

Short Encouraging Stories



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On Earth as it is in Heaven

A gentle summer breeze swayed the mauve colored curtains back and forth as the morning sunlight crawled slowly across the room and up onto the bed finally reaching her eyes. Julia could not put off another day any longer.

She gave the moving curtains a disapproving glance as she thought that very soon she would need to take those curtains down and get them into the wash.

As usual sleep had not come again last night for her, and to top matters off Julia chastised herself for saying yes to the girls about the new family portrait that they had inquired about from the recent ad in the local newspaper. The mere thought of a family portrait without her dearly departed husband Bill was hurtful to her. Julia felt that any new portrait, even a hand painted one by a professional artist, without Bill, would only serve to remind her of all that she had lost.

None-the-less, the appointment was for 1PM today just after Church Service. The girls said that the artist had insisted upon that time following his Church service time as well.

It had been just a little bit over six months now since they had lost Bill to his unexpected two year battle with the cancer, but the pain of that loss to her was ever present and a constant silent whisper in her heart that tragedy was always only a single heartbeat away.

But down inside she recognized their girls, the girls that GOD had Blessed them with, were trying to move on with life just as their father Bill had expressed time and again for them to do. Bill had done his best to prepare them for the inevitable as his health spiraled downward and his prognosis grew grim.

He asked his daughters to live for him, not to just remember him, and the time that they had together, but to honor the values, and remember the Love, that he and Julia will always have and shared with them, to strive to achieve whatever it is that GOD had in store for them and to honor their memory of him by living each day as if it were their last. Bill had told Julia in his final moments that he had been Praying on how to give their girls, Samantha and Sally, something that they could put to use out of this mess, something of value, a lesson, and a charge to them that would last.

In Faith, their father Bill, had tried to instill in his daughters a sense of duty to always trust GOD no matter what curve balls life pitched at them, and to swing for the fences, always giving it their very best because that is what he would want for them to do.

Yes, mom knew.

Today was a very important baby step, a step initiated by the girls themselves on what was bound to be a very long journey of picking up the pieces of their shattered lives.

At 14 and 15 years old, they were trying. Sal and Sam, as they would forever be referred to in the Perkins household, were ready and eager to try and move on just as dad had instructed them to do. They were doing it because it is what he had wanted and out of respect it was also what they wanted. But Mom Julia was not ready, not by a long shot.

Oh today Julia would Pray for the strength to get through her day, but in reality she would be just going through the motions.

Thank GOD that Bill's mother, Karen, had decided to stay a few days and help with the girls during the funeral for her son. Grandmother Karen had never left, even though she

was poorly in Spirit and shaky in health herself. Grandmother Karen understood just how much Julia and the girls needed her. No one in the house ever spoke openly about Julia's depression but they were all very much aware of it. The simple truth was Grandmother; being a widow herself understood Julia's loneliness and was just about the only family that they had left. Besides Grandmother Karen's very presence reminded Julia of Bill. And that was good.

Life can be funny. Less than ten years before, it was Julia and Bill who were there for Grandmother Karen when Bill's father, Will, had passed suddenly of heart failure. Now Grandmother Karen was stepping up and seeing to the needs of what remained of the Perkins family.

It was quite a relief to Julia when all the attempted acts of condolence and comfort from her co-workers had ended, and then at least for her, at work things were now seemingly somewhat back to normal. She worked through her shifts at the hospital in the admissions department on automatic save for the exception of the way Julia avoided entirely the eastern wing of the hospital. That end of the hospital contains the ICU ward where her husband Bill had spent his last days on GOD'S good green Earth.

Julia thought the Church Service dragged slowly by today and she felt a pang of regret that she could not remember a single word the good Reverend Hanson had said. This was not a critique upon the Pastor or on the message but in fact almost everything in Julia's days were filled up in this way. Autopilot would be a good word for it. For Julia, despite the brave face, her lights were on but nobody was at home.

Reverend Hanson had seen the Perkins family through it all including Bill and Karen's marriage, as well as the Birth, Dedication and Baptism of each Samantha and Sally, and later caringly and respectfully serving as GOD'S solid

rock both in support and ultimately the burial of each father and son, Will and Bill. Julia and Grandmother Karen would forever be grateful for their Pastor.

After Church Grandmother Karen saw to a light lunch of cucumber salad complete with a homemade pepper and garlic dressing. As Grandmother and Granddaughters made jovial light talk, noticeably absent was Mother. While Julia earlier had made sure that the clothes that she had selected for them to wear to Church would be very well suited for this afternoon's scheduled portrait appointment, she was in her room Praying for the strength to get through this next ordeal. How she could bear to have a family portrait without Bill was constantly on her mind today.

But she must honor Bill's request that the girls be strong and do their best in Faith for their lives, and like it or not, today was a step in the right direction at least for them. Julia could not remember just how the girls had found the artist in the classified ads. They had contacted him themselves and made all the arrangements. Julia had tried to find the ad for herself but for some strange reason she could not find the ad, not even after a week of searching both of the local papers.

At precisely 12:50 PM there came a tiny knock at the door. Chuckles, the cat raised himself sleepily from Julia's lap while taking the time to stretch and give out a long drawn out yawn. Due to the cat's tardiness at exiting his master's lap, Sam was the first to reach the door.

A calm soft male voice came in through the screen door as it spoke two words: "Perkins residence ?" "Yes it is!" Sam responded cheerfully while opening the storm door. In stumbled a frumpy- looking, portly, middle-aged man. He was wearing a white doctor's smock with bright green industrial work-wear trousers worn hiked up, that appeared to be well prepared for flood waters. He was also sporting

old, well-worn wing tipped patent leather shoes. His ensemble was topped off with big thick black framed eyeglasses.

Julia could not help with a suppressed smile to notice that the man had on one dark navy blue sock and one of dark green. It did remind her of the male lack of color coordination; she had no doubt that this man was a bachelor.

Under the man's left arm was what appeared to be a neatly folded white sheet for use as a drop cloth and in his hand a collapsed tripod clearly for holding a painting canvas. In his right hand was a large old fashioned case, the kind that traveling book salespeople used to use in times past.

The girls helped the man clear the dining room, setting the table to one side, and they helped him lay out his drop cloth across their carpeted floor. After this, the mystery man artist unfolded the tripod and placed it in the center of the cloth.

With all of the lights now on, the man opened his case and took out some precut lengths of wood. Next he quickly assembled them by securing them on their backside with a big old silver arrow staple gun. You remember those don't you? -- The ones that took 3 men and a boy to squeeze the handle to insert a staple!

The man produced a roll of fabric from his case and measured it out from his left fingertip to his shoulder. Then he quickly cut it at that mark with some very old-fashioned looking scissors. After he pulled it tight across the now assembled picture frame he stapled it as well on the back side.

He fussed a bit with the arrangement of the Perkins Ladies with Mother and Grandmother behind and Sam and Sal in front slightly off center as to not block his view of their elders.

The unorthodox artist with the messy hair then produced a pallet and tubes of paint from the case. He surprised everyone when he squeezed a generous glob of pure white paint onto the canvas giving it a good shellacking as a base coat.

All the Perkins women gave a small laugh as the man was lost in his own little world, humming the melody of an almost unrecognizable "In the Garden Alone."

"That was always Bill's favorite hymn" Julia remembered.

"That was always Will's favorite hymn" Karen remembered.

"Ready" the artist announced to no one in particular.

Julia found herself hoping that none of the silly grins they were all now suppressing would appear on the final product.

All of the Perkins women were amazed at how fast his hands moved, both of them, (the man painted simultaneously with each hand), all the while humming away from one hymn to the next, all of them quite out of time or tune, usually a mixture of both, as the man was lost in thought and absentmindedly humming along.

The girls nodded and smiled at each other and at least twice the artist had to remind the ladies "to please be still" in a very polite fashion, always soon followed by a very big loud "Thank-You" once the girls settled from their outbursts of amusement.

Grandmother was the first to say it out loud.

"You know this is three generations of the Perkins women."

"Yes it is" they all agreed.

Despite her earlier doubts, Julia was now beginning to feel very grateful for this happy moment together with her family.

Finally the artist paused and spoke ;

" Smile, Mom, for you never know what a day may bring. "

"Who knows," he added. "Maybe GOD might even send an Angel with a message your way." At this they all gave a slight laugh, even Mom who was now, despite herself, smiling. But upon closer inspection, was Julia smiling in agreement with his sentiments or was her smile a mock of doubt? I submit that perhaps it was just a little bit of both?

In less than 20 minutes the artist was done. As he started to put away his items, all the Perkins family began to relax and move.

Very quickly the artist said, " Nope, nope."

Then he added " We have only one rule-- that no one sees the painting until after I leave."

"OK" Julia said, a little bemused by this strange awkward man. "May I get my checkbook"

" Please " the artist replied.

As Julia returns, the man announces that he has met his quota for this quarter and that they will receive a special discount. "Yeah" the girls say and clap. Even Grandmother is obviously pleased at the genuine goodwill this man is feeling for having met his quota in their home.

Julia was a little surprised at this because the mans ad in the paper was originally priced at less than 50 dollars, 49.99 to be exact! She knew this because the girls had repeated it time and again, not that she had ever found his ad.

The point was how could he discount a fee so small for a hand-painted portrait to begin with, she wondered to herself.

Then the obvious thought hit her: "none of us have yet to see the painting!"

"It could all just be a hoax, a scam. Once this man gets his money and runs we might find a canvas of squiggly lines, or better yet, maybe one of those of dogs playing cards. Now it is all making some sense to me." Julia begins to think. "I will go along just to get rid of him."

As Julia returns to the dining room with her checkbook, the artist meets her in the entrance with his packed case in hand. Grandmother, Sal and Sam are still standing in place. "You are my 77th customer this quarter," the man announces again with a broad grin.

"Today's charge, ma'am, is only 7 dollars and 77 cents and I am afraid that I must insist upon that amount exactly because the boss does not allow tipping!" He says with an even bigger grin.

Julia is stunned at this meager amount, especially considering the fact that she has already concluded that this man is a complete phony and a fraud.

"Are you sure about that amount" she asks the artist.

"Oh yes, I am quite sure," he replies with a smile as broad as Texas.

"Who do I make the check out to?" Julie asks him.

"Good question," the man replied as he appeared to be lost in thought.

"Ahh" he says as if remembering. "Please make the check out to the Way."

Julia paused and instinctively the man understood why. "Today is July the 7th... 7-7 is the date." The artist told Mom.

Julia failed to notice the Heavenly coincidence of her check number being 777 as well.

"Thank you", Julia said while writing out the check, she tore it out of her checkbook and handed it to the artist. He folded it in half and placed it into the top left pocket of his doctor's white lab coat.

He simply let himself out the same door that he had come in less than thirty minutes before, saying "Thank you" once and adding "May GOD Bless" as he went out.

It was an almost stunned silence in the Perkins household for just a moment.

What had just happened?

Grandmother Karen was the first to move as she walked around to see the painting. Apparently in a rush, the artist had forgotten his drop cloth and tripod easel. In their bewilderment at just what had come in and had come out of their home in less than half an hour none of the Perkins women had noticed either that the artist had forgotten the other items as well.

Grandmother Karen gasped and lifted her hands to her face. Samantha and Sally were next and they too were obviously stunned as well. Sam said nothing but her large surprised eyes said something was up. Sal simply said "Oh my" and drew in a deep breath.

"Well now is the time" Julia thought as she made her way to the painting, thinking that it would be quite a letdown for all of them.

It took almost a full 30 seconds for the entire image to soak into Julia's overwhelmed brain. There in the center were the 3 generations of the Perkins family women together. But it was perfect.

Perfect in how GOD sees us all.

Grandmother Karen was as she was in her twenties; even Mom appeared to be about ten years younger. But that was the hitch, the image was perfect.

As she was in her prime of youth even down to her natural hair color, and the girls, Sal and Sam, how beautiful they were, of who they were to become.

You see, the artist had painted them as fully mature adults, also in their prime, but without a doubt clearly who they would become in their GOD given time.

But that is not all.

In radiant light on each side of the elder women... were their men.

The men of the Perkins family,

Father Will right beside Karen where he belonged.

Also, beside Julia, was Son Bill again right where he belonged.

They too were in their prime but also had a beautiful Heavenly glow about them.

The family resemblance between the men was without any doubt. But in this painting with them each young, strong, and vital you would think them brothers instead of father and son.

You see on Earth, by the Grace of GOD, they are father and son, and in Heaven they are fully brothers in CHRIST and so shall we all be: Members of GOD'S family.

The awe-inspiring painting had a few words inscribed on its top center and below.

On top it said in fancy script: The Perkins Family.

On the bottom it said: On Earth and as it is in Heaven.

Julia could not stop her tears.

But it was good, for they were tears of joy.

The weight of the world lifted from her and she knew in an instant that GOD had answered all of her Prayers and that HE will always have her back.

Julia now understood that GOD holds onto all of us, in HIS hands, with Love. She knew that she would continue to miss Bill, but that it was OK, because he was OK, no longer sick and in pain, but healthy and happy in GOD'S Glory.

It was time for Julia to begin living again.

By the love and eternal hope of JESUS.

May GOD Bless you also dear reader

With HIS Love and Hope

As you live,

May you live peacefully through and for HIM.

Don't forget to show hospitality to
strangers, for some who have done
this have entertained angels without
realizing it! Hebrews 13:2 (NLT)

My Body
Is a prison
In which my life is confined

For inside
My heart and mind
Do hide
& my soul
Hath to abide

Yea my heart may churn
Whilst my mind doth yearn
Shall mine soul ever discern

For the Lord's
Many a splendid things
Nay do my travails
Ever seem to bring

Lumpy Tators

Jim knew in an instant that his words were a mistake judging by the expression upon her face. Trudy clearly had perceived them as a slight upon her cooking and by extension as an insult against herself. Jim was right about the insulting part.

Trudes was indeed hurt, but not by Jim's actual words about her potatoes being just a little bit too "lumpy." It was Jim's rather insensitive follow up comment that would forever stick in Trudy's craw.

"Not smooth like my mother's." Jim had added to his tator insult rather thoughtlessly.

To say that comment struck a nerve within Trudy would be putting it mildly. Jim's mother, bless her heart, had nothing but the best in mind for them, but she had no idea that all of her helpful "suggestions" were really starting to wear thin on Trudes.

"If only my husband could be a little more smooth," Trudy felt within her wounded heart.

Like I said before she was not upset about the insult against her tators, but rather the feeling that Jim did not appreciate just how hard it was for her to even find the time at all to cook for them daily the old fashioned way just like each of their parents had done while growing up.

Did Jim even have a clue as to how frantic and always in a rush right after work she was just to get home and prepare an evening meal that they can share quietly together?

Well apparently not... she correctly thought.

But he will.

As they say, H.E. double toothpick has no fury like a woman scorned.

Let the games begin!

“Plunk. “

That is the actual sound that the two nearly raw, attempted to be boiled small potatoes made as they bounced on and off of Jim’s dinner plate as he sat bug eyed at their dinner table the next evening.

“Look --- I am sorry about last night. “ Jim said.

“I spoke without thinking about it first. “

“It’s just that I can not stand lumpy potatoes! “

Jim felt better after he said those things to his young wife. He had handled the problem!

But he failed to notice that his words revealed that he had not yet truly learned his lesson.

The Next Night:

It was canned potatoes and the left-over chops from the evening before.

Jim’s chop was charred black on one side, as it was not nuked but pan seared without any bothering to take the effort to flip it a single time in order to reheat it.

But Trudy’s chop... it looked just fine!

“Well this sucks! “ Jim said clearly getting tired of her games.

Trudes never blinked an eye as she hinted with a touch of sarcasm to her tone;

“You’re welcome. “

The Next Night:

Jim sat in disbelief as the old, once - were - crunchy, rippled sour cream potato chips were served to him. Those chips and just a single boiled hot dog on his dinner plate, plain that is... not even on a bun!!

Just for an instant Jim had a flashback of eating like he was four years old again!

“How is your dinner tonight dear? “

Trudy asked him with a smile as sly as a fox on her face.

Then just before Jim let the cannon balls fly, he heard again the words of warning that Trudy’s father had told him about her at their wedding reception only a few short months ago.

“Jim, I have just one piece of advice for you--Trudes is a lot like her mother. “ “She hates being overlooked and feeling like she is being taken for granted. “

Trudy is many good things, but a good cook is not among them. She had asked Jim to be patient with her that it was just for his sake that she would try to learn to be a better one even though she really did not have the time to do so properly.

So this time, while staring down at his dinner plate, at the pile of crumbs that were once potato chips and a single boiled-until-it-was-split- to-pieces Oscar Meyer wiener, Jim

thought before he spoke for his growling stomach demanded that he did !

“I am sorry Trudes, I really am, please forgive me. “

The Next Night:

The mystery meat did not even garner Jim’s attention at all. It was the crispy over-cooked, what once-was; mashed potatoes that did.

Jim could swear that they had a funny after taste. Then it occurred to him;

“Surly not, he correctly thought. “

As he took a good look around the kitchen, there they were.

The “ lumpy tators.”

Sitting in plain sight for him to see, if he was just smart enough to take notice of them and finish Trudes game.

You see, dear reader, that strange after taste Jim was getting was freezer burn.

A half full freezer bag of Trudy’s lumpy tators from that very first night this spud war had begun, sat out in the open for Jim to hopefully, take notice of, upon the counter.

Oozing away I might add.

Trudes eyes instantly followed his eyes as he took notice of the bag on the counter.

“How are the potatoes tonight dear? “ Trudy then oh so sweetly asked him.

“They are splendid; the most wonderful potatoes that I have ever eaten sweet heart! “

Jim replied with a large smile.

And the best part was that Trudy clearly understood that Jim actually meant every word.

Be content with what you have

Hebrews 13:5b (NIV)

Behind the Scenes
Our GOD is Loving and Just
HE moves mountains when HE must
But that is not HIS style
For HE loves to make
HIS children feel worthwhile
So this fact you should know
Under our radar HE likes to go
Coincidence and happenstance
Plain luck or chance
Are really how HE likes to operate
HIS Miracles are our twists of fate
GOD does answer your knee mail
Always,... without fail
But in HIS own time and way
Forever true, tomorrow, yesterday, & today
So do not feel dejected
When you think your requests were rejected
HE just answers in ways,... unexpected

The Little Store In Watts

As Reginald stood in disbelief before the small local “ mom and pop “ grocery on the corner of what is now among the seediest neighborhoods in Watts, L.A. An emotional storm raged within him.

How many years of his life had he spent within this tiny little store that was once his very home. You see “ Reggie “ as he is known by all, grew up with his family

Owning and operating this store, while he actually lived with his divorced Grandfather in the apartment above.

Reginald Williams was born in the autumn of 1947 to loving parents.

His mother Abigail Turner was a true old fashioned southern belle from rural Georgia about an hours drive south of Atlanta. What Reggie remembered most of her, was her beauty, patience, and southern charm. How she had insisted upon proper social graces, respect for GOD, and country, and good old fashioned manners at all times.

One of Reggie’s favorite memories of his mother was when she informed him that a gentlemen never swears or reveals to others what it is that would cause him to have an out of character outburst in the first place.

“Even if he has a mouthful of it” she added.

Oh how Reggie had laughed when he realized that his prim and proper mother, the very guardian of proper behavior was referring to the word “ dung “ he laughed so hard that both of his sides ached and tears had formed in his eyes.

“ What did I just say young man?” his mother sharply responded to her son.

Then she reminded him of her lesson “ I said even if you have a mouthful of it, you will never say it !” Reggie’s laughter stopped as abruptly as it had begun.

You see he Loved her so, and the memory of this event turned sad in Reginald’s mind.

As he remembered the sadness he felt inside in that moment for upsetting her.

He remembered just how weak she had looked, and how afraid her appearance had made him.

Even at 9 years of age in the year 1956, Reggie understood that his wonderful mother was not long for this world. His mother had fought the good fight, she lasted and hung on longer than almost anyone thought that she could. Just before Reggie’s tenth birthday the Tuberculosis claimed her.

That is when Reggie moved into the apartment above the store with his paternal grandfather. His father Manuel Williams was lost to war while serving the nation proud in the U.S. Marine Corps in Korea summer of 1953.

Reggie always felt a little guilty that he had no real memory of his father. Most especially during all those times while growing up with his Grandfather and uncle Perez his fathers older brother, in the grocery store as they told him all about his father.

The Williams men all had the proud tradition of serving in the U.S. Marine Corp.

Grandfather in the first war, uncle Perez during the second, as the world wars were referred too in the endless conversations about serving in them, between the Williams men, while they worked their days away in the family owned and operated grocery store.

And of course Reginald’s father himself had served and given the ultimate sacrifice upon the alter of freedom in Korea.

Looking back Reggie could clearly see that his Grandfather and uncle had to have been afraid for him after the loss of both of his parents because neither of them ever allowed him to be a child again. They made a collective effort to pile on the work and adult responsibilities along with accountability for his actions from the very moment he had arrived at the store permanently to stay upon his mothers passing.

Thinking on it, Reggie was sure that some type of conversation between his mother and grandfather for not only his physical care but also to his emotional well being had been arranged in advance. Perhaps mother had hung on so valiantly just to be sure that all was going to be done just as she wished for things to be done with her son?

Maybe that is why seeing this store in the hands of outsiders hurt him so, while in reality it should only have had a small sting of regret? Reggie wondered to himself as he prepared himself to enter inside like an adventurer into his own families past, as he was ready to step inside the old store that he had grown up in.

Reggie was remembering the endless hours of his initial job of the stores innovatory. How at ten years of age grieving and afraid for his future, he had to not only write down what needed to be ordered, but to actually know and understand what items were selling and should be increased, and what other items were slow movers, and of course what product could be eliminated entirely from stock. Reggie smiled as he whispered out loud; “ It worked mom, gramps, you all kept me so busy that I did not have the time to feel sorry for myself and get into mischief.”

Then a loud motorcycle raced through the red light with it's hollowed out exhaust cackling in protest as the biker powered away, drawing Reggie back to the here and now from his cherished memories of yesterday.

Today is Sept 28th 1985.

" Oh Gramps how I still miss you." Reggie thought, while his mood darkened in the simmering anger he still held for uncle Perez.

" How could he ?" Reggie wondered while looking up at the sign above the double sliding glass entrance doors for the store.

Wong,... is just wrong.

Screamed the concealed rage in Reggie's brain.

Wong Convenience Stop is what the sign actually read.

Open daily 8-8 that is except for Sundays, on which the store remained closed.

Just in case you care to know about such mundane details!

Reggie was still half looking at the Wong grocery sign and also half remembering that dreadful day of over five years back now, while out in the pouring rain at the cemetery just after Gramps funeral.

The moment when Uncle Perez had crushed all of Reggie's dreams of ever returning home.

He sold it, the grocery store that is.

Uncle Perez had retired himself and had sold the store because his own two daughters were now long married and each had moved away, and they were quite uninterested in retaining and operating the old market in a terrible neighborhood.

Uncle Perez could see the pain and anger behind Reggie's eyes, but as his mother had instructed him years before, he would contain his feelings deep down inside.

Uncle Perez reminded Reggie; that at that time, he still had a few years to go in the Marine Corp in order to reach his own active duty retirement.

The combined loss of the family store there in the pouring rain made the loss of Gramps that much worse in Reggie's heart. Quite literally all of Reginald's remaining family was laid to rest on that dreary GOD forsaken day. He was alone.

Taking in a deep breath outside the store as the flood of feelings and memories began to crest inside Reggie's heart and soul, he knew there was no way he could walk away. That is without going inside and seeing what had become of his home.

Reginald stepped on the old fashioned pressure switch black rubber mat that was supposed to activate and trigger the doors to swing open. Nothing.

Reggie's was disgusted to have to pull open for himself the heavy safety glass door by hand. How can the new owners of his store ever expect little old ladies or small children to be able to pull open that heavy door! Reggie's mind screamed inside.

Then in a nano second another memory raced past his minds internal checkered flag and with it's victory won, it had Reggie's complete undivided attention.

The memories of how these doors were installed in the first place. You see these doors were originally just plain old shop doors.

The old fashioned kind that swung inward complete with a ringing bell that tinkled each time the door opened and closed. Reggie still remembered the difference in the tone of the bell. Uncle Perez had pointed that out to him, just how there was a very slight audible difference between when the bell was struck by the door if it was opened from the inside, as in someone leaving the store, or it being struck from the outside by someone entering.

Reggie had smiled and said “ Yeah uncle I can hear the difference ! “

As a much younger uncle Perez demonstrated by swinging the door open and shut.

“ Sure you do kid-o “ Uncle Perez had said mockingly calling the young Reginald’s bluff, while messing up his hair by rubbing the top of his head as uncle smiled and walked away.

“ But trust me, you keep on listening and you’ll get it. “

Meaning the difference in the sound of the bell, and Reggie did. One day about a year later it just clicked, even though there was seemingly no difference at all in the sound but there was.

Just one of those things unexplainable that the good Lord has seen to that we can instinctively comprehend when we learn to listen without listening.

The image shifted in Reggie’s mind as his memories waltzed by dancing together in the rhyme of passing time.

The doors with their glass smashed out, the store looted, and gutted, finally fully burned out. He was remembering the Watts riots of 65 of course.

Reggie had just turned 18 and he foolishly went downstairs and stood his ground behind the entrance doors locking them and desperately searching for anything that he could prop up against them. Grandfather had tried his best over and over to drag him from the store repeatedly telling him that lives were more important than the material, that we have insurance, it's not worth it. Young Reggie had opened the door and in the only act of rebellion he ever expressed to Gramps, Reginald pushed Gramps outside and locked the door behind him.

Gramps never even turned around. He already knew exactly what Reggie was going to do. Fortunately most of the rioters were caught up in pillaging and poaching property, not in pummeling people.

But Reggie; in a mass hysteria brawl had drawn a line and made a dare for anyone to cross. They did of course, seemingly the entire city at once.

The rioters flowed like a tide from one building to the next. Police you say,... no way.

Not until this forest fire had raged and consumed much of the under brush.

Meaning what the average person, the little guy had.

Many small family business's overnight were reduced to mere memories of ash.

It was Gramps.

He patient and cool, having been through many battles before in WW1, simply walked slowly right back in through the now shattered doors and picked up the unconscious Reggie and carried him for over 6 blocks to uncle Perez's home.

It was located just outside the danger zone. At 67 years young Gramps would never admit it, but his poor back was never the same after that night, but it was worth it.

Gramps and uncle Perez repeatedly had told Reggie that all would be fine. After all they were insured, and the city was busy banging on their door begging them to rebuild and be a vital part of rebuilding the neighborhood.

The city of LA had given them so many grants, discounts, tax breaks, and incentives, that along with the insurance money, not only was the store and the apartment above it restored to almost brand new, for their buildings structure was as sound as the dollar in those days.

That in the end Gramps was financially much better off than before.

But it was time, events happen in our lives that just set things into motion.

Just as Reggie's mothers passing had brought him into the store. The burning of the original store book ended that portion of Reggie's life. He graduated high school and worked his shift as manager at the newly refurbished store the next day.

Oh How those shiny new automatic doors had impressed him. Reggie secretly enjoyed watching the children play at those doors. Stepping on the shinny new black rubber matt and open the doors would swing !

The only store in the neighborhood with such doors ! Even Reggie had to admit that before the riot they owned a small mom and pop shop, after the rebuilding the shop was transformed into a fancy supermarket.

Modern and convenient, nearly double in size due to the old TV repair business that used to be right next door. It was also burned out and was quietly sold to Gramps for a song and dance.

After all what was it really worth at this point?
It would be a heap of responsibility just to clean up the debris. Meaning not only was the family store much expanded and bigger and better than ever.
But they also had another apartment above with actual paying renters. Gramps never had it so good.

That day Reggie knew.
Like I said; it was time.
All was right again with the world, and it was now or never for Reggie.

After work Reggie went for a walk.
One that would take him the next 20 plus years to complete. Reggie walked straight downtown, well he walked to the bus stop ! Then rode downtown !

Right to the United States Marine Recruitment center.
Where for the next chapter of his life the USMC was to be his home.

Reggie walked right in and shook hands with the man behind the desk.
Then he promptly informed him what it would take to get his signature on the dotted line. Reggie drove a hard bargain, the chiseled stone faced Marine recruiter thought to himself. He rose with his immaculate dress blue uniform and said “ Excuse me for a moment son, I will have to make a couple of phone calls for you. “

The Marine Sargent left the small room that was plastered on almost every square inch with posters detailing life in the Corps. Reggie paid no “anymind” as his southern mother used to say, when we think of the phrase that he gave to the recruitment posters no thought at all.

From somewhere in the back of the office Reggie could overhear an old rotary style telephone being dialed.

Then he heard bits and pieces, fragments of a conversation about him. To that,... Reggie did give some of his mind!

He overheard the recruiter explain on the phone that the man insisted on leaving today right away. Silence as whomever the man was talking to on the other end of the phone was speaking.

Then the recruiter said “ No, I don’t think he is in any type of trouble just eager to begin.”

Followed later by;

“Yes, I think it is no threat that if we do not move quickly that he will enlist in the Army.”

“OK,... Yes sir. That solves the problem does it not, killing two birds with one stone.”

“Thank-You sir. “

Then their was silence and the sound of approaching footsteps from down a long corridor. “ Your in luck troop.”

“We have an enlistment scheduled to leave from San Diego at 0400 hours.” “He has come down with the chicken pox and has to be delayed. It has been confirmed by our doctors.” “That gives us an open seat on the bus for you.”

“My superior does wish for me to legally inform you that if any felony charges come to our attention that you are trying to hide from, that you will be discharged and handed directly over to the proper authorities. “

“ No charges sir, I’m clean.” Reggie responded.

“ Good,... good.” The Marine Recruiter answered then he added.

“ Don’t call me sir, call me Sargent I work for a living.”

“ Yes Sargent.” Reggie replied.

“ OK “ the Sargent said while extending his hand to Reggie,

“ Welcome to the United States Marine Corps.”

“ Time for your papers and oath, and may GOD have mercy on your soul !”

“ The Recruiter finished with his first smile to Reggie.

Reggie started off by serving two tours in Nam; one hot, one not.

As in combat.

The first as a young enlisted man in action.

The second as a Sargent in a marshaling training area.

Oh a couple of skirmishes here and there on the second tour,

But nothing like the first, knee deep in the swamps everyday playing cat and mouse games against Charlie with deadly consequences.

Reginald Williams learned first hand while serving his nation in the Marine Corps that Honor must be ever vigilant, for evil never sleeps.

There is no point of us discussing any of the commendations that he received, even the very special one that pertains to Valor. Because as you already know, Reggie's momma brought him up to keep his peace. Reggie would be put off if we gave him the proper recognition that he so richly deserves. Let's just say there are more than a few complete families today that would not be. That is complete, without Reggie.

Reggie did not like the look of things, and we are not just talking about the arrangement of the store goods, but rather the sudden appearance of two young hoodlums who just entered the store. This fact was also noticed by the new shop keep as well, as Reggie saw her eyes lift from her clipboard that she was holding onto, the fore mentioned trouble in the form of the two bandits were clearly headed straight for the cash register. Straight at the lady standing behind the counter.

Lucky for her these two numbskulls have not a clue at what they are doing Reginald was thinking to himself, because they did not even take the time to recon their prey as his

military training kicked in while he was already quickly approaching in a low crouch down the opposing aisle of cookies and salty snacks. Two bags of kettle chips for a buck were on special that day. Behind the counter was the approximately 35 year old pretty oriental store keep with the beautiful long black hair neatly twisted up in a French braid that ran all the way down her back. Seated behind her on an old metal stool was her son. About ten or twelve and of mixed heritage, half of him his mothers oriental, and the other half black. He seemed to have noticed his mother's awareness of impending danger as he stood quickly and placed himself at her side directly behind the cash register.

"Just give us the money." Thug one in the long winter Army over coat said while pointing his gun directly at the young man being held protectively by his mother behind the counter.

"Lookey at what we have here " Said Thug number two in the leather jacket with the skull and cross bones black bandana upon his head.

"Yeah I have seen this miserable half breed before." Thug one replied to Thug number two.

"Maybe we should just do him a favor and put him out of his misery." Thug two continued. However fortunately for the scared out of her wits store owner and her brave young son, Thug number one never got the chance to respond to his partner in crime.

Corn.

It was the creamed variety to be exact that sailed through the air and made a resounding thud creaming the head of Thug one with the gun in his hand.

He never knew what had hit him as he landed on the concrete floor already unconscious. Thug two was stunned and turned in the general direction of the tossed corn When in a flash of movement he caught the full force of Reggie's hand to hand combat thrust uppercut under his

chin. The blow lifted Thug two instantly off of his feet and deposited him also quite incapacitated on the floor beside his counter part.

It happened so fast that it took both Cara which means precious jewel in Vietnamese and her son Chau which means precious stone of the Wong family, the store's new owners at least that is to Reggie, to comprehend what had just happened.

It took the police far longer to leave the store than the ambulance that carried the now in custody would be robbers. With statements of investigation, and endless forms of paperwork Cara was not only concerned about the loss of time and revenue, but also what today's attempted robbery would do to the already very fragile reputation of the store. When with a pang of regret she had to remind herself to thank the Lord and the strange man that both she and Chau were now safe.

That GOD had brought this saving Angel into the premises at exactly the right moment of time. A chill ran down her spine as she had a uncontrollable thought or two about what could have happened had the tall lean man with the Marine Corps T-shirt on had not been there.

Finally as the last two police officers were leaving, one a black male, and the other a white female, the lady cop spoke to her partner as they were exiting the door;

"Creamed by a can of corn !"

" I know too funny." the tall male officer replied as they walked out.

As the police left the store Cara approached Reggie. She had not a clue as to what she could say in order to thank him.

That is when her strength finally failed her.

She simply latched onto Reggie and broke down.

Trying not to cry only made it worse.

" Thank-You mister.' She repeated time and again.

It was Reggie who sensed that until she got these feelings out of the way and let herself go, that she would not be able to regain her composure.

Reggie hugged her and said “ It’s all right ma’am, it’s all over now.”

Even Chau approached and placed his arms around both his mother Cara and Reggie. It was a moment. One that just happens to people even to complete strangers who have a connection through events of great tragedy or nearly averted tragedy.

“ Hi my name is Reggie and this is my store.”

He announced to the Wong’s.

The blank stares upon each Cara and Chau’s faces made Reggie add;

“ Well it used to be, I grew up here.”

“ Oh, you are a member of the Perez Williams family ?”

Cara asked.

As she remembered who had sold the store to her family about five years back.

In fact it is not uncommon still today that from time to time, for Perez to stop by and just chat for a while to Cara or Chau, or to anyone else that happens to be in the store!

Surprised but yet not surprised Reggie answered,

“ Yes my uncle, but I lived here upstairs with my Gramps as a young man.”

The attraction was instant for Reggie, as he had developed a keen sense of appreciation, of well how to say, in Nam Reginald developed a fancy for oriental ladies.

It was more than just their appearance; it was also their bearing and manners.

Even though oriental women behaved quite differently, it was also the very same in respect, dignity, and in emotional control as his dear mother.

With all the excitement earlier Reggie had not noticed until just this very moment how beautiful Cara truly was. That thought flared up a tiny jealous protest deep in his mind as he recalled that she now owned his store. Reggie pushed that thought aside.

Later Reggie would be astounded to learn that Cara had to push aside some bad thoughts, feelings, and prejudices about of all things, U.S. Marines, to even talk to him in the first place. She had disliked Reggie immediately when he had entered her store.

The man with the military bearing, haircut, and Marine Corps T-shirt.

You see Cara has had more than a few tough experiences of her own:

April 28th 1975 Saigon, Vietnam.

Chaos that is the word.

Hundreds if not thousands of loyal Vietnamese were crammed into the American embassy as America's pull out of Vietnam was nearing completion.

The city was crumbling and the fear of retribution by communist forces upon the families of those who had fought for freedom, was the driving force amongst those promised safe passage to the good ole US of A.

Desperation was in the air as it became more clear with each passing day, that it was just simply impossible to air lift out everyone who had been promised a way out. It was both heartbreaking and humbling to the American service men and women.

It was quite simply life or death for many Vietnamese loyal to America.

Cara's father had attended college in France, and was just fortunate enough that the French university required a foreign language in order to graduate.

He could have taken the easy way out and fell back upon his native tongue for that credit, but wisely he realized with the war going badly for the French in his homeland and with their cry for help to the United States, he understood that learning to speak English and later the decision to serve as a translator would be very useful.

In the end it saved their lives.

Well not quite,

It put his family into a position that by a twisting turn of events that led to the saving of his family.

Let me explain, you see the Wong family that is what was left of it, were among the thousands inside the embassy awaiting the fulfillment of the promise to be evacuated. After years of endless war all that was left of Cara's family was her father, one Grandmother and herself. Just three. Cara now at twenty five years old had already lost her mother and two brothers, and not to mention Ai who was to be her husband, along with almost all of her relatives.

Her engagement had ended tragically shrouded in mystery. She could never prove it, but she believes either American or NVA assonated her future husband as a spy. She would like to believe it was the enemy, but on the day it happened a team of special forces sharp shooters were known to be in the area.

Did they make a mistake ?

Or were they just overzealous ?

Or were they in fact totally innocent ?

Only GOD knew the answer to that question.

There was no chance.

That is of the Wong family going to be whisked away and taken to the land of dreams and opportunity. Cara's father had his promise of extraction, but simply put he was just not high enough, not considered to be important enough to be moved up on the list and flew out on one of the few remaining choppers.

Then it happened.

More tragedy upon young Cara that turned out to be the biggest Blessing of her life.

A U.S. Marine inside the embassy had stalked, isolated, and then perpetrated an unspeakable crime upon her.

After, when she emerged it crushed her father to the point that amongst throngs of human beings in a panic, he just knelt down and held Cara all night crying with and for her, and for everything the war had done to them.

A broken man at the end of his hope, not rope, for their lifeline had already been cut.

However Cara's Grandmother was another story.

She sought out the big cheese and shred him.

She demanded justice and she wanted it yesterday!

She wanted a firing squad.

What she got was a quick chopper flight out of Saigon to the U.S.S. Enterprise and later a quick relocation to L3,...

You know; Lady Liberty Land.

Of course thirty seconds after the chopper doors had shut the Colonel in charge of the evacuation dropped the Wong complaint papers on the floor amongst the thousands of pages of documents strewn about the place.

That is how Chau Wong had come to be in this world.

But he was Loved deeply by his family.

After all, there were just the four of them in a strange and wonderful land. Grandmother Wong ended up out living her son, Cara's father. But by the time Reggie had saved Cara and Chau on that fateful day, those two were the only members of the Wong family yet alive.

Oh, Uncle Sam had finally made good to Cara's father in the end. The government had compensated him for his service and losses just enough so that he could purchase the local store from one Mr. Perez Williams.

And that is the story of how Cara and Chau Wong came to be the owners of Reggie's little store in Watts L.A.

As she stood there talking to Reggie about their lives on that fateful day after the robbery attempt, Cara astounded herself when she offered to cook dinner for him.

Reggie astounded himself when he heard himself saying yes to her offer. Cara was even more special than Reggie had imagined. She worked every evening preparing food for those in need. Her charitable work in the Christian mission just a block away from the store was heart touching and very necessary for many a folk. For some it was the only hot meal a day that they got to eat.

Within a week Reggie was working for Cara in the store. Within a month he was living in the same upstairs apartment alone that he had shared with Gramps for all of those years before.

Within two months they “ Cara and Reggie “ were an item. Within a year they were married.

Today it is Chau and his young wife who live upstairs in that very same apartment.

Chau is the store manager, and it is his young Italian wife who manages him!

Ong,... Reginald and Cara’s son together whose name in Vietnamese means Grandfather or Gramps in the Wong/Williams household, is a proud member of the U.S.Navy Reserves, and has decided to transfer his enlