstairs she noticed the reason. Ruth had sat down on the floor resting up against Andy's legs. "You didn't tell me" she said.

"Tell you what?"

"Stop, I know you like a book girl."

"I don't know. It's just a thing."

"There are eight boys down there. It's not just a thing."

"Come on Kelly. You saw how I reacted too Tim. How I handle that relationship. I'm not ready." Kelly sighed, roller her eyes and said, "This isn't about forever you know." Just then Jessalyn favorite Amy Grants song came on, "It takes a little time." Grabbing one more snack she ran downstairs and sat down next to Ruth.

Junior year is a plateau time in Jessalyn life. What most kids took for granted, Jessalyn gave God praise for, one stable season. There were no downs and mostly up events in her life. Yes, there is change. It seemed each change is an upward event. A pleasant surprise came one Saturday morning. Seated at the kitchen table having breakfast, Clara is smiling, not the norm this early. "What" J said. "We're going shopping" Clara told her.

"For what?"

"New beds"

“Mom, no it’s too much money.”

“Penny’s has the best sale on mattress’s and it is time.” Well, it is way past time. There is no argument there. At the store, J plopped down on them all, soft medium and firm. Roaming the entire area, trying mattress after mattress they gravitated to the ones priced realistically for them. The sale is made, delivery date set. “Now” Clara said. “I will look over at Kmart for new pillows and sheets. Jessalyn never took things for granted. On Sunday, during worship, her heart softened. She knew the goodness of God. His generosity for her and Clara. Truly she is grateful.

A year without drama seemed to increase the speed of daily life. It’s May and everyone is feeling it. The year is ending and there is joy and reservation. Joy to be Seniors, sad because for many of them it has been the best year of their lives. The biggest challenge before the junior student body? Taking and passing the Constitution test. For some a no brainer, they could retain information easily. Other, total melt down time. The price to pay for passage into their Senior year. In that last week of school, Jessalyn took in the sights and sounds surrounding her. Savoring the moments. And just like that!

Emerging out of the trees, Jessalyn follows the path back to the flowerbeds. Taking in the aromas as she always did. Enjoying the colors and rushing into the center. Looking around, a bit frantic, she sees him. Sitting on the bench in the middle of this place of beauty, she runs to him. “Angel” she said, “I didn’t see you when I came back here from walking the path.”

“I have gone ahead of you to prepare” he said. Instantly they were moved back to the edge of the canyon. “What do you see” he asked. She welcomed his question. To dialog with her guardian angel brought comfort to her. “I see my past” she said. Turning towards her in a moment of pride, she is learning quickly. “Yes” he said. Continuing he asked her, “Jessalyn, what is the difference between your life then and your life now.” She entered her thinking mode. Walking back and forth along the cliff, she thought. *Is it all the change I have gone through? It’s all about the spots and the times between.* Thinking about her life and journey, nothing is coming to mind. *Okay, I am looking down. Those were the low points in my life. I can actually think about them without feeling the pain. Being in the valley, walking the ravine. I was younger.* Looking into his eyes, not willing to give

up just yet, but drawing blanks, she paced. “If I tell you I do not know, are you going to make me figure it out or will you tell me” she asked him.

“Where are you now?” he asked her?

“On the plateau.”

“How did you get here?”

“One spot at a time as we walked the path.” Okay were going to play the learning game and she liked it right now. “Angel, you know, each spot was a learning experience. A life’s lesson.”

“Yes, and when you didn’t want to go any further?”

“You told me we would stay there until I yielded to the journey or I would get stuck there.”

“What took place in each spot?”

“A difficult life experiences.”

“Yes, and what else” Okay now this is getting old. “I guess I am going to need some help” she conceded. Raising his hand up to her forehead, she saw it. The images that took place in each spot. The knowledge gained. She knew. “Decisions” she said. “I made decisions based on God’s ways to please Him.”

“Yes, and where are you now?” he asked. “We are on the plateau, high above those times.”

“Jesus told you, He came that you might have life and it abundantly.” It all makes sense. Then she thought about the path she was just on, looking in its direction. The angel again raised his hand to her forehead. “The trees, they were the godly people who helped mom and me. They closed in and surrounded us. Yes, I see it now. But why did we need to move to a new church angel?” she asked. “Forward progress” he said.

Without motion they were back in the center of the flowerbeds. She thought *it is beautiful here. I feel peace in my heart.* “Angel” she said after a long time of silence looking to the north. “I didn’t notice those hills before” she said. And with that they now stood before a new path leading towards the hills. Lush green grass covered the rolling, gently sloping upward hills. There were different animals grazing on them. “If I asked you what is up there, would you tell me” she asked him. She already knew what his response would be, so she just grabbed his hand and they began together. Upward they

walked until the path disappeared. A spot is hidden there. She took a quick look. It looks like all the rest of them. She bid him farewell and stepped in.

Clara is sorting through the office mail prioritizing them for their importance. Immediate mail is always on top of the pile. It is a regular letter size envelope but had the business name on it and “Care of” Mrs. Clara Ross. Holding it up, she swiveled towards Millie to get her attention and then oddly displayed it to her. It did not give a clue to the content, no return address. “Well open it up Clara, I’m dying over here” Millie said. Grabbing the letter opener, she cut it open taking the single sheet of folded paper out. All expression drained out of her face. She stopped reading, looked a second time at the sender’s name and slowly lowered it without finishing it. All she said is “It’s from Bob” and Millie too now had a blank face. It has been almost a decade since she has heard from him. “CLARA, what’s it say?” Millie pleaded, she had to know. Reluctantly raising it, the pit of her stomach is churning.

It read: Clara, Jessalyn will soon be a senior in Highschool. I am sending you \$100.00 a month for her final year of school, here is the first month’s check, she looked in the envelope and took it out examining it like it is a joke. No, a cashier’s check. Continuing to read the letter, also, call my parents. They have a car David wrecked and needs repair. They will give it to Jessalyn if she will get it fixed, its hers. Signed Bob. Clara can’t talk. She just hands the letter to Millie for her to read. “Wow, Clara, this is a miracle. What is going on here? Did he get a conscience?” she stated.

How can she have an emotional high and low in the same instant. The joy is gaining help from Bob after all of this time. The low, where has he been all of these years and the bitterness is all over her face. The joy? Jessalyn will have car, the low she will have to contact and deal with her ex in laws. Millie said to her, “Do you think this a good idea about the car?”

“It will make my life easier if she has a car. Up to now J has not wanted to get her driving license.”

“How bad is the car wrecked?”

“Oh my, I’m “going to have to call Tony over at the garage for a referral.”

“Way better to call than go over there.” And they both laughed. Clara grabbed a note pad to make a list. She began to write, while Millie answered a call. Rules of the road booklet, learners permit, talk to J about car and money, all

in laws see how bad the car is wrecked, get an estimate and on she went when another detail entered her mind. “My gosh Clara, you’re going to have to talk to your ex in laws. I remember when you heard they were helping David and how hard it was on you” Millie said.

“I’m sick already. But really Millie, everything about this is upward, hard to deal with, intense emotionally but upward for J. How can I not do this?” As they drifted through the day they delved into the sudden interruption, out of the blue, that Bob reemerged in Clara’s life.

“Clara” Millie said. “Why do you think Bob sent the letter here?”

“I’ve lived in a dozen places since he left Trinity.”

“Yeah, it makes sense when you look at that way. Work is the only constant location for you. Okay, how are you going to tell J about all of this. It is life changing for her.” Stunned she didn’t see it, Millie is right. What would my folks do if it were me? Of course, they would make it into a memory.

Twenty-Seven

Clara ran her finger over the calendar. Tomorrow night is open. Shouting down the hallway she said, “J, keep tomorrow night open, I have a surprise for you.” Bounding off the bed, she nearly broke her neck running down the hallway. This has never happened before. It is killing her and regardless of how she questioned Clara, she wouldn’t budge. As planned, Clara freshened up, changed out of her work clothes into some nice clothing. “J dear, put on that nice sundress your grandmother bought you” she said knowing the boots are part of the outfit. This stirred her excitement.

Jessalyn did not know where they were going nor why the fuss. It is a longer drive than J is use too. Her head is on a swivel as they passed the Boot Barn. Just over the river Clara made a turn onto SW 15th street headed east. New territory for J. Some old buildings with manufacturing gone by now renovated. Empty lots on each side. Under Interstate 44 until they came to Agnew Avenue. Making a left onto Agnew heading north, they’re almost there. Here is what is called the stockyards area. Western wear stores on each side of the block, a shopping paradise. Clara slowed, turned left into a narrow parking lot, which is full and pulled through to the parking in the rear. “What here mom” J asked.

“You’ll see” is all Clara said. Once they are on the sidewalk, Clara walks along a building with no windows. But people seem to be enthusiastic near the door and why are they taking pictures? It is the famous and historic Cattlemen’s Steakhouse. To get in, the front doorway is plate glass with handles, just the horns that are made to look like Texas Long Horn Steers. Once inside, the ambiance has not changed in fifty years. As far as this restaurant is concerned, the customers do not want it to change. The gentleman host greets them inside the door, delighted to help the ladies, seated them at one of the better tables. The place reeks history. “Mom, what are you doing” J said. The dimly lit room fosters a pleasant atmosphere. The waiter walks up to the tables, giving a warm western welcome, he gives them the menus. They are the size of a newspaper, solid front and back and three interior pages of choices meals. When J sees the prices, she is in sticker shock. However, it is always understood, they have a price range. That is finally where her eyes settle. “Mom, we can’t afford this place” she said looking around like a fish out of water. “Okay, it seems a bit crazy for us, honey. This one time let’s enjoy yourself” she says. The busboy brought ice water and left. Well-dressed

families are everywhere. Talk and laughter filled the air. The waiter returns, asks for the drink order, which there wouldn't be a drink order. Then asks what they would like to order tonight and then went into a delightful country oration of their specials of the night. Clara has only been to an affluent restaurant once before and this place emanates Texas hospitality. In this wonderful country cowboy atmosphere, you can tell these people have money. "Your order Ma'am" he asked. "I'm going to start with a shrimp cocktail for each of us and for the main entrée I will have the Chopped Sirloin."

"Very good and how would you like it cooked?"

"Medium well please."

"And you Miss." A bit shocked she wasn't ready to order. She is observing every detail that is taking place around her. This is a side of her mother she never knew. "Deciding to join in the game, she said "I would like the Cattlemen's Chicken Fried Steak with extra gravy" using sharp express tones and punctuations.

"Very well Miss, would you like the extra gravy on the side?" There is a chink in the game. The look on her face gave Clara the cue and she nod's yes. "Yes, on the side please."

"Remember to save room for our famous cream pie desert. It is a world renown house favorite." With that he excused himself. "Wow mom" is all she can say. Clara takes a few minutes of idle chit chat before telling J all the things she knows about the historic restaurant. Hot dinner rolls arrive with tabs of real butter. Placing the napkin on her lap and motioning to J to do the same, the beginning of their meal and opening conversation into why they are here. "J, there are some new developments we need to discuss" Clara said. Now using those words in any other setting and J's heart would have dropped through the floor.

"You are starting your Senior Year at school. It was the best year of my high school experience and I want it to be yours too" she said. New possibilities for you have come up. First, your father is going to give you child support of \$100.00 a month for your senior year." J is too stunned to talk. The windfall is immediately welcome but is concerned about the other shoe dropping. She wonders in her mind are there any strings attached. And of course, the internal questions of why now? Leaning forward with her arms on the table she asks; "Mom, can we count on him?"

“There is more. I got a letter from Bob at work, the only place he could reach me. In the letter is the first check. He also said that David had a car that he had wrecked. The car is yours if you paid to get it fixed.” Oh, how Clara wishes she had a camera that moment. A constant flow of people are passing their table, invisible to them both in this moment, nothing mattered but more details. “Mom, I can’t believe this, really, this is really happening?”

“Yes. The most important issue, do you want the car?”

“YES!”

“I thought you would say that. We need to make a plan, a list to get ready.” Reaching into her purse beside her on the booth seat Clara pulls out a booklet. Handing it over to J to look at it read, Rules of the Road for the state of Oklahoma. “I know you have been thru Drivers ED at school. We need to get your driver’s license. Next, is what condition the car in, meaning we need to call your Grandparents so we can go see the car.” “Oh” is all Jessalyn could say. She has not talked to them in years and knows how much they hurt her mom by helping David.

The waiter arrived with their meals in a display of showmanship and balance. Jessalyn thought his black Stetson made his apparel blend into the motif of the experience. “Medium well Sirloin Steak for the lady” turning the plate to bring about the best view of her meal. “For you little Miss (a John Wayne expression), Chicken Fried Steak for a country queen.” Placing a small bowl of gravy near to the plate, a plate too small for the steak. Leaning a bit closer he adds, “Those Boots look just right on you” and she blushed as he left. Clara folded her hands and they said grace.

Between bites of food, Clara said, “Taking for granted the car will not cost a lot of money to fix, you are going to need to borrow some money and I cannot do this for you. A call to your grandparents will need to happen” she said. “MOM, mom, what kind of car is it?” she is dying to know, not that it really mattered. “In your fathers’ letter, he said it was a Hyundai Hatchback. That is all I know.” The wheels are spinning in J’s mind, excitement is running high with all kinds of possibilities. Then Clara said, “J, do you think you can handle this new responsibility?” Not rushing to answer, she cuts a piece of steak, then said, “Mom, don’t you think things have been building up to this point for me to take the next step in being responsible? Ya-know, I handle work, school, sports and friends carefully. Yes, I am ready”.

Pleased at J’s answer, Clara allowed another glance to the side to take in the heads that are turning toward their table. Definitely good for a gal to be

seated here. Jessalyn took another deep breath wondering if she still has room for dessert. “It’s going to be a busy month before school starts. I will call over so we can see the car. Work in getting your license, you need a checking account and insurance, and who knows what else will come up” and on that note, the waiter reappeared. “Well ladies, what type of our famous cream pie can I get for you tonight” he said with a very pleasant smile. How could she disappoint this young man? Clara placed her hand on her stomach to indicate there was no more room available, but then said, “J, how about we spilt a piece?” Allowing her mom to take the lead, Clara said, “How’s your banana cream pie tonight?”

“Superb” he said and then rushed off. “Gosh mom, I’m going to need a parking permit at school” J said to get the ball rolling. Jessalyn’s eyes got wide as their waiter approached with a single piece of pie almost too beautiful to eat. “Carryout tonight Ma’am?” to which Clara nodded yes and he whisked away their plates to pack up the leftovers. Those first bites are heavenly. J had never tasted a dessert that rushed taste buds to sheer delight. Letting each bite rest on her tongue just a moment to enjoy the texture and bliss of flavor. Conversation drifted onto eating the pie.

Stepping through the glass doors with take home bags, they took in the nights air with the smoky smell of meat cooking subsided and the dry summer scents took their place. The air carried all their spoken thoughts. From beginning to end, it is a night Clara and Jessalyn would never forget. If ESTEEM could be measured, it would register a full tank for each of them.

The whole thing couldn’t have gone better. Two phone calls to Bob’s parents and everything fell into place. The car is towed to a body shop recommended by Tony. The signed title arrived in the mail. Estimate for repairs, \$1500.00 and the call to Grandma Wilma is made. A payment schedule of \$80.00 is agreed upon. Jessalyn got the checking account with Clara’s supervision. She passed the driver’s test and stood in front of the camera for a picture she wishes they would redo. The Car Insurance will be on Clara policy, but another bill; she is beginning to get overwhelmed. The call came; car is finished come and pick it up, cashier check only. Jessalyn had been banking as much of her paycheck as possible. Anticipation, excitement fill the air. Freedom!

Clara and J pick up the car. Handing over the check makes this real. A price not yet experienced. With the keys in hand, Jessalyn walks around the car and cannot believe it is hers. The rule, first two months, no passengers in the car, exception being Clara. Opening the door, it is hot inside. Greeted by

smell, not unpleasant but needed to be cleaned with good soap. Technically a hand me down car, she is totally in love. Yuck, there is a haze on the windshield, that has to be cleaned immediately. Taking care of the car will be pure labor of love. She is having a rite of passage. Freedom and responsibility and already in debt. Isn't it the way of the world? Obtain things we haven't paid for yet? Right now, Jessalyn life is firing on all the cylinders. Work, social life, next week school and more. The refrigerator calendar has changed in its importance. Once showing Clara where she needed to be and doing in relationship to J's life. Now it only tells her where J will be.

First period comes early, but Jessalyn is ready an hour before hand. They have breakfast together discussing the days details. It's time to go, J gives Clara a kiss goodbye, and her senior year begins. Closing the car door, cranking over the starter, Jessalyn will become familiar with every sound this car makes. She loves the feel, the car being an extension of herself. It responds to her every move. Jessalyn is the cars eyes, ears and motion.

Pulling into the school parking lot, it is a first come first serve day. Until spots are assigned that is. Yeah, she sees looks of envy from the sophomores and freshman walking past the parking lot. It is what being an upper classman is all about. Prestige; Privilege. She has done this for three years, enter the school, just not from this entrance, off the lot. The heavy wooden door with the upper half of nine pane window gives way to her pull. The scents fill her nose. It is the unique aroma every school building has in its hallowed halls. The sounds, teenagers, some very loud and the slamming of metal locker doors. Faces pressed into opening their combination locks. It is chaos, shoulder to shoulder motion as each student heads to their starting class. The opening bell too the: mad dash 500 telling everyone the period has begun, you are late. By the end of the day, Jessalyn's head hurts. In each class, the expectation is listed on the front board. The benchmark on what they are to achieve before Christmas break. Nothing new here. Just heightened expectations. It is the feel of school, the security and stability it brings to Jessalyn, brings a sense of home, belonging.

Horrible news. It came as a total surprise. No one has stepped up to sponsor the Pom Pom squad this year. Without a sponsor, there will be no Pom Pom's this year. The cadence of objections from the girls fell on deaf ears. It is a solid no from the activity director. Not to be deterred, Jessalyn sought out a way. The scripture in Matthew 7:7-11 comes to mind. Knock and it will be opened to you is in there. Seek and you shall find. She asked her heavenly Father for help. Then moved forward. It is not good to go over someone's head, but that is what she did. In the Principles office, she raised

the subject. A compromise is reached. If she is willing to do all the work required of a sponsor, she could lead them. Without hesitation, she accepted the responsibility. Maybe a bit naïve, but youthful ambition, sheer desire guided her to take on the challenge.

First on the list? Uniforms, selecting, getting sizes and filling out the order forms, submitting them to the office. Now is the brain teaser. Creating a choreographed routine. All of her free time went into this. It is how she would introduce dance into the Pom Pom girl's squad. To be done in such a way to where it is no longer a joke in relations to the Cheerleaders. Next, planning practice times, getting the new routines printed out for them to learn. Jessalyn found support from the girls, she is better than the alternative. They wanted it to work, they became a cohesive team. Uniforms, music, routines fell squarely on her shoulders and she carried it without a hitch. Football and basketball games, the Pom Pom squad put on a performance to the fans delight. Of course, jealousy rose up from the Cheerleaders who were used to having all the limelight. The competition by the sports team is not the action only action taking place. It made it interesting.

Never slowing down, beyond Pom Pom's would be playing the role of Aunt Eller in the school play. Of course, it has to be Oklahoma, the musical. It would be a challenging role for her. Being old and crusty, a no-nonsense character of the benign matriarch, a stern farm owner in day where men ruled, she pulled her own weight. It is Jessalyn other love, Aunt Eller had a singing role. Practice, practice, practice, the cast became a family. Knowing their lines, going into the singing scenes and making the choreograph moves all look natural. Show time. Friday night, Saturday matinee, evening and ending Sunday night. To standing room only crowds. Two curtain calls per show, standing ovations. Payment for all the hard work. The lights turned off, the curtain calls ended, costumes hung up and stored. It is a wonderful experience. Never to be forgotten.

There is a dance competition of another kind going on when the Seniors hung out together. It is a rotating, spontaneous gathering. If you are not in the inner circle, you had to find out where the group would be meeting next. The dance? Watching them pairing off and into couples, High School sweethearts. A wonderful time of life where young heart flourish from chemistry to becoming an item. Jessalyn is getting a little tired of being one of the boys. Being able to out play many of them at basketball. In peak physical stamina, she kept up with them or beat them at their own game.

Somewhere along the line, it occurred to her. She decided to change her approach. It is time to be the girly girl instead of one of the boys.

Okay, even though everyone saw it, and the dance never really began for them, Jessalyn and Andy are together. Their eyes are always seeking out the other person. Beginning with, it is hard to make any kind of interaction at school, schedules and all. There are those few moments when Jessalyn saw Andy in the hallway. Catching her breath, trying desperately to calm the butterflies, she would nonchalantly greet him as a casual friend. She loved it when he stammered all over himself. True chemistry.

Twenty-Eight

Turning the key to the car, it sounded funny, but it started. Jessalyn is making an errand to the bank to deposit her check before one she wrote bounces. It has happened, already. A painful lesson learned. Then off to Kelly's to plan a hang out party. It's been a long time since it is at her home. The door is open, she walked right in, being nearly family. Kelly rushed over, grabbing her hand and pulled her back out to the car. The first tell, when Kelly drags her somewhere it is for one of two things, to get her to do something she wants her to do or it is to pump her for information, outside of prying ears.

"When did it happen?" she asked her with a hurt, slightly angry tone. "I'm your best friend. You tell me everything, everything Jess."

"What are you talking about?"

"You and Andy."

"Where have you gotten that idea?"

"The last hang out. I saw it. You can't fool me Jessalyn Ross."

"Saw what Kel?" she said with a coy attitude. "It is in his eyes. He had that we are connected look, like you to are together. It is just a flash, but I saw it. And don't tell me otherwise, I can read you like a book girl."

"The river walk in San Antonio."

"Wait, you two have been keeping this secret for that long? That was months ago. I didn't see you pair up."

"Might have been you are too busy with Jerry," Now Kelly blushed. "Well, it was over before it started. You know there is something about that place, you know, romantic."

"Listen Kel, everyone has a busy life. Our senior year, can you believe it, is almost over. Who has time for a relationship? Not me" she said with a hard period. Impeccable timing, Kelly's mom came to door out of sheer curiosity, and we went in to plan the hangout party. She is off the hook for now. This will be the last group gathering before graduation is three weeks. It is a big deal. It has got to be planned just right; Kelly will be keeping a close eye on them. It's what she does.

It is an Oklahoma tornado and it lasted three weeks. How it all came together, how they pulled it off, the near sleepless nights, is anyone's guess. Kelly's final party is a night they did not want to end. They lived to the full, grasped at every second because they knew. The best year of their lives is about to come to an end. Something many of them did not want to happen. Being the perfect hostess, flitting from person to person, groups and circles, every topic of conversation floated in the air. College expectations, job hopes and how to pursue them, military careers for some and the few who couldn't see beyond this year. Kelly, staying true to form, watching to see any progression in Jess's and Andy flowering relationship. She is disappointed. It is 5 am when the last group left the party and then lingered about by their cars.

Time for finals. Every student approach tests in their own way. Grade point averages are important for those college bound. Others, passing is all they strive for and it only those who have been hanging by a scholastic thread knowing they need a passing grade to successfully graduate with their peers. This class could write a collection of stories and put them into an anthology to the accomplishments they gained, learned and achieved in their Senior year of High School. If they had, it would be the crowning glory to their teachers and their push for them to succeed.

She is melancholy today. Final touches to her makeup, brushing her hair, light hair spray, Clara is ready and prays she will not cry before her little girl crosses the stage. "MOM" J yells from her room. She wonders how many days will she hear that precious, wonderful word in this place. The days are numbered, and she knows it. Flattening her dress, she goes into J's room to see what's the crisis. She loves to be needed. "Mom, how am I going to get my gown on without ruining my hair?" In the moment Clara is welling up with emotions. She knows J could have done it herself, she enjoys the fussing anyway.

It's a mob scene at school. J give Clara a kiss as she goes to the staging room. Clara enters looking for Kelly's mom. Relieved to have found her so she will not be sitting alone in the crowd.

The music department played the school song, and the ceremony began. Students were called in to be seated and all the parents looked to see their child. Clara has been here before. With the boys, it was a time of relief, just getting them through school with a diploma. This time, it's her finale. She spots her. Thinking, *my beautiful daughter, best friend in life, she has grown into an intelligent, responsible adult.* Already she is fighting back the

tears. After the commencement speech, the valedictorian is called to the podium. With great poise, inspiration, encouragement he delivered the last message to this student body. Time for honorable mentions and to Clara's surprise, J's name is called for leadership and creative program contribution to the Pom Pom squad. The final words are spoken, the band readies their instruments as the first student is called up and they play "Pomp and Circumstance Graduation Walking March." Working through the alphabet, reaching R, Clara's attention sharpens, then she hears, Jessalyn M. Ross. Stepping from the stairs, the final steps of her senior year, life, she reaches out to shake the Principles hand, holding for a picture, in the crowd she hears her mother clapping with a cheer. Life has just changed. As if Clara could hear the hinges squeak in protest, the door is closing her mothering days. But right now; she is bursting with pride. The air is filled with flying caps and a joyous uproar. Her job complete. Clara now allows herself to be a single woman and she thinks of Jacob at church.

Jessalyn steps out of the spot, the angel smiles. Yes, he sees it. Jessalyn has grown. Most of all; matured. No more does she approach him in a childish manner. With confidence she greets him, as always with a question. She has taken for granted what transpired in her senior year. Saying, "Angel" turning back to look at the spot where she just came from, "I don't see the importance of this spot. What's the big deal?" It is oblivious to her. He turned and began to walk the path retracing their earlier steps. Down the slopes, Jessalyn took pleasure looking at the animals on the sweeping grassy hills. It wasn't until they arrived back in the center of the flower beds, sitting on the bench did he talk. He said, "Two things were introduced into your life. Can you perceive them?" She knows the answer is close at hand. Swiveling to look into eyes, getting up to pace along the flowers, running her hand over the tops of the tall grass, she searches her minds for clues. Yes, it dawns on her. Looking in his face she says, "Angel, my father's financial support. It came out of nowhere."

"Out of nowhere" he asked? Okay, now we think about what happened in response to his support. It opened the door to having a car, which led to my checking account, car insurance, additional work, getting a loan and freedom in life. What is it mom said in the restaurant? Are you ready for responsibility? Yeah, that is it. Standing in front of angel she says, "Responsibility."

“It is a foundational building block to a sound Christian life. It is the first layer Jesus brings you through so you will be strong in Him. When you live in the Spirit, you have everything available to you. That same Holy Spirit stirred your father’s heart to invest in you at this time.” They did not discuss the damage her father had brought into her life, all of that played out in the ravine.

One down one to go. This is a little bit harder to see. From the moment she got the first check, all through her senior year, responsibility played out. She is thinking, *what else happened within this year. Come on J think.* Resuming the pacing, drawing a blank, walking over sitting on the bench she has nothing. Staring off into the distance, to the hills of green a picture flashes into her mind so fast she almost missed it. No, it couldn’t be. Standing in front of angel now she places one arm across her waist, the other arm resting in it so she could put her hand on her chin. “Pom Pom’s” she asked? His smile told her yes. “Lay it out for me angel” she asked. “Responsibility is earned. Then it is known. It opened a door no other senior had been given before. Sponsorship to leadership. Once leadership is gained and tasted, it arises when called upon.” It is all he said.

Little had she discern the providential hand of God as the lesson of responsibility and leadership were introduced in her life. Angel sat there waiting while Jessalyn is in the moment. Feeling invigorated in the understanding of her growth and God being with her, she hadn’t noticed. To the left side of the flowerbeds, near the edge of the plateau, a glow could be seen. Colors flashed illuminating the sky. As they got brighter and higher, Jessalyn took notice. The appearance of something new is the beckoning to a new spot. In an instant they were standing in front of a spot encircled with flames of fire. The flames turned colors. From the ground upward, varying in height they leaped and danced. “Mesmerizing, isn’t it angel” she asked. There near to them, a bench is providing a place to sit and compile this new arrival. Always changing, in the color and size the flames burn. Jessalyn looked at the angel with a questioning look, nodding in the direction of the spot, prompting her companion to speak. It didn’t go as planned. “What do you see” he asked her? She is hoping for the easy way through this, but not this time. “Flames of fire in different changing colors” she told him. “Tell me the primary colors you are seeing in the fire” he asked. Taking a moment to observe them, she made a mental list. “Well,” she said. Continuing, “I see the color, orange, green, blue and red.”

“Very good, now approach the fire and put your hands in the flames.” Early childhood experiences flashed into her mind and she cringed away from the

spot. “Jessalyn” he said. “Not every type of fire burns the body.” In the journey, she had learned to trust her companion. She got up, reluctantly stepped up to the spot and noticed the lack of heat. No, she does not need his reassurance, she places one and then the other hand in the flames. She is not burned. “Jessalyn, I want you to think about the fire and place your faith in God.” Following his instructions, she focused. The fire subsided. Glancing back at angel she seemed to have a sense of control through the help of her heavenly father. “It’s by faith” he said to answer her unspoken question. The flames turned to orange; she knew what to do. Grimacing, grunting, the fire would not go out. She felt his hand on her shoulder and the orange flame went out. Next the green flame appeared. She focused her thoughts and prayer upward and found the fire went out. Now the red, it is a very little flame. How does she focus on this time? When she thought about the love of God the flames jumped upward. “Wow” is all she said. Then the blue flame, it too is small at first. This flame she did not figure out. Sitting back on the bench thinking about what just happened, four new paths appear, moving outward from the spot. They are color coded. The orange and green paths go over to the edge of the plateau. The red and blue colors being into a land unknown. The angels said two words, “It’s time.” She got up, walked right up to the spot, stepped through the flames and into the spot.

Never in her wildest dream could she have imagined it. Two weeks after graduation, J is thinking, *who am I now?* Family, church, friends and school were her life and a big piece of that was school. The end of school brought a void of interacting with her friends. So, they started doing group trips to local points of interest. Somewhere along the line, Jessalyn status with Andy changed. They were best friends with no aspirations for more to when Jessalyn seeing good qualities in him she is now being attracted too. The most attractive, he is a Baptist, and his parents have a strong relationship.

Taking on more hours at the restaurant didn’t fill the gap of consuming her time. In this vein, as the fall is approaching, other friends prepared for college and now the numbers of those hanging out diminished. Andy got a job in the oil field and took to it like a fish in water. A natural and his boss took notice. A tug of war played out in the hearts of the groups, inner circle of best friends during the upper classmen years of high school. Inevitably life moves on. They had been best of friends, very close and now they are being torn apart by different paths of life. It surprised Jessalyn and stunned her,

while they were together enjoying the last of summer, her entire vision turned green. More than once, this happened. It wasn't until she got along with God did, she sees it.

Invitations were extended to come and visit at college. Stay overnight in the dorm. If there is floor space available, they had room to sleep there. Jessalyn had turned off her subconscious early in life, now causing her to have a missing link between her feelings and the surrounding events. It nagged at her each time her vision filled with green. It finally got to the breaking point when she had her breakthrough. She is jealous. Almost to the point of ending her relationship with several of her truest friends. At times the jealousy raged within her. Why didn't she plan for college? Why didn't her parents speak of her going to college? She is being left behind and hated it. If she was going to college, it would be an extension of the High School years and the good times could keep on going. Here is where the Holy Spirit ministered to her. As He helped her come to grips with the loss of friends and advancements college would bring, the green vision disappeared. As the green vision went away, the strength of her friendship is healed. Jealousy will kill friendship in a bitter rage as it burns within a person's heart.

September changed Jessalyn's life in two ways. Clara is spending time with Jacob at church. Unexpectedly, she feels a twinge of pain knowing she is losing that top spot in her mother's life. And the dwindling number of friends brought her a void she has not ever known. She is no longer surrounded by her friends. In the gap, Andy stood by her side. Here is when red flashes filled her vision, and she experienced a sense of panic. *What now*, she asked herself. It happens often when she is with Andy. But why? Finally, when the red color in her vision deepened to the point of almost being not able to see, she took time to be alone with God. She is shaking. Getting into her car, she just drove. Mindlessly. As if on auto pilot, she passes Wiley Post airport. Going north and she found her way to Martins Nature preserve. As she walked on the trails, she was almost zombie like. Her eyes were open, but it is the inner vision that is fully functioning. The sound of the creek brought back wonderful memories. Standing on the edge of the flowing water, she took her shoes off, sitting on a rock ledge, a dry spot, wonderful memories washed over her. "Father God, I need your help with this. Why am I seeing red? What is it all about?" she said in a soft whisper.

Images came into her mind. Of the sweet times with her brothers. Other times with her mother. In her heart she felt love for them all and a light hue of red entered her vision. Startled she asked? "Lord, what was that? Please, what was that?" Running the same thoughts, images through her

mind to connect the dots. The family is here having fun. No drama, fun. It is more than the event, the memory, it is about what happened between them. Getting along. The troubled world was outside of the park. In here, they genuinely shared the love of family. A burst of red filled her vision. LOVE. Putting her arms behind her she leaned back on them. Allowing all the wonderful times fill her mind. She felt loved. It is what we look for in the recess of our heart in times of testing, challenges and change. Now the dots were falling into place. Andy! The friendship, transition into infatuation and now birthed into love.

The paths in her life keep changing. She almost allowed jealousy to ruin friendships. Through God, she dealt with it. Now, is this love issue, opening a path she has not experienced before or for that matter, observed healthy demonstrations within the nucleus of her family. It is unknown territory. It does not enter her mind to examine the pros and cons in moving ahead. All she knows, spending one on one time with Andy does something in her heart, stirs up a love she has not experience before. She likes it.

Twenty-Nine

Does Jessalyn love the feeling of love? Oh, she did love the feeling of passion. That element held within Romantic love. Andy needed some help here. He is still in the best friend position. So, she shifted, slightly in her interactions with him. As friends they always encouraged each other but Jessalyn words turned into affirmation. From groupthink to couple's language. Spontaneously actions turned into affections. His response to her changed and it fostered closeness. There is no goal in any of this. It is chemistry allowed to run its course. And so, it went those last few days of summer, friends exiting for college they were now an item spending more time together.

Did the changes at home have anything to do with it? In a whirlwind, Oklahoma style, Clara bought a townhouse and they moved. Nicest place she has lived in since her time on Painted Pony Road. The household of two, Jessalyn seemingly being a part time resident, meant there is room for three. Clara and Jacob spent time together, on the low profile, without notice or fanfare. Clara's focus shifted from her daughter to a man totally smitten with her. She liked it, not being alone, just one. The Bible says, two are better than one and right now she is in total agreement. It is no wonder in why Jessalyn is totally caught off guard when wedding plans are made and in short notice, the ceremony took place. Right now, time will tell to having a man around. Jacob moved in. Their plans are to upgrade ASAP.

September 3rd, 1993 began with a dramatic event. In a dream, Jessalyn is in the third person. She is not accustomed to this type of dream, it is unnerving. Seeing through her own eyes and watching herself as the dream flows onward as if she is watching a play. All around her are intense orange flames of fire. Surrounded by fire, gripped with terror, there is no escape. In an act of desperation, in her heart, she calls upon Jesus to save her and the flames shrink to the height of her knees. The scene broadens. In the distance she sees, Andy! The flames shoot higher than her head and she cannot see him. She jumps in a vain effort for even a glimpse of him. Jessalyn is startled awake, the room is dark and there is no sound except the pounding of her beating heart. Right there, in the lack of visual stimulation, no disturbing sounds to distract, she understood. The two loves of her life, Jesus and Andy are vying for first place in her heart.

There in the dark, alone with her thoughts, she thinks about the dream. Jessalyn is an intelligent girl. Although sifting through feelings and emotions is like a mine field. It has created a blind spot. She is not seeing in the natural course of being them being close, there is a progression. *Where did this happen. This is the third time I have seen colors in my vision, and it is in my face with the circle of fire. Passion for Andy is wonderful. Everything is better when my heart is welling up with passion. Where, where did it begin?* At the age of eighteen, who looks to contemplate when relationship change. They just happen. However, Jessalyn is on a journey, a calling by God to a destination He has prepared for her. His Fathers heart wants the best and living to please Him releases the grace and blessing needed. By the Holy Spirit He interacts with her. It is not unusual at all. As a matter of fact, if He did not relate to her it would be unnatural feeling. The absents to His guidance.

The last hurrah; Red Rock Canyon. Saturday September 4th most of the group made the plans to go. Home from college for the Labor Day Holiday weekend and bringing home laundry, two weeks' worth, they were suddenly different. Some came prepared to scale the rock wall, bringing ropes and carbineers to test their skills, repelling the rock wall. Others brought lawn games and of course food and drinks. It is the way people were talking Jessalyn didn't like. The college group talked about what they are majoring in, their classes, professors and the number of pages to each syllabus. Others talk of resume's being sent out to companies across the country and pending jobs took primary discussion time. Jessalyn and Andy didn't fall into either group. Although this core group will be friends forever. The glue that held them together is gone. Subtlety the atmosphere is ripe for those being left behind to bond. At the end of this day, thing will never be the same again.

Never before has Jessalyn looked forward to seeing someone as she is doing now. There is an ache in her heart when he is not around. Mother and daughter are now living separate lives. No longer is the schedule on the calendar paramount. J's focus is on one thing, seeing Andy. It is a no brainer when it comes to the intelligence of God. But it is not spoken of the sneakiness of the devil, the second most intelligent being in the universe. God calls you from the front door of your life. The devil exploits the blind spots of the past when they have no conscious presence in our thoughts. But they are there. Jessalyn is in love with feeling her love void in life being filled. The safeguards she has lived by through most of her teen years, she does not want to follow right now. When she looks into Andy's eyes with the soft expression

of love, Orange fills her vision. The cautions no longer work, she wants what she wants.

Young love! The fire, once it has erupted is very hard to contain. Can the Jeannie be put back in the bottle when it is freed? Hand in hand they embrace the new relationship blind and oblivious to the dangers, pit falls and consequence. Time spent alone, fosters closeness moving towards intimacy. Stop! Never enters her mind now that she has turned off the warning of the Holy Spirit. The fine line of closeness turns into desire and without strength and will power desire almost nearly always has it way. The red fire of passion in marriage bonds a man and a woman deeply and it is intended to work that way. Oneness. The hurricane force winds of intimacy out of time destroys lives. They have become accustom to being together, alone, either at the townhouse or Andy's parents' house. The raging fire of passion is paramount. Today, it is Jessalyn's home court advantage. It's midday, no pending interruptions for hours. Boldly she gets up off the couch, reaches out her hand. They walk down the hallway and into her bedroom and the door is closed to all the outside world.

Angel stands. The fire surrounding the spot drops and disappears. In wonderment, Jessalyn looks into his eyes. There is no condemnation. No hint of disappointment in her. His posture is matter of fact. The choice has been made. He approaches her, motions for her to step alongside of him and instantly the light of the plateau goes to darkness. She cannot see the beauty of the flower beds. Instantly they are on the path comprised of the color orange. "Wait" she says. "What about the blue fire."

"The color is reserved for the Holy Spirit."

"But what happens in His fire" she asks. Now they are poised on the edge of the plateau facing the canyon. Savoring the moment, angel takes her hand, and they enter the atmosphere, out over the edge and begin to fall. A hard stop jolts Jessalyn as they have arrived. Darkness surrounds her. As her eyes adjust, she feels them before they are seen. Strands of the spider's web. Creepiness surrounds her. Filled with the hee bee gee bees, regret fills her. In a broken voice she asks, "Which Way?"

"Go to the opening" he tells her. Using her arms to protect her face from the spider webs, it is slow going until. This place is not like anything she has experienced before. Now she wants a spot to appear and once it does, she is

confused. A single spot has three paths in extending outward. Those spots each have three paths and so on and so on. She can see all the paths are color coded. Yellow, orange, black, maroon, all lifeless colors. Turning to the angel she asks, "Do any of these paths lead back up to the plateau?" No response. Really, she wanted him to say something. She steps into the first spot.

Euphoria fills Jessalyn heart. However, as she and Clara sit down for the usual evening meal, Jacob is not home yet, it has not gone unnoticed. When innocence is lost, the tell, a mother will always know it even though J's stays mum. Clara keeps the secret close to heart. A fleeting glance on her mother's face and from within guilt awakens. She does not like this feeling. It is feeding, preying on love she is feeling for Andy. They have a nice meal. Exchange details about their day, excluding the time spent in the bedroom with Andy. Sleep did not come. Instead, all types of feeling's rolled over J as she recounted the day. The crossing over to womanhood occupied most of her thoughts. In the midst of reliving the day, shame, something she has not felt in a long time, sweeps over her emotions. Silently she screams inside, *NO. I don't like what I am feeling. Just hours ago, my heart burst. Guilt, shame, deception is robbing me of what my heart wanted, desired and it was good. I have never withheld my heart from my mother, aside from the that year from hell. Sleep.*

Secrets have a way of self-sabotage. Oh, it might be hidden in the darkness and gradually making it self-known in the light of day. But until that time Jessalyn and Andy reveled in their secret oneness. Fifty years ago, they would have been shunned, reprimanded, chastised when it is brought into the light of day. In the nineties nearly no one cares. No one cares except her heavenly Father. As Andy increased in her life, the Trinity decreased, and she could feel it. It bothered her intensely. She wanted them both. For the first time in her life, the bond, the closeness, the intimacy with the Trinity began to dry up. The spiritual life she enjoyed is now all but gone. Oddly it forced her to lean on Andy more and more. She had traded one void for another.

September rolled into October and again the bedroom door closed. October rolled into November; the bedroom door closed. December is filled with the holiday activities. Christmas pageants at church; one time was met with anticipation, now took a second seat. Celebrating Christmas in two household is new. Dividing time for each family. Where once Clara had J's

undivided time, now she was forced to share her with Andy's family. It wasn't as if she didn't know it is going to happen one day. She just didn't want it, really, to ever arrive. And there is more.

Inside of Clara, a monster is rising. Those hidden memories, behind the veil in her mind, where her subconscious mind places a do not enter sign over it. And then life plays out as if it never existed. Until. It is triggered and roars to life once again. As if so often happens, it is the backdoor access to the feelings and memories that arrive first. Long since dormant, waves of panic sweep over as she is still in denial. Maintain at all cost has been her rally cry. It's not working. Come January there is no denying it. The rose color in J's cheeks is all she needs to know. In times past, she would have needed to remove herself to the privacy of her bedroom to process her feeling, emotions. Now, it doesn't matter. Most of the times she is with Jacob anyway. Right now, sitting in the very comfortable chair, staring at a TV that is not on, she burst into tears.

Oh my God, no Lord she says in her mind. *Not again. I did not want this for my little girl. You know, it was a cancer birthed into my relationship with Bob. We tried. Always in the root of our foundation it festered. I didn't see it. He felt trapped. I felt trapped. At seventeen and eighteen what did we know of life. We did what was expected of us. Everyone knew. I hated it when I felt the shameful eyes upon me. Everywhere people looked and whispered. Maybe Lord, it is what drove Bob to become a minister. To bring respectability back to us, for the children. Now, my God, J.* Clara fought her own demons. Tears flooded her visions until she could no longer cry them. Not letting on she knew. She allowed it to play out. *Who knows, maybe it will work out.* A fantasy that didn't work out for her. But hope springs eternal. A euphemism, once the lid is off the can of worms you can't get them back in. What is lost, for another generation, God's best. It is the same monster Wilma parents fought.

What do guys know. It is February and she is starting to show. She and Andy need to have their first, *we need to talk* conversation. He missed the color in her cheeks. He is not seeing the growing bulge in her stomach. He is oblivious, she needs to tell him. *What are the odds* she said to herself? *It was only three times.* Her heart harbored emotions that had been built into her for good. Now, self-reliance told her, she didn't need Andy. Defiance gave her false hopes she could easily do this on her own. Disobedience towards God's provisions set her up to endure this valley, this ravine in the spider web of choices and it hardened her heart toward the loving Father God she has known all of her life. All the men in her life left her. If she protects herself

now, pushes him away, it will save her in the long run. She had it all worked out in her mind. She is ready.

No, she wasn't. Fear gripped her. In her mind she told herself *what are you doing J? Just ruining your life. Eighteen and it's a mess. This god forsaken soap opera of a life. There is no going back to the best year of your life, senior year of high school. No this is real life and I have screwed it up. No one knows. I will just end it, the baby.* Shock and horror rolled over her spirit in waves. How could she even think of having an abortion? Everything in her life, her beliefs told her it is wrong. God has always provided for her. What about now that she has sinned. Will He still be there for her? She does not know.

Jessalyn had Andy meet her at the Eldon Lyon Park. She is already there, dreading what lie ahead. She is motionless on the swing, he is confused. Her loving looks did not greet him. She looked off in the distance. He sat on the swing next to her and waited. In a rough tone she told him; "I cannot see you anymore." At the speed of light, Andy's heart dropped in utter despair. He is head over heels in love with Jessalyn. "Jess, what are you talking about" he asked in a quivering voice. "I can't do this couples thing with you Andy. I need to be on my own. Do you understand?" This is not a conversation you have out in the open. He took her hand and walked over to the picnic tables under the arbor of trees. A sheltering place. "What is going on Jess" he asked her. Oh, she could rationalize, justify her position when suddenly, unexpectedly, her heart softened. "I'm pregnant" she said. That knocked the wind out of his sails. He got up off the bench, walked towards his truck. Okay, he is not the fastest of thinking men. However, it occurred to him, *Okay, it is happening quicker than I had thought.* He had not verbalized his fantasy of life with Jess. Before this the feelings of, he wanted to protect her, shelter her, provide a good life her. Be a good loving Christian husband to her. So, he would be a husband and father in quick order. Turning around, he just said to her, with love in his eyes, "It will be alright, it will work out." Tenderly wiping her tears away. They embraced and he said, "Hey, let's go over to Sonic's." She is always a sucker for Sonic's.

They went on with life, despite the news. Several weeks past. Andy talked Jess into going out to Red Rock Canyon on Saturday. A bittersweet trip for her. Fond memories all around. The state park is an escape from the wind. All of OKC knows about the wind. That is why you are never alone there. As you drive in, the road descends in a gradual decline. A natural shelter for those looking to be outside and not buffeted. "Come on Jess" he said. Let's take the trail walk" and with that they headed off. The temperature

dropped a few degrees as they entered the canopy of trees. Hand in hand they walked the gray grave path as it curved, twisted, rose and lowered in the beauty of nature. In the distance, muffled by the foliage, the sound of water falling is heard. One of Jessalyn favorite spots. Seeing the falls is hit or miss. Today, it is flowing in all of its glory. Pausing at the scenic platform overlook, alongside of the spilt rail fence, they watch the water as it fell, feeling the spray, hearing its sound. Andy turns towards Jess, in their solitude, takes her hands in his. His face softens for a country and western, hardworking roughneck, he gazes into her eyes. Tears well up, choking back his rare display of emotion. He takes a breath and says, "Jess, will you marry me?" Without hesitation she says. "Yes".

"Jess, I was near asking you to marry me, before you told me about the baby. I love you with all of my heart Jess. And soon we will be a family."

Wiping the cobwebs off her face and head, Jessalyn looks up to see a single path before her. It is sloping upward. Angel smiled. Picking a cobweb out of her hair, he places his hand upon her mind. She sees the journey ahead. The march towards Christ likeness, a picture of perfect healthiness and the abundant life. The path weaved endlessly before her as discoveries and issues will arise. With each choice, the outcome will vary accordingly. However, there is no sight of the plateau. This brings on sadness.

Thirty

The organist raised and held her hands above the keys in anticipation. The Pastor nodded in her directions as she began to play Mendelssohn rendition of the Wedding March, everyone stood for the Bride. David and Samuel Ross escorted Jessalyn Ross down the aisle. Together, they walked elegantly forward, until they relinquished their role to Robert Ross. His princess is now a beautiful bride. Tears welled up in his eyes as he kissed on the cheek, walking to Andrew Harrison he releases her hand. Shaking his and then placed his little girl's hand in Andrews where they smiled and turned towards the pastor. Robert took his place next to his wife on the front pew.

Here in Windsor Forest Baptist Church a miracle is taking place. An unspoken treaty of a scattered family reunites to share in this moment. Fifty-five people are witnessing God joining this man and woman in marriage. Submitting to His higher authority in a testimony of their decision as Christ followers, they seek His blessing on this union. Tears of joy freely flow. Parents, grandparents, sibling and friends witness their joining together. Vows are shared, blessings from Pastor prayed over them, he has them face all who are witnessing this union, in the declaration he says, "I present to you; Mr. and Mrs. Harrison and the organ came alive. All stood in honor of the new couple where they immediately went into the foyer for the receiving line.

Millie rushed about for all the last-minute details. The reception is held in the church fellowship hall. It is loud, a time of celebration and despite the family history, everyone chatted in this time of truce. Clara met Bob's new wife, keeping things superficial. The meal served, the wedding cake cut and eaten, time came for a hasty departure. However, in this rare, miracle of gathered loved ones, Jessalyn knew it is not a time to rush off. This will not happen again. All those she loves are here for her. April 9th, 1994 will be a day she will never forget. The best day of her life.

Everyone gathered outside the church. Rice filled the air, words of love said to encourage them. Two nineteen-year old's take their first steps to meet and challenge the world. Is innocence bliss? The question that will take much time to be revealed. For now, it is the best of life. Shangri-La resort on Grand Lake is the honeymoon destination. The dark cloud that plague Jessalyn soul is gone, and she is soaring. Love, life and hope for the future. In the best of

times, life is a blur. The continuous flow of wonderful memories overwhelms them.

The task of making an apartment a home is new to Jessalyn. The two-bedroom place needed new paint in the babies room. Excited family members bought furniture. A lowkey baby shower, a time of fussing over the mother to be, filled their place with laughter, ooo's and ahhh's with the opening of each gift. Now Andy on the other hand wishes he is in another place and not in the middle of all these women. It is a bit humbling. The blessing of wedding gift, new apartment and baby gifts. Towels, curtain, sheets and more. Just buying a few pieces of furniture and a bed used up most of their money. In this time, family and friends rallied around them.

Placing her hands on her back is a futile attempt to ease her pain. Periods, a part of her life, but hormones and body changes in pregnancy, all new. Two births are taking place: a baby and motherhood. How, it is different when it is someone else. The realization that this baby, the one pushing its heel in the same spot rubbing it raw, has to come out. The talk of all pregnant women. They hope the baby comes two weeks early. Not so for baby Harrison. Doctors consider inducing Jessalyn now that she is two weeks late. First pushing Andy gently with her hand to shoving to wake him up, "It's time." The rush is on, all premediated preparations go out the window. In the hospital by 5am. The news is not good. Andy made calls to family, soon to gather in the waiting room.

Clara takes a deep breath as she learns the baby is breach. Flashback, panic and fear needed to be controlled. Grandmothers come together to pray for this delivery. In the birthing room, talk between doctor, mother and father, a C section maybe necessary. Except, he try's one more thing, to see if he can get the baby to turn. He is not giving up. Jessalyn is pressed, pushed, poked until the baby is moved. "Okay, let's get her induced, she ready" he says in a glint of accomplishment. Contraction, pushing, breathing, enduring, sweating, pain, screams, breathing, hours go by. The words come. "The babies crowning" the nurse says. 3:30 pm, Allison is born. Seven pounds, eleven ounces, twenty inches long and a head filled with hair the nurses can't wait to put a bow in. October 24th, 1994, parents are born.

It doesn't take much time for these new parents, even with the help of grandmothers to see the baby arrived without an owner's manual, as Andy put it. In a very short period of time, Jessalyn and Andy went from being two separate people, becoming one in marriage and thrust into parenthood. Enough to take anyone's breath away. True to form, Jessalyn's ever changing,

constantly evolving life continues. Their faith life is taking place in Andy's church, another change. Responsibility to the demands of a newborn, physical changes, hormones, depression on all levels, explode. All it takes? One last trigger. Andy has no idea of what is coming.

"You know Andy, I don't need you. Me and the baby can make it on our own" is the first explosion of words coming out of her mouth. Andy calmness isn't helping. Not responding in kind. He is not a Ross. He is a from a Sooner's heritage. They think things out, plan and respond. Screaming, "This was all a mistake" she says in cutting words that do not pierce him frustrating her all the more. "Do you even hear me? Do you have an emotional bone in your body?" and she vents, and vents again. In a calm tone of voice Andy says, "Jess, I am not going anywhere!" Oh, this had her brain scrambling. What does he mean by that?

Is it God or is he this mature? To see beyond the volcano eruption to the foundation of pent-up pressures. What is taking place exactly? The reoccurring Ross curse? I reject you before you can reject me? I abandon you before you can abandon me? In a moment of tenderness, Andy looks into the face of his wife and nearly whispers, "I am not going anywhere Jess. You are my life. I love you in a way I have never loved anyone" he told her. The volcano burped as the remaining pressure subsided. His words are what she needed to hear. His calm demeanor brought about an assurance in their marriage. Catastrophe avoided.

God rebuilds lives. What took place in the first nineteen years of Jessalyn life, God is now raising issue to undo what was done. What normally divides a couple is now bonding them together like concrete. Andy is not mister perfect. He is more calculating. He works on inner issue in times of solitude and other times he just puts them on the shelf to work on later.

Scarlet Letter syndrome. Sin kept in secret will see the light of day. It's the ninety's, who cares? It is not working for her. Guilt and shame of sex before marriage is weighing heavy on Jessalyn. No words Andy shares with her help. It is like the time she hated her mother for moving out of a school she loved. Eventually she needed to forgive her mother. But this is not as easy. Who needs to be forgiven? It takes time, eventually she sees it. It is the act that needs to be forgiven. This milestone breakthrough took work, soul searching, and answer of prayer. Isaiah 43:19 portrays, God will make a way. Even if we cannot see it. Perseverance is rewarded. How easy we can let ourselves off the hook in our conscience mind. Not so in our subconscious. Jessalyn knew God was warning her. She knew she was about to sin. There

is no hiding it until rationalization, justification lays a veil over it and it is out of mind.

It is the looks other woman give her, even if it is not about this, it triggers her guilt. Pleading with God, grace comes through. Repentance is a spiritual act, event. It does not work in the mind. It has to work in our spiritual heart. It is when she opens this door, Father God releases her shame. She feels it. She is forgiven. The weight lifted, the knowledge retained, until. Now, Jessalyn takes on a role she has never done before. Has never conceived of before. Standing in the GAP for her child. It is one thing to read the Bible, it is another to apply the Bible to your life. Jessalyn, called by God must understand the higher points of application of the Word.

The revelation is twofold. Generational cycles and conception out of wedlock. The discoveries come when she is not looking for them. It is God's appointed time, His preemptive work. Out of love, he is applying John 10:10, the thief comes to seek, steal and destroy, but Jesus came that we might have life and it abundant. The spiritual principle she finds in Exodus 20, the sins of the fathers. Her mother and grandmother conceived out of wedlock. Jessalyn does not want this for her daughter or future children. Entering into prayer, in her private place, she prays that God would forgive this sin, and break the cycle in her family line. In Deuteronomy 23 is another discovery, a child born out of wedlock carries a curse. Shocked and horrified, she searches for more knowledge on what happens to the child. The traits that happen in the spirit is an overlay to David's life. She is shocked. Without hesitation she prays to ask for the forgiveness she has brought upon Allison without knowing it. Pleading with God to forgive and heal, He answers her prayer with restoration of healthiness. Humbled she can only ask why God is blessing her in this way. The answer is slow in coming. There are hiccups in her marriage, however she settles into a flow that has never occurred before. She will learn about the spiritual covering of her husband.

It's like entering a train yard. One track splitting off into many; forming a band of tracks. Before Jessalyn and angel is a single spot broadening off too many paths. On the right the paths were dark in nature. Moving right to left, the amount of light increased until it seems like full sunshine. A sign appears over the spot. A name is on it. It reads: Allison. Aghast, Jessalyn cringes and asks angel what it means. He responds, "I want you to pray God forgives the sins of her parents." In her heart she does. The darkest path on the right

disappears. “Now, pray for the curse of being conceived out of wedlock.” She does and again, the right most path is gone. “Very good. Now, think about John 10:10 and pray it for your daughter. Another dark path is gone. “Dedicate her to God.” A path is gone. There were only three lighted paths left. “Now” angels said, “Pray Allison walks the plans God has for her life” and one path remained. A sign over it says; Blessings.

Thirty-One

Coming from the heavenlies, Jessalyn's guardian angel heard the sound of a summing trumpet. Advancing above the earth, near a brilliantly white cloud, angel took on a humbled position and knelt before his Lord, Jesus. "Blessed be you Lord of heaven and earth" is his greeting to Jesus. From their position, just beyond earth's grasp, they are in God's time zone. Jesus directs angels focus back to his charge and then begin to review her future and where divine provisions and gifts will be released into her life, family.

In a rapid flow, Jessalyn's life played out before them as angel saw himself in the third person. At just the right times Jesus showed him a provision to release. Daily life for Andy and Jessalyn seemed normal enough. Except for those moment Jessalyn stepped behind the veil or experienced a visitation no one else could see or feel. Raising a toddler is challenging. An early lesson? You can't take your eyes off them for one minute or they are into something unsafe or out of view all together. How many times Allison looked at her mom waiting for the right moment? Andy is patient with the love of his life. He has grown accustomed to his wife being triggered by her early years. In a flash she could be calm to raging. Eventually, by the grace of God she got it under control and dealt with issues on her own. Learning not to display the inner turmoil until a later time. She is gaining maturity.

Jesus and angel watched as the family rented their new home from a family member. New baby new home complete with a backyard swing set. Twenty minutes south of Will Rogers Airport. Northly winds placed them right in line with approaching airliners. Allison started kinder garden. Then came the blessed arrival of Allison's little sister, Rayen, mothers little blossom. Family life suited them. Jesus lifts his arm, to bring attention to Andy. He said, "Here" and angel released the first new provision. In the work office, Andy is called in, this is not uncommon. So, when they offered him training in Ranch Management at Trinity Christian University, they accepted it.

All part of Jessalyn's life, frequent moves. Andy's employers are pleasantly surprised how easily they took the offer. Quickly settled in accommodation, it is love from the first day. Fort Worth Texas felt like home

to Jessalyn, part of her mother's roots and all. Jesus points again and tells angel, "Here." Jessalyn applies for administrative assistant for the pastor of education in a large Baptist church, she is hired. Excited and sad are her flip-flopping emotions. She and Andy are building a life. It feels wonderful. The love for each other deepens as they become dependent on the other. Being away from home is hard. Making new friends takes effort. Quickly, now having leadership over five secretaries, life lessons are surfacing. It came to her fore knowledge during her drive to work one day. How defensives she is concerning her secretaries. A part of leadership changed as she learned to be a servant leader. The six of them bonded as their relationship grew. Although Jessalyn did not go to college to learn the skills she is now using. The days spent as an administrative volunteer at school taught her, enabled her to step into this role.

Life at its best has a way of being fleeting. It is a very good year, if not the best year of family life this husband, wife and children have experienced. Upon graduation, Jesus points again and this time said, "Favor." Andy is offered a job in Oklahoma and life begins anew in Edmond. A principle of favor of God, soon to be learned, it always moves you towards and into your destiny. Life resumed in Edmond but in their hearts, they knew it would be short lived. They could feel it, sensed it. The door is closing on living in Edmond. A map appears in front of Jesus and angel, reaching out, Jesus rest His finger on Crescent Oklahoma. Angel sees himself whispering in Andy's mind and the feeling is birthed to move closer to his sister.

Did they think, or did they ever notice the house they are now living is a direct guidance from the Lord? I think not, at least at this moment. A church is adjacent to their new home. It is an Assembly of God church. No, it is not a déjà vu moment for Jessalyn. Being in love and being loved by Andy, healings has been realized. How the love of good man is undoing the rejection and abandonment of another. Being a PK, preacher kids, the front of the church is the expected place for the pastor's family. Because of the close proximity to their home and years of water under the bridge, they tried it. Stepping into the door, the sight and sound, even the smell screamed it is an AG church. Jessalyn insisted they sit in the last pew trying to be invisible as possible. She fights the inner desire to run, run from the memories, run from the feelings. But then, like a thirsty dry sponge, she revels in the spiritual life, the presence of God is in this place. These feeling are memories she longed for; wanted in her life. A huge part of her, a secret part kept inside for many years now is immersing as a must do for the good of her children. They need to know, to experience their spiritual heritage. Jesus points to the

pastor and said, “Call her up” an angel whispers into the mind of the pastor. Talk begins with the staff to ask this new family, this new member to reach out and teach the Missionettes class for 2nd grade girls. This Wednesday night meeting is a perfect way to have her girls learn of church life. Humble beginnings, she had charge of three girls and with her two makes five. In the heavenlies Jesus breathes toward the classroom. Life is released, spiritual life. So excited were her pupils their numbers grew to twenty.

Again John 10:10 is applied; “I have come that they might have life and have it to the full.” God has a way of sneaking up on a person with a surprise. Right there, watching her daughters eating their breakfast, sipping a cup of coffee, Jessalyn felt it. A wife, mother, daughter, sister and volunteer at church, a good home, her husband has a good job, they have the fullness of life. They are blessed of God. She is surrounded in love. Then came the hug fest. It began during a Wednesday night class for the Missionettes girls. Spontaneously, a girl got up, walked up to her and gave her a side hug. A line formed and one by one they all came forward even the new girls. Not sure what to make of the fuss, it is clear in her mind, she is in a season of increase.

Favor is resting on her. The staff at church could see it. The number of families increased. Attendance is up. Growth brings new needs. Jessalyn became the obvious choice for the church’s new Children’s Pastor. She accepted the volunteer position. The tithe’s increase with all the new family’s, now up to four hundred people in attendance. The Children’s Pastor became a paid position. “Jessalyn, can I see you in my office” the pastor said. “I would like you to enroll in the Global University Pastors program.” Stunned, she listened. “Here is how it works. Through the church we will order you the books for each class. When you complete the first ten courses you will be a certified minister in the AG. The next ten course will bring you to be a licensed minister and the final ten to being an ordained minister. As long as you are in the classes, we can have you functioning on staff. Do you have any questions?” She shook her head no and wondered when she would squeeze in an already busy day. But she reveled in new challenges. And, she knows, as the Spirit guides, He provides.

Allison and Rayen willingly are drafted into becoming her assistants. Ushering them into leadership within the ranks. She taught them how to pray for others. In those times her heart would be overwhelmed with joy. It is a Tuesday morning, Jessalyn wandered into the sanctuary sitting down on the front pew. There in the quiet, in the solitude the thought entered her mind; *performing arts group* is what she is thinking. Immediately it is a hit. She

taught, Ribbons, Flags and stick routines. New forms a worship in this country church. Everyone loved to watch the children worshipping the Lord.

A shoe dropped, of sorts. Home Schooling is now at the center of their conversations. The conversation went in a circular manner, round and round until it is agree upon. Allison finished third grade, Rayen first grade and now their mother would become their teacher. Clara approached her about becoming a volunteer in the new program. In tears J' accepts the help and a team is born. Although it is a drive for them, Clara and Jacob embraced it. At times, this duo felt as if it is J's senior year all over again.

Jessalyn, being true to her name, knew the church is under spiritual attack. She sensed it, saw it and stood against the best she could. It is taking its toll. Drawing on those who have gone before her, holding on to the examples of her mother and grandparents she held on. It is here she saw her, Jezebel sweeping through the church. Keeping it to herself, knowing in heighten worship it could not endure, she carried on. Jesus pointed to her and said, "There" to her guardian angel. The class is hanging on each and every word as Jessalyn read from the book Comic Christmas. A wind passed over her. The hardened walls around her heart softened and right there she is on the verge of tears. Strength and love is infused into her spirit. The atmosphere around her is stirred. She knows something spiritually is happening. She stays focused and carried on to the finish of the lesson. In the disorder at class ends, one of the girls walks up to Ms. Clara and told her, she saw an angel standing behind Pastor Jessalyn. His hands were resting on her shoulders.

Every spiritually alive church knows. When the life of Christ is flowing, you will get the unwanted attention of evil. Spiritual warfare is happening, but they are not winning. With every challenge, growth takes place and knowledges of how evil operates is learned. Take away the legal grounds evil has and the battle is won. Even though a dozen things are happening at one time, Jessalyn can tell the times is right. It is still dark; the alarm is on snooze. Laying on her side, nuzzling up to Andy's ear, she tickles him with her nose. "What" he says in a non-interested way. Do you want to know something" she teases him in an effort to get his attention? He bites. "If you have a secret, I want to know."

"Well, if I tell you it won't be a secret anymore. But it could be our secret." Andy turns so they are face to face. Not that it mattered. They couldn't see each other in the dark, but if felt right. "What's your secret, I want to know."

“Alright, I’m late.” Silence. This is a new game. Mulling it over in his mind, still dulled and half asleep. In his mind are all the possible options. Late on home schooling. Late at developing the program at church. Late in completing her class for Global. The light came on, “Your late? How long?”

“Six weeks.” The secret is out. His excitement is filling the room. “Who else knows?” he asks. “Just you.” He did the math, next year they will be five. Smothering her with kisses the snooze went off.

Jesus told the angel, “It is now time to teach her about the full armor of God. Evil noticed a subtle change in the hedge of protection about Jessalyn. They launched fiery arrows in her direction and sometimes hitting their mark. At first, she thought she is losing her mind. She needed time alone to process what is going on. It’s been over twenty years and not since her grandmother called out to her on the edge of the staircase, ready to throw herself off, has she felt this deep desire to kill herself. She hated feeling this way. Wondering if this might be physical being pregnant and all. She told no one of her struggles.

Going through the motions, she had everyone fooled. Andy just passed her quietness off as pregnancy related. In the few moments to herself, she cried out to God for help. It has moved from struggling to enduring the spiritual pain of worthlessness, abandonment, and rejections. It is true to her when she was a child. They are not valid points as an adult. However, they are unresolved. Evil is exploiting them. Now it has advanced into suffering. Taunting her to kill herself is a daily thing. Teetering on the edge of a break down, walking a razors edge is becoming concerned the emotional turmoil is affecting the baby.

Everyone is fed, the girls are doing dishes, Allison is standing at sink while Rayen needs a chair to dry. The kitchen is filled with their usual gibbering at the sink, laughing and then *bickering* then laughing. Sisters. Jessalyn loves it when they are singing worship songs while doing their chores. “Andy, I need to slip into church for a minute. Watch the girls I’ll be right back” as he hears the sound of the screen door slamming closed. Slipping the key in the door, she will have the church to herself, its why she is going. In a rush, the crying starts before she makes it into the sanctuary. The relentless condemnation in her private hell, the pent-up pain gushes out in uncontrolled sobs. Kneeing down in front of the altar platform Jessalyn lays her heart bare before the Lord. Pleading with Him for help. She gasps for breath between the sobs.

Spent, wiping her nose, drying her eyes, the long shadows coming through the window tell her she has been in the church too long, Andy will come looking for her soon. She wonders, *did I feel it or is it wishful thinking?* A spiritual shift. Walking towards the door, passing the pastors office, she sees motion. A book is tumbling on the floor. There is no doubt in her mind, the church is empty, but the question is what did she just see and hear? Breaking the plane of the doorway, the room is electrified. Picking up the book she reads it, "Wearing the full Armor of God." The screen door just slammed close; Andy is on his way.

A quick wipe of her nose, relocking the side door of the church she hears, "Honey, is everything all right? You have been in there for an hour" Andy said. Raising the book, she said, "I was looking for this book." Avoiding the real issue. Every spare moment is given to reading it. Jessalyn thought she knew about spiritual warfare. In reality she hadn't a clue. New level, new demons is an old phrase grandma used to say. Now she understands. With spiritual life flowing from her, new challenges immersed. Stuck in the end of the book, is a type written page with the topic of "Anointing." It is instructions on anointing a home or church.

Andy is on his way to work. Reaching for bottle of cooking oil, pouring a little in the cap, Jessalyn prays for the Holy Spirit to be with the oil, she begins. Dabbing all doors, windows, and anyplace the Holy Spirit led, she anointed. In the middle of the living room, she prayed for the cleansing it of past sins that had taken place in the home and on the land, setting it aside for God. Then she prayed for the full armor be placed on her like the book guide the reader to do. It is gone, is it over, she wondered? The heavy spiritual condemnation is gone. Jessalyn has just grown in faith and implemented what her grandmother exorcised all those years ago, spiritual authority.

2003 is the year the Harrisons have a baby boy. Seven pounds, eight ounces and twenty-two inches long and not one strand of hair. Discussions about boy names had been going on for two months. Then one night, it came into Jessalyn mind and Andy agreed, they will call him James. Somewhere down the line, it will be shortened and morph into Little J. Joy overflowed in this family and Clara fussed over the baby just like she did with the girls. Although this time she has to share him with his sisters. The adjustment period to the new family member went like clockwork. They all settled into the routine of family life.

Jesus rest his left hand on the angel's shoulder, points his index finger on His right hand towards Jessalyn and says, "There." The church board

meeting is taking place without Jessalyn being there. Because the meeting is about her. The angel in the meeting releases unity and agreement. Jessalyn will be asked to be the Executive Pastor over all the ministries and finances.

In the next breath, Jesus again says, “There.” Her guardian angel whispers into her mind and her eyes were opened. She thought, *where are the miracles? This is an Assembly of God Pentecostal Church and we do not see a demonstration of the Power of the Holy Spirit.* A restlessness settled on her. Domino’s fell into place. Longing to experience the power of God again, A multi church mission trip is now planned and will take place in 2005. They will be going to the Jungles west of Cancun. She hasn’t thought about him in decades. To bolster their faith and excitement about being part of the mission, she told them the story about Tim’s miraculous healing at the border of Mexico. Blank stars, mouths hung open, eyes were wide open in amazement hearing of a supernatural healing. They want to be part of this type of mission trip. Okay, she didn’t tell them about the spiritual warfare. Who knows, maybe this time it will not happen.

Thirty-Two

Leaving the Cancun airport, the group gets their first impressions. It is not the five-star resorts most Americans travel to Cancun for their vacation. The buildings are humble, made of minimum materials. The streets are narrow. The most notable difference, how they drive motor vehicles. Well, let's say it raises a person blood pressure if you are not use to it. Or you hold your breath more than once. The bus driver pulls into the driveway to where they will be staying the next seven days. The mission staging home. Mr. Mrs. Gomez are the hosts. They graciously met the bus as it arrived with a warm welcome. Bob, the mission coordinator is there as well. Everyone is ushered into the open-air courtyard. The Gomez's familiarized them with their home. Giving out needed details as everyone looks around. It is a two-story building. The first floor is where the kitchen, living area, offices, all decorated in the Mexican motif. Arched doorways, stairway at the end of the courtyard. Wrought iron railings line the balcony facing the courtyard. Plants and small trees brighten up the area. The lighting adds a warm atmosphere.

Bob spoke up with room assignments. He called out names, telling them their room number. It is so different from Jessalyn's first mission trip. Being in a one room bunkhouse, a single light bulb and a tin roof. They have had the foresight to place Jessalyn and her stepdad, Jacob, next to each other. It is their first time on a mission trip together. While they were being briefed, the bus driver brought in all the luggage. With the rooms assigned, the clamor to find bags began and the noise of people carrying the bags to the second floor and the excitement of being in a new place. The sounds bounced off the courtyard walls filling the air. Everyone is here to serve God. The Gomez's home is a spiritual island on the edge of Cancun. Clara's two J's settled in their rooms and then talked about Bob's cautioning them all not to go outside of the house at night. From the looks of the neighborhood as they drove in, it is a good idea. They all look like tourist and will stand out.

A flurry of activity is taking place in the courtyard. Workers have set up tables with folding chairs. One of the servants rang a bell, it is dinner time. As quickly as everyone scampered up the stairs to their rooms, now on both sides of the courtyard balconies, hungry people scurry down. Joyful words and sounds fill the atmosphere. Mr. Gomez stands at the end of the table and all eyes are on him. In a heavy accent he began, "Lets us pray and give thanks to God for our food, safe travels. Dear Father, you have gathered us together

to share a meal and serve You. Please bless this food, surround us with angels and open the heavens over this team as we minister in Your name. Amen. Let's eat" he said, and the staff began to serve their guests. The volume of voices rose as many conversations took place. God stories took center stage. Faith raising, inspiring acts of God people witnessed or were blessed to be part of at other times. It renewed a hunger to see God move again this week.

The dishes were cleared as Bob gave the overview of this week's mission trips. "Okay Missionaries listen up" set the tone to conclude conversations and turn their attention to him. Grabbing a three foot by three-foot board, it displayed a map of the jungle area west of their position. "We are going to begin traveling to the southwest area" Bob showed them the expressway they will be traveling the first few days, breaking them easily to the new terrain. He went on to say, "If you have not been on a mission trip like this before, brace yourself to see and experience poverty. Begin to pray for our spiritual protection. Darkness reigns in the Jungle. Evil does not want us there. When God shows up and blesses the people, lives changed, and Jesus is praised. That is why you are here." Bob pointed to positions on the map where they will be traveling each day. Moving southwest to directly west and ending up to the northwest region. All of the locations are less than two hours away from the city.

Exhausted travelers talked in groups, mingled about well past night fall until Bob told them tired workers did not give their best in the mission's field. Slowly conversations ended, people drifted up to their rooms and quiet settled in. On the balcony Jessalyn and Jacob said their good nights. As Jessalyn laid in bed, her mind would not slow down enough for her to fall asleep. She thought, *now I can see what Andy and Allison described while they were here last year. Yes, the air is warm, filled with good and bad scents. The courtyard is prettier than I imagined. Okay, why did they laugh about the time spent in the bus. Mom, are the kids going to wear her out?* A constant flow of thoughts filled her mine. The gunshots in the distance didn't help either. Finally sleep came.

Jolted out of her sleep, Jessalyn felt a dark evil presence in the room and immediately she went back to her first mission trip and dread filled her heart. Doing spiritual warfare before was hard, she is not wanting that to happen again, but here it is. Nervous, she got up and looked out the window into the courtyard and there is Dad standing on the balcony. Joining him, he said to her, Ya-know Jess, I've heard others talk about the evil they experienced while on mission trips. If what I just experienced is a taste of it, I now have new appreciation for those men and women of God laboring in

spiritually hostile areas. I had no idea. We are so spoiled at home. God is truly watching over us in the States.

Everyone is up, dressed and groom, fed waiting in the courtyard for their transportation to arrive. Through the entryway, a white, twenty passenger minibus, towing a small trailer, pulls in the driveway. Bob led the team out to the bus, most of the group inwardly breathed a sigh of relief when they read, Air-conditioning, written on the side in bold lettering. On the driver's side, the bench seats two people for six rows, the back bench could seat four and then four single seats on the passenger side. Bob sat up with the driver. At first, no one noticed the windows didn't open. All accounted for, the bus pulled out onto the street, made their way over to route 180 and traveled southwest to merge onto highway 1800. The fans on the air conditioning units are blowing air, but it is hot. That is when they learned it didn't work.

Turning off the highway, they drove on a paved road barely wide enough for two vehicles. With a bump, it is now a gravel road. Important knowledge is gained after they hit their first pothole. All four people in the back groaned. The suspension on the bus is very stiff. In their minds they made a note to be on the bus early for better seating. Trees pressed in all sides with a few spots to see beyond, to see the countryside. The building they did pass were well worn, a step above a shack. It is obvious there is no electricity in this area. More potholes; groans. It is slow going now. People are hot. Bob yells out; "We are here" a cheer goes up. All eyes looking out they see the trees recede and the area widens out. Stick huts appear and are numerous. A wooden structure here and there but mostly thatched roof huts are the villager's homes. It is hard for the team to believe people are living like this, so poor. Children run to greet them.

The bus comes to a stop in front of the largest building, twenty feet wide and forty feet long. It is church and community center in one. The local pastor is the greeting party. "Bienvenido, bienvenido a todos." Bob translates telling them he is saying, "Welcome, welcome one and all." It's chaos. Pablo, the driver, opens the trailer and gets to work setting up. First thing, children time. Meaning, puppet show with a gospel presentation, a short flag and dance routine guided by Jessalyn and story time led by Bob.

Having set up in the church, the Children laughed as they watched puppets of Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, Jesus being born and the three wise men arriving. The puppeteers knew all the rough spot, no one else knew, nor cared. Bob's narration filled in the pieces to the story. Jacob

stepped outside to look around. Most huts had dirt floors. All of them had fire rings outside and there is no running water. Everyone used a common hand pump well. Sanitation is nonexistent. It doesn't add up in his mind. The children are laughing, adults are smiling and very friendly and they have very little in life.

Children are sent home for lunch; the team had the prepared food and bottled water. They were cautioned to only drink bottled water. Jessalyn rang a bell calling everyone to the dirt area by the bus. Really, there is no traffic to worry about, she had the children line up. The language barrier is overcome by her putting the kids in rows, five feet apart, then, she brought out the flags. Standing up front, she waved one flag, then the other, beginning to work out the choreograph. When they got it, Pablo played the music and to the pastor delight, the children did a flag/dance worship to praise songs. On the finish, the children, adults were called into the church and Bob had them sit down on the plastic chairs they use for the Sunday service. In Spanish, he told the gospel story of Jesus crucifixion. You could feel the Holy Spirit in the atmosphere. Bob gave an altar call invitation and Children and adults came forward. The pastor and Bob prayed with them to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. The love of God filled the place. Even adults were as little children in this place.

The team gather for some simple food, talking the whole while of the salvations they just witnessed. There is a sense of envy, amongst the difference church members on the team. Wanting the presence of God, they are witnessing to be in their own church. It started many trains of thoughts. By four o'clock, men women and children were arriving. Most of them were walking. They are coming to attend the evening church service. There are too many people to be in the church so it is held out on the gravel road. The pastor called everyone to stand, as he led them to sing, in a Capella. Jacob looked at Jessalyn and she looked back with a smile of recognition. It's their joy Jacob is having a hard time believing. Walking over to him she whispers in his ear, "Dad, isn't it great?" Thirty minutes later, everyone is still standing, worshipping, raising praise to the heavens. Pastor guided them to sit where they could and handed over his position to Bob and became their translator. He is bringing a message on the healing power of God. It is why the people have come. There is not health care out here. Trips to the hospital seldom happen. Calling on the witchdoctor will happen first. It is how they get the peoples respect and gifts at the weakest moments. They unleash evil spells upon people when they get out of line. That is why he is right now on the edge of town watching.

“Get ready Dad to see wonders” Jessalyn said knowing they were about to be released to pray. Bob concluded the message and said, “Team, you are released.” Pablo pressed play and worship music filled the air. Jessalyn and Jacob walked up to a woman who is blind in one eye. They laid hands on her and began to pray. A loud scream came out of the woman’s mouth. She could see out of both eyes. God healed her vision. Sobbing continued as she showed her family she could see. Noise all around is happening as others are being healed. Jacob and Jessalyn walked up to a father and child. He motioned the child could not hear. Jessalyn leaned over, kissed the child on the forehead, as they laid hands on and prayed, they are now more expectant. The look on the child’s face showed something had happened. They knew. Jacob grabbed Jessalyn’s hand in search of the next person to pray for. At seven o’clock the pastor had Pablo turn off the music and ending the service. It is very important to give people time to get home before it is dark.

The team pitched in and packed the trailer, cleanup the church and area. Hugs were exchanged with the pastor and locals. Loading up the bus, four new unsuspecting travelers will sit in the back. Testimonies crossed the isle, over seats, telling how the power of God touched the villagers. “Dad, what did you think?” Jessalyn asked. He said, “I have never witnessed anything like this in my entire Christian walk. Chills wash over me just thinking about it. The people came to the meeting needing healing and God showed up. Our loving Father gave them back a normal life. The blind sees, the deaf hear, the love of God was so thick it was tangible.” While he is talking, Jessalyn smiled. He is experiencing the supernatural side of God. Now, they have a new depth to their relationship. “I have to apologize to you. I didn’t understand. When you talked about seeing people healed, I doubted you. When you talk about spiritual warfare, I mocked you. Please forgive me?”

“Dad, it’s been my hope for you to step behind the veil of this world and experience God. We have four more villages to minister in and more of the Holy Spirit to experience.”

As they pulled into the Gomez’ driveway, the house staff had diner waiting for them. Despite their tiredness, they enjoyed a meal together. Bob told them which village they would be going to tomorrow and with that people drifted off to their rooms. On the balcony Jacob and Jessalyn prayed for God’s protection while they slept. Once Jessalyn laid down in bed, unable to turn her mind off. It is the seeing of miracles, it never gets old for her. Deeply she longs for the outpouring of supernatural power of God to happen in America. It is like a burning fire inside of her. A driving force. As she is

drifting off to sleep, she has a mini vision. They last only seconds. It is in the in between state of being awake and sliding into sleep that they take place. What she sees is disturbing. Not visually. No, it is because she feels like she has seen this before. Lived this before. But she can't put her finger on it. At three in the morning, she is startled awake from a horrible nightmare. Getting up, stepping out onto the balcony, Jacob is there, praying for God's protection. He sees there is a need for a prayer vigil throughout the night. In the morning he will ask if others are enduring spiritual warfare.

Salvation take place in the next village during the Children session. A little girl has taken a liking to Jessalyn. Holding her hand, she tugs for her to follow her. She wants her to see her home, meet her mother. Bending down low, she enters the doorway into the hut made of sticks and a thatch roof. There is a blend of scents. Dirt, wood stick, the thatch on the roof in the hot sun light mingle in her nostrils. Sitting down in the dirt floor she smiles at the child mother as the little girls puts her hands together showing Jessalyn to pray for their home. The little girl is very excited, and she is telling her mother all about what happened at church. The mother, looks at Jessalyn, reaches over to where they cook food when the weather is bad, picks up a wooden carving and gives it to her, a gift. It is very humbling. They have so little and are giving to strangers. As best she can, Jessalyn excuses herself and returns to the group.

Villagers begin arriving for the healing service. At four o'clock it begins. Jacob, at his age, is like a little child in that his inner excitement is to see God move again. All he wants to hear. You are released to pray. The pastor is working up the people's faith. He knows when the Spirit is stirring, and it is time. Jacob and Jessalyn walk up to a little boy who has one leg shorter than the other. They have him sit down on a chair. Jessalyn says, "Dad, grab ahold of his heels in your hands." He does. "Now Dad, command the short leg to grow out." He looks up at her in disbelief. "Yeah Dad, tell it to grow out."

"In the name of Jesus, leg, grow out." Jacob dropped the feet from his hands as he felt the short leg change lengths. But it stopped growing. "Dad, hold onto his heels until they match. "In the name of Jesus leg grow out" he said. It so unnerved him he is stunned. Speechless. Stunned. "Now Dad, have him standup" so he did and the boy smiled. "Dad, place your hands on each side of his hips and command them to come into alignment." Reluctantly he did as she said and felt a shift take place. Pablo is near them. She pulled him over to the boy and told him to tell the boy to run. "Correr" Pablo told him. The boy looked confused; he has not been able to run all of his life. Off he went, running around the inside of the church. His mother is weeping, the boy is

weeping, Jacob is weeping. Jessalyn said, “Dad, let’s go pray with another person, and off they went.

At the dinner table that night, it is loud. So many stories. For most of them, they have never seen God move in powerful ways. Near the end of the Bob’s talk, Jacob stood up and brought up the subject of a prayer vigil. A signup sheet was started for the remaining time on mission. “Dad” Jessalyn said. “I feel like I have been here before. You know, a Déjà vu moment.”

“Jessalyn, do you think it is because of Andy’s and Allison’s stories from their mission trip here.”

“No Dad, it is more than that.” With that she let it drop. It is their first good night rest, the prayer vigil covered them during the night.

It is Friday morning. At breakfast, there is excitement and sadness, it’s their last day, last village, Francisco May. It is the closest village to Cancun; however, it will take the same driving time as the farthest one. Bob knew there is no reason to tell them. Instead of heading towards highway 180, their direction is to the northwest, out of town. Immediately after leaving the city limits, the bus and trailer roll onto the dirt road, not paved, not gravel, dirt. There are fewer words spoken from the team, but more grunting is going on. Bracing themselves by holding onto something, the bus slowly rolled through huge potholes listing one-way or another. On occasion, the backseat bunch came off the seat as the bus dropped into one of them. The worst of it? When the bus came up before their butts were on the seat. It is bone jarring. At the halfway mark, Pablo stopped the bus for everyone to stretch their legs and get kinks out.

Reaching their destination, everyone knew their roles. Setup is in record time. Jacob had adapted. He had a sweat rag in the ready and used it often. One of the things in life he has learned is the act of savoring. He stepped out into the road. Slowly he did a full turn taking in every detail, sights, sounds, smells. In otherward, feeling all of his senses to take in his experience. The unexplainable? How happy the people have been? Carefree children ran about enjoying life. They have so little and yet. It is changing him and his own outlook on life. Jessalyn caught his attention and he walked into the stifling heat in the trailer for the flags. She is about to start the flag/worship dance training. The laughter of Children filled the air, with the occasional baying of wild donkey’s and roosters crowing.

As the local pastor and Bob brought to the climate to do thee altar call for salvation, Jacob leaned over and said to Jessalyn, “It never gets old. Are

all the angels in heaven rejoicing” he asked? “Oh Dad, their rejoicing alright.” He glanced at her with a quick look. It wasn’t what she said that struck him, it is how she said it. As if she knew, as if she heard. It is then he knew there is more to his stepdaughter than he realized. Joy of the Lord filled the air with the new soul that have been saved.

As the team is having a meal, people start arriving for the evening service. Word gets out the missionaries are coming are returning to do a service. When miracles happen for people, who have no way to receive any health care, Jesus is in their conversations. Jessalyn has a far off look in her eye and Bob notices it. “Penny for your thoughts” he says. “I don’t know, it’s feels like I have been here before. Like I have seen this place.”

“Have done other mission trips in this area?”

“No.”

“When you figure it out, let me know” and they ended the discussion.

The air is electrified tonight. The presence of the Holy Spirit is strong. The pastor is beginning to wonder if He is going to give a message or is the Holy Spirit taking over the service? In the spirit, Jessalyn is seeing flashes of white light and then it is gone. She doesn’t know what to make of it.

Jesus points towards Jessalyn and says, “There.” An angel waves his hand pass her eyes and then steps back.

In a burst of clarity, Jessalyn is remembering. It has been decades. From their vantage point, she sees a man enter the church. He is on crutches. His left leg is amputated below the knee. Jessalyn gasps and says, “Oh my God. Dad I know what is going to happen tonight. I have seen it.”

“What, what have you seen” with the look of confusion on his face. “We are going to see a creative miracle!” He has no idea what she means. It is what everyone has been waiting for. The pastor concludes his message, takes a breath and releases the team to pray. Jessalyn grabs her stepdads’ hand and said, “Come with me.” She grabs two other team members, and they approach the one-legged man. A light begins to shine behind him that only Jessalyn sees. In his seated position the foursome lay hands on the man and begin to pray. One minute goes by, then another until the man begins to weep. Softly, he is speaking. Pablo leans over and says, “Love. He keeps saying he feels love.” It is like a lightning bolt hit him he jerks back in his

seats and begin to cry out as if in pain. He points to his left leg. Jacob bends down to look at his leg. He turns pale and steps back, then steps forward for another look. He cannot believe his eyes. Women around the man begin to scream. The pastor and Bob come down to see what is happening. The man's leg, it is bulging lower. Layer upon layer of tissue is appearing. More than the human mind can process. The man's leg is growing out. Jessalyn breaks out and begins to pray in tongues. For thirty minutes they pray and then it is done. Beyond human comprehension, God made a new leg for the man. He stood up. On two feet. Jacob leaned over to Jessalyn and asked her, "How did you know?"

"I'll tell you the whole story later Dad." Worship and praise went beyond the normal times. That meant, it would be too late for the jungle folks to return home. For tonight, they will stay in the village. It is a night to remember. A night to celebrate what God has done.

Jesus looks at the angels, smiles and his mission is complete. What has been only moments for them has been over a decade for Jessalyn. Jesus leaves.

Except for the groans brought on by the potholes, the bus is quiet. Food is waiting for them when they arrive back. Too tired, most eat quietly. Most cannot believe what they have seen. Bob finally broke the silence. He says, "I have only heard about creative miracles before. I have not seen one take place until tonight. It brings my faith to a whole new level. When you return to your homes, give God all the Glory as you share this testimony of His healing power. I want to thank each of you for coming on mission to be the hand of Jesus to our villagers." He then shared details for their departure tomorrow. Jacob motioned for Jessalyn to sit at the secluded table and chairs near the front door area. "Now, tell me how you knew" he said. "Dad, I was fifteen years old. Mom and I were on vacation down at my grandparents' home. It was a wonderful time. One night, I thought I was asleep. Two angels woke me up and took me by the arms. We moved high into the air, then above Texas, the Gulf of Mexico and then Cancun. I saw this place, the roads. I saw it all. Everything. That is what I have been trying to remember. I saw Francisco May that night. I saw the church; I saw the man come in on crutches. Then, without any notice of movement, I was back in the bed. I knew at the time it was from God. But it has been twenty, twenty-five years."

“What is it you are describing to me Jessalyn; I’m having a hard time with all of this. I read in the bible about miracles, about the things Jesus did while he was on earth. I have been in church most of my life, but Jessalyn what you are telling me is what exactly in the bible.”

“It’s more than a vision Dad. It is like when the Apostle Paul says, ‘I know a man, he went to the throne room of God.’ I know now, in the spirit, God brought me to get a fore glimpse to this miracle.” A new mind set is forged in Jessalyn’s life. She is ruined. Now there must be away for God’s power to manifest in this manner at home.

Thirty-Three

A warm smile came to Jessalyn's face. Will Rogers Airport is coming into her view as she looks out the left side window. The pilot begins to line up with the runway and it is now out of sight. The airport charm is, it can accommodate larger aircraft even though there are only twenty-four gates. To her and Jacob, it seems like they have been gone a month. They packed in a lot of ministry into one week. So many stories to tell. Walking up the jetway, a rush of emotions hit the two of them. They are home. A homeland they now have in depth gratitude to Father God for this great Nation. Stepping through the door and into the terminal, the excitement of seeing family wells up in Jessalyn throat. Not normally this emotional. It's a tell. Just one of the changes to her life. They went to give on mission and received.

Straining to see, yes, just beyond the TSA entry point, the family is there. Andy, Allison, Rayen, little J and Mom, their waving. Within second Jessalyn is in the center of a family hug as Clara and Jacob kiss and embrace. Andy noticed; Jess lingered as she looked into his eyes. A deep look. Tears well up. The children, kisses and hugs, bending down to her boy, she scoops him up into her arms for one of those big kisses he loves to hate. Reaching over to Clara, she gives her mom a side hug as everyone turns towards the escalators and down to baggage claim. Facing the baggage belt, Clara leans over to J and said, "I'm bringing over a cold cut lunch tomorrow for after church. I want to hear all the stories."

"Sure mom." They all walked through the glass doors, past the statue of Will Rogers in a lasso rope display, captured in bronze for all of time. No one looks. It is in the parking garage, they part ways. Jessalyn gives her traveling companion a hug. Pulling out of the garage and onto exit road, Jess turns to Andy, glancing back to Allison and asks, "Did you two go to Francisco May Village?" Allison burst out first. "Mom, you guys went there? It was so awesome. If you survived the ride." Jessalyn knows she heard their stories when they came back. However, now she is really hearing it and reliving it. Allison said, "The children were so excited to see us. They made it really fun." Francisco May dominated the conversation for the whole way home.

Andy knew from past experience; tonight, is a good night to order pizza. They had forty minutes, or so before it is delivered. Okay, it might seem a little crazy, but Jessalyn didn't bring her suitcase inside yet. Right outside the backdoor, she opened it up on the patio table. She shook every piece of

clothing making sure there were no stowaways. She wants to make sure there are no lizards in it. Dropping the lid on the washer, not thinking, she yells, “Andy, I gotta get cleaned up.” Meaning, taking a quick shower. When the washer finally filled, it turned off the cold water tap and Jessalyn’s warm shower turned cold with a shout. She’s home.

Allison and Rayen got the table ready with paper plates, napkins and glasses. The doorbell rang, the children ran for the table, Andy walked to it with a family size pizza box and a two liter of pop. Glancing towards each one, Jessalyn feels how blessed they are as a family. They are all waiting. “Little J, will you say Grace?” While the kids scoop up a piece of pizza, she catches Andy’s eye, and he looks back with a *what* expression. He will soon learn just how much his wife has changed. Right now, she is feeling the abundant life Jesus talked about John 10. It is fast becoming her life’s verse now that she understands it is an ongoing gift. “Now, what have you kids been up too while I was gone” she asked them. Like an uncorked bottle pouring out, they all started talking at once.

Pastor had already heard about the creative miracles and asked to hold that testimony back for when there will be more time. Pastor Jessalyn came forward to give a witness to the Glory of God during mission. Tightly restrained to just ten minutes, the joy of the Lord fell on everyone as their heard of the power of God experienced in Cancun. She said, “We are holding a special service this Wednesday at seven o’clock to tell you more of God’s activity while on mission.”

“Jacob, will you get the coolers out of the car and bring them into the kitchen” Clara asked. Andy jumped in to assist knowing they would be packed with food for seven. Clara always puts on a good spread. A flurry of activity ended everyone now holding hands as Andy said grace. At the final word, amen. Allison assisted little J as bowls of salads and such are passed to most of them he shook his head no, except for potato and Hawaiian salads. Between bites of food, the family heard God stories. Turning to Clara Jessalyn said, “It was heartwarming and heart breaking serving in each village. They have so little and yet they are a happy people.” Looking at her stepdad, she asked, “Dad, what village were we in when the little girl led me to her home to meet her mother?” He couldn’t remember, anyway, she painted a colorful word picture as what their homes were like, what they had in them and how they lived day to day. They have no health care. “No wonder” Jessalyn said. “When the villagers hear the missionaries care coming, they walk many miles hoping God will heal them.” She went on, “You should have seen Dad when that little boy’s leg grew out. He dropped his feet

the first time.” They all laughed. At two thirty Andy told the kids to get cleaned up they are going into Oklahoma City for a movie matinee. Jess shot Andy the look. He said, “Ask your mom about it, it is her idea.” All Clara said is, “I have news for you.”

They moved into the kitchen to be close to the hot coffee. They always did their best conversation at the kitchen table. Jessalyn had no idea what is at hand. She allowed her mother to let it play out. With a full cup of coffee, they were ready. “J, the day you left for Cancun, a letter came in the mail for you. Andy didn’t open it. He immediately called me and of course I had to come over to look at it.” Handing to her, it’s opened, and she shot her mother a look. “You’ll see” is all Clara said. On the front of the envelop, the left-hand side is the Cherokee Indian Nation Seal. She glances back at Clara with a surprised, confused look, but said nothing. Hesitant to take the letter out. It read: Ms. Jessalyn Ross Harrison, you have been inducted into the Cherokee nation. Robert Ross has filled out the application to the nation on your behalf providing us with all the needed documents. If you now have children, we will make application for them available to you. Jessalyn drops her hands to the table and gives Clara a for longed look. “Go on dear” Clara said. Reading on, going over new tribal expressions, she navigated through the letter reaching, stopped at the point where it said, she is now eligible to all benefits given to Cherokee Citizens, concluding with the, sincerely yours; Principal Chief with his name written beautifully in cursive. “MOM” is all she could say.

Many questions surface. The prominent one is; why did her father do this now? Being Cherokee has always been in the shadows. Questions, possible answers, more questions passed between them for the next thirty minutes concluding with, “What about my brothers” she asked. “I haven’t heard from them dear so I do not know, but your father wouldn’t leave them out. I am sure they are receiving this letter as well” Clara concluded then said, “Pull out the other page.” Unfolding it, hard to believe, she is even more surprised is an official document. It read on the heading; Certificate of Admission into the Cherokee Citizenship written in a fancy script. Subtitle: Office of Commission on Citizenship, then naming the regional office. Reading on, it named her as a new member to the tribe. What it will all mean to her will only come out in time. Right now, she is conscience of an identity long forgotten and repressed.

Of course, Clara looked into it. The computer age is like having an encyclopedia in the day, but better, faster. “J, you can go into the Regional Cherokee Nation Office, that is on 39th street, just outside of Trinity and there

they will print you up a citizen card that looks like a driver's license." Clara is a plethora of information. Reaching behind her, Clara grabs a large manila envelope. It is an inch thick. She said, "Here is why the Andy and Jacob took the children to the movies." Pulling out a pile of papers, she lays them on the table. "That letter got me thinking about our heritage. My side and your fathers' side. So, while you were away, I spent hours at the Oklahoma Historical Society. You know, it's like a library. We visited it one time. It's downtown by the bombing of the FBI building memorial site." Seeing a look of connecting the dots, she went on.

Clara took great delight in setting the storyline making sure not to give out any clues this early in her expose'. Clara handed her a piece of paper with a black and white photocopy of a sailing ship. Clara begins to read the ships description. "This is the Simmonds ship. It carried passengers and cargo between the England an America" she told her. "The Simmonds is a three masked sailing ship built to sail all open waters. It is a full sail rigging, Barque sailing craft, 225 ton, the keel is two hundred- and five-foot stem to stern." Pausing, she realizes it is too much information. Continuing she tells J, "It is who is on board the Simmonds in November of 1735 that is important.

Reaching into her stack of papers, Clara has fifty pages stapled together. It is from the Revival Library, subtitled, John Wesley's Journal. She is only using it as a visual aid. Clara says, "John Wesley is the founder of the Methodist Church. It is due to his teaching style where his methodology of teaching the scripture brought him to the fore front. He is known in England to speak two, sometimes three times a day all across England. In 1735 he felt called to preach in America to the native Indians. John and his brother Charles booked passage on the Simmonds in November of that year. Destination? Georgia. Many people and cargo were on the ship. John took notice of the number of Germans on the voyage and took to learning the language to share a sermon with them. The ship encountered several storms. It is here John noticed the Germans. Despite being passengers, they served people. They had times of prayer and in the evening times of worship. They are a joyful people, to the point of being unnerving to him." Clara got up for a coffee refill, lifting the pot towards J, she shook her head no. She went on, "He learned they called themselves Moravians. A denomination believing in the power of God. The ship entered a storm tossing everyone about. Most people were concerned, but John watched them, they were unaffected. The second storm, it was the same. Praying, singing and serving as before. John's life is about to change. The third storm is so severe the main mask breaks

and falls off to the side dragging in the water by the riggings. Water is coming in the ship as wave crest over the bow and aft. Crew and passengers feared for their lives. John again talks to the leader asking how they could sing worship songs in this bad storm? He responded by saying they were not afraid to die.” J is waiting for a conclusion, not yet. Clara continued, “In his own script, his journal, John writes the Moravians have something he does not possess. It deeply troubles him. Well, J the storm ended, they landed. John and Charles set off to preach to the Indian tribes and the Moravians set off for the Cherokee tribe in North Carolina.” Jessalyn perks up.

“You see J, we now have two paths” Clara said. Then went on to say, “The Moravians were well received by the Cherokee Chief. This wise leader is recorded saying he could see it is important to merge in the white man’s ways. They learned English. They listened to the spiritual message the Moravians shared. They witnessed signs and wonders. Many were saved and they learned in schools. They were becoming an educated people. Back to the Wesley brothers. They made a home for themselves in Savannah Georgia. They reached out to Indian tribes and settlers combined. After two years, John was desperately defeated. Despite rigorous preaching they did not see any spiritual fruit.

John and Charles returned to London. It is Charles that experiences Revival. He brings John, not easily, to see for himself. George Whitefield is a man on fire for God. Wherever he preaches the presence of God is there too.” Taking a sip of Coffee, Clara says, “Here is where it gets interesting. John Wesley hunts down the London leader of the Moravians and asks to join them. Weeks and months go by. They share the scriptures. Unexpectedly, Charles becomes ill. Peter Bohler, the Moravian leader accompanies John to see his brother. It is when Peter prays for Charles, he is instantly healed. This started a whole new line of conversations until finally Peter said, ‘John, salvation is a gift you receive. It is not this hard John’ he told him.’

Six months has pasted. It happened. John Wesley is Born Again, and quickly is Baptized in the Holy Spirit and is on fire for God. He sees the importance of repentance and begins to preach it and all doors in London Churches close to John, they don’t want to hear it. The Brothers return to Savannah Georgia and begin a speaking circuit. More closed doors, they adapt to open air meetings and the power of God falls everywhere he goes.” The phone rings. Clara got up and answered it. She knew it would be Jacob. “Yes, take them out to eat, I need more time” and she hangs up the phone. “Mom” J said. I need a break.

“Mom, you have me interested in the Cherokee connection. I am lost with John Wesley.”

“It’s coming dear” she said. Rustling through her papers, she pulls out a new stack. “John Wesley made his way across the south, destined for the west coast. Where John went, he set people afire for God. Signs, wonders, miracles of all kind took place. Towns, cities, counties, states, the gospel dug deep roots that lasted generations.” Clara stopped to gather her thoughts.

She started up again, shifting to the Cherokee Nation. A hundred years after the Moravians touched the hearts of the Indians, was a horrible time in Cherokee history. They had now expanded from Georgia and westward into the Mississippi Valley. Terrible hardships took place and eventually the Chief signed a treaty giving away tribal land. A faction Cherokee Chief with Scottish and Cherokee descent opposed the treaty. Chief Ross called for the dismissal and death to his opponent.” Clara waited for it. Yep, it is what she is waiting for. The look of shock swept over Jessalyn’s face. “Mom, you have got to be kidding me.”

“No J, it’s in black and white. The sad part, it is the beginning of the trail of tears for the Cherokee. Many, many of them died along the way to their new territory, Oklahoma.”

“Mom, how did you find this stuff.”

“It is all right there in the library for anyone to discover.”

“Where is Wesley’s story going mom?”

“J, do you know what denomination started because of John Wesley?”

“No.”

“The Methodist Church dear.” Clara could see J’s mind rushing in thoughts.

“Let me ask you this question. How did the Assembly of God church begin?”

“The Azusa Street Revival.”

“Who was the pastor then?”

“William Seymour.”

“The power of God was on display. Tell me J. Did you see the power of God on display while in Cancun?” She knew the answer is yes so, she used this statement as rhetorical and moved on. “Now, compare it to what you are seeing in your church right outside your backdoor” Clara said. “Mom, I am

sorry to say it, it is nearly spiritually dead and that is why I am so disturbed. I want to see the fire of God just like what happened on mission.”

“The Methodist Church is a large denomination spread all across America. Wesley birthed many of them himself as he moved his meetings across the southern parts of America. We know in our day; both of these churches are not seeing the power of God like when they were birthed. But there are glowing ambers. The people who are the ambers remember when, in the day, when Jesus was on the tongues of people and the fire of the Holy Spirit burned hot in the souls of men and woman.” Reaching for more papers, Clara said, “Let’s make another jump in the is spiritual heritage. A family in Mississippi, near the end of the civil war, chose to build a new life. Let’s just call them Amber Glowing Church goers. They are saved, no power. It is the Jernigan Family. They pulled up stakes and moved to East Texas and bought a farm.” Jessalyn’s mind is taking in all of the details with interest. Now we are getting close to home where her grandparents live. Clara’s loving this. She goes on with the story, “They have eleven children and all of them working the farm. On Sunday, they attended the Methodist Episcopal Church in Greenville Texas.”

“No way mom, you’re making this stuff up” J said with sarcasm. “Can you believe it?” Clara told her in astonishment. Then said to her, “It is true, here reading it, it’s highlighted.” Expressionless, Jessalyn looked at the article, read it through twice. Clare went on, “It is their son Charles I want you to know about. Charles is Born Again at the age of nine. He receives the baptism of the Holy Spirit soon after he is saved. His experience with the Holy Spirit is so radical every waking moment Charles spends learning about what has happened to him. As he got older, the phrase ‘Entire Sanctification’ is coined. C B leaves the farm and begins to preach in Greensville and Revival breaks out and spreads throughout Hunt County. His preaching is on sanctification leading sinners to repentance. He begins his tent revival meetings there and it becomes the Holiness Movement. The Pentecostal Holiness Church is birthed.” Jessalyn pushes her chair away from the table and stands up, pacing in the kitchen with this new knowledge. “Mom” she says. “You’re talking about that big building over there on 39th street, west of Sonic’s?”

“Yes dear.”

“Jump to how this affect grandma.”

“Well, you remember the time we were with them on the fourth of July?”

“You bet; it was wonderful. I still have that sun dress packed away.”

“Remember sitting on the side of the street waiting for the parade?”

“Yes.”

“Grandma introduced you to her childhood friend. Remember her mother got her to the closest tent revival meeting and she is healed? Well, the preachers that night were C B Jernigan and Charles Parham. Mom’s neighbors became Charismatic’s after the healing and invited your grandmother to church where she where she is filled with the Holy Spirit. It changed her forever. She tasted and experienced God bringing her to be a strong woman of God you know her to be.”

“I want to call Andy and tell him to bring the kids anywhere else but home right now.” They both laughed but knew time is limited for uninterrupted talk. Clara went on, “Okay, you’ll love this part. C B and Parham had another fellow preacher that traveled with them. His name is Willian Seymour.”

“No mom, stop.”

“Yes, it’s true. There is a spilt between C B and Parham over Entire Sanctification. Parham moved more towards manifestation of the Holy Spirit where C B believed if you strived for personal holiness the Holy Spirit would show up. Get ready for this J. Parham left C B and went up to Kanas, Oklahoma region where he held tent meeting reaching out to the Cherokee Indians.” Silence. Revival spread in the Cherokee tribal community. The embers that were burning from the Moravians are now ignited once again. Okay, I know I got to hurry. Life for the Oklahoma Indians skyrocketed when they found oil on their land. They became wealthy. This brought on a very bad time for them. The government started a program called ‘Guardian Program for Native Americans. Under this program hundreds were killed by their guardians to gain control over their money. The Indians are treated so bad J, the stepped into the shadows for safety. Leaving their heritage behind. They did not want anyone to know about them.”

Clara let that sink in. It is personal now. “Mom, is this why Dad and his family didn’t talk about their roots?”

“It is a huge part of it dear. Charles Parham reignited the Pentecostal fires. It a part of why your father was a pastor.”

“Mom, what about C B?”

“Married and raising a family, being a Revival Preacher became too hard on the family. He brought his family to a place in Oklahoma where there were no people to begin a fresh start. Not building on anyone else’s ideals and

influences. Rev C B Jernigan is one of the founding men of Trinity Oklahoma. For the first thirty years the goal for Trinity would be holiness. They passed Blue Laws, no alcohol, gambling, dances movies, all stores closed on Sunday, etc. to help keep people from the temptation of sin. That all changed after the tornado.” Jessalyn lean her elbows on the kitchen table, places her face in her hands and begins to cry. She is feeling the hand of God. She is not sure, but somehow this is important to her life. “Honey” Clara said. “I do not think it a coincidence you just experienced a creative miracle of God in Mexico. Deep in your heart, you want the power of God, the fire of God to come to our community, our Nation. You are one of those embers being fanned into a new flame. It is in your lineage, in your blood J.

Thirty-Four

Standing room only. Church folk talked about the mission trip to family and friends. The spiritual hunger for God is evident. Pastor Jessalyn is called up, you could hear a pin drop in the room, everyone is quiet. She began, “I recommend going on a mission’s trip. The board did a wonderful job. The airport pickup, transportation for the week, staying in the beautiful home of the Gomez’s, all very well planned out. I want to thank everyone who prayed for us. I hope you will hear tonight how God answered your prayers.” Jessalyn described where they stayed, the city and valid concerns, the ride to the jungle villages. She could see the look of surprise when she expressed of the living conditions. The people listen attentively to the description of the children’s ministry. When it is told of the number of those saved, applause rang out.

“In the evening service, the first miracle we witnessed, my dad and I, prayed with a woman who had one blind eye. We laid hands on her and prayed. At first nothing happened and then she started waving her arms, screaming, excited and then crying. Through one of our interrupters, he told us she felt a pop in her eye and then she could see” she told them. Again, applause went up in praise to God. “Dad, come on up here’ she said. Jacob didn’t know she was going to call on him. With reluctance, giving her a look, stood and made is way to the podium. “Dad, tell them about the little boy.” His words flowed with ease. Laughter filled the room when he told them he dropped the boys’ heels. Tears welled up in many eyes in the telling of this little boy running for the first time.

It is time for the final story, the one everyone had come to hear. God’s creative miracle. Jessalyn took a breath and began. They hung on every word. Some leaned in as if to hear better. Women put a hand to their mouths during the telling of the screams of hysteria from those around that man as God grew his leg out. Hearing how the pastor had the man walk forward for all to see. Jessalyn summed up the night. She told them, “The services end before darkness so the people who walked can return before dark for their safety. But that didn’t happen. The atmosphere was filled with praise and worship. The pastor knew people would be staying the night in church. Pablo, our driver, slipped out of the church and to the bus. He has learned to carry a spare set of cloths. He walked in the church carrying a pair of boots, a gift for a man who needed two shoes. I’m telling you folks, if God can heal in the

Jungle Villages, He can heal here in America.” A new mind set is forged in Jessalyn. To see the power of God released in the Oklahoma City area.

Father God, why? Why are healings, deliverances, miracles not happening here in America? Salvations take place, but not the other gifts of the Spirit. The power gifts. Is there something I need to do in my life? No wait, if you used me on mission, then it is the location. Help me see why Your Holy Spirit is not flowing like in the Azusa Revival. Open my heart, my mind, and my spirit to hear from You, Amen. It has become her obsession for Revival, or at least healings to take place. Whenever possible, she did an altar call hoping the Holy Spirit would visit them. She is gravely unsatisfied in ministry. As an Assembly of God Pastor, spirit filled, with little to no fruit in the power gifts she questions God.

Jessalyn first met Robin when she lived in Edmond. Robin is the person you who is there for you when you need someone to listen to you. Taking in all the details, she listens to Jessalyn’s heart, offers empathy when needed and occasionally gives advice. In other words, a great friend to know. However, Robin is getting pushy. In the quiet of her office, talking to Robin over the phone, she said, “Jessalyn, I have listened to talk about wanting to see the power of God come here. Have you been listening to me? No! In the last two years I have said you need to meet with Arielle. You and her are alike in this desire to see the Fire of God erupt here. You would be good for each other. What are your concerns anyway? You know I love you, but you are wasting time.” The phone line went dead silent. “Set it up” is all Robin needed to hear. The meeting is planned for Tuesday, 10:00 am at Katie’s Diner in Guthrie, the halfway point.

Arielle arrived early. She thought the place looked cute, homie. A smile came across her face in a first impression. Painted sign on the window read, “Breakfast Served all day.” The restaurant hours are 6 am to 2 pm. The door is in the center of building. Walking in, through the second set of doors, she looks for a good spot. A bit of Déjà vu comes over her. The memory of the Diner on Main street in Farmington sweeps over her. On the left, against the far wall and window, the table is open. It is a seat yourself style place. Arielle takes the seat, against the wall, next to the window so she can watch the folks inside and out. Texting Robin she asked, “Are you close yet?” She doesn’t respond, she is reading it as they walk in. Waving to get their attention, Robin slips her phone back into her purse. “Arielle, this is Jessalyn” she said. Small talk rises as the unity in the spirit is evident. True to her nature, Arielle looks for clues to who Jessalyn is as person. She’s much younger, healthy and strong in appearance. It is the brightness in her eye that gets the notice.

Excitement. First step, ordering coffee. As they get their preferred cup ready, look at the menu, Robin says, “Katie’s meals are like our mom’s cooking, you will love them.” Now that they have ordered, Robin says, “You are both AG Pastors” or Assembly of God pastors. What you have in common is your fire for the supernatural. Ari, why don’t you tell Jessalyn about your mission trip to Africa.” A warmth came over Ari as she talked about the power points of the experience. The supernatural happenings and how God showed up and shocked her.

There is a parking lot meeting going on. Angels unite. It has been over twenty years since they have last seen each other. Although a quick meeting, they knew it would only be a time before they reunited today. That meeting took place just beyond two gates, a chance passing at Will Rogers Airport. Arielle deplaned from her life changing trip to Africa while Clara and Jessalyn were saying their goodbyes to Sammy. It is a brief meeting then, but now they will be a team.

The food arrived, grace said, when Ari continued and relayed how Africa changed her life, her goals. “Jessalyn, tell Ari about your mission to Cancun” Robin said, in an effort to let Ari eat her food while it is still hot. Now Jessalyn’s face warmed with remembering the hand of God working in the mission team. Leaving the creative miracle for last. The waitress cleared away the dishes as Robin took joy in seeing them get to know each other. She knew it would be this way. She had not counted on it being so difficult to set it up. Katie’s is a coffee clutch kind of place. A comfortable atmosphere where they would not feel rushed.

Jessalyn, chopping at the bit, asked Ari if she had a Ministry in mind. Listening intently, tapping her right boot to the floor nervously, she’s blown away at the scope and size of it all. Now she had big ideas in her daydreams, but not like this. Here is a person she could partner with in serving the Lord. The lunch time crowd, small on a Tuesday, allowed them time to share their hearts desire with the goal of seeing the fire of God come to OKC. It is not until later, Jessalyn will make the connection. Last night, just as she is falling asleep, she heard the sound of a newborn baby crying. In Katie’s Diner, a new ministry was conceived.

Everything is shimmering in the sun light. Jessalyn takes in a slow, long breath through her nose. The fragrance of the flowers is wonderful, sweet. It has been a very long time since she has visited her spiritual path. Standing in a gleaming gazebo, all the wood is bright white. It is made in an octagon shape. On four of the sides is a comfortable bench and a stunning view. She turns in every direction to take in her surroundings. Stepping from the gazebo to examine flowers, it occurs to her, she is alone. Immersed in the atmosphere of love, Jessalyn is at peace. In her mind, she knows this will be only a moment, she begins to savor every sight, every smell for her to enjoy. Gliding from one flower bed to another she admires the beauty and uniqueness they bring. Oh how she has missed being here.

Turning back towards the gazebo, waves of colors flash over the roof of the gazebo stirring her curiosity. Moving closer, in her mind comes the understanding the shingles are sheets of sapphires. The depth of blue took her breath away. Jessalyn stares in awe of the beauty, that really is lacking the description. Making her way back into the gazebo, sitting on a bench, she begins to wonder where is angel? A glow in the distance catches her sight. As it moves closer, she feels the glory of God; her heart is moved deeply. It is Jesus. Falling onto her knees, she cannot stand before Him. Reaching out His hand to her, she rises as He warmly embraces her. “Lyn” He said, “Come sit with me.” No one has ever called her in that manner. Right now, it feels right, to have a special name spoke by her Lord. Pivoting towards her He raises His hand and puts into her forehead. Instantly brought to the beginning of her spiritual journey, she sees Jesus high above the path, off in the distances. He answers her questions. “Yes Lyn, this is the place I called you too. Through all the trials, tests and tears, you followed my calling.

The air began to move. In front of them, on the path, a wind began to manifest. “Lyn, this is the wind of my Spirit. In the wind change takes place. Spiritual change manifest in My wind. People are stuck in their lives until My Spirit comes as a wind to move them out of their bondage or advance them in their journey.” The wind stops and a bubbling fountain of water manifests. Jesus goes on to say, “Living water is the essence of all Born Again Believers. Without my living water, they dry up and die. The knowledge of knowing Me remains, yet they are lifeless.” Now, as the water disappears power illuminates in a ball. Like individual sparks they swirled and change in the level of charge. Jesus continues, “Power in My Spirit creates something from nothing. In all manners from human needing healing to creating jobs and impossible things are created in My power.” The sparks

congeal into a lightning bolt and it is gone. In its place are tongues of fire. “This is your heart’s desire Lyn, to see Revival burn all across America and throughout the world. Daughter, you will release My Spirit of fire.” First an olive branch appears in the place of fire. Slowly changing into a clear vessel of oil. Again, He says, “Lyn, Oil brings My Spirit and a Child of God to co labor together. They will be as one unless My Spirit is grieved. Caution those anointed not to grieve My Spirit.” The vessel of oil fades from view. “Lyn, these are the elements of My Spirit for you to release to others.” Jesus’ turns once more towards her and said, “Take a deep breath and blow air from your mouth.” As she exhaled, a mighty roaring wind exited her. “This is the very breath of God. Use it only as We guide you. Stay within My will and you will be protected. Going outside of My covering; it will leave you defenseless to evil.” Taking Lyn’s hand, they walked in the middle of all the flowers. Jesus extended his left arm and with a wave, clouds parted, and Lyn could see angels as far as her vision allowed. “Lyn, these are the end times angel waiting for assignments. Prayer is how they are sent by My Father. Utilize prayer. It will bring heaven to earth. Shun sin, be quick to repent and Glorify Us before all of mankind. “

In an instant, they are in another place. Standing on a mountain top Lyn can see the world below. Jesus begins to answer some of unanswered questions. “America is not experiencing Me in power because of decades of blessings. They have grown comfortable. It breeds self-reliance. Sin is accepted and spiritual blindness hides their need for repentance. The consequences of sins are manifesting. Many will lose everything.” On hearing this Lyn is moved in tears. He tells her, “This will be your mission field. The souls of mankind are in front of you. Salvation is at hand. Your every need will be given to you. When the Pandemic arrives, know it is the beginning of woes. I am not sending you alone. You will labor with two of my Daughters who have withstood the testing. A cord of three is seldom broken.”

She took a deep breath. Her body responded in bland expressions. His presence encompassed her, and she is in His love. A love thick like water. Inwardly, she knows she has been made, born to exist in His love for all of time. Jesus, taking her hand asks; “Lyn, what do you see?” Instantly she is in a vision. I see the outline of America. I am far above it.”

“Now what do you see?”

“I see tents. Fire burns above the tents.”

“Now what do you see?”

“People, all sorts of them. They are in your presence, experiencing Your Glory. Healings, deliverances, salvations are running rampant.”

“Because you love me, have followed me through the hard times, now you will walk in the My Joy.” Lyn sees herself flowing in the Authority in Jesus name. That she will be co laboring with the Holy Spirit and angels for a Nation devoid of Signs and Wonders. A host of millions will be fed spiritual food to eat and be refreshed as they drink living water. In awe she falls to her knees and thinks of all the time, in the many ways, she wanted to give up. Now, for the first time, ever, she understands.

Jessalyn, Arielle and Robin are in a meeting. It is time to dream. Time to plant and expect a harvest. Although Oklahoma is thriving, and their comfort levels run high; it is a spiritual desert. Their ministry foundation is now intact. They are witnessing to the power of God in small portions. However, their time is not yet. SUDDENLY, the lockdowns begin, the pandemic is here.

Tom Donnan

Healingthenation1776@gmail.com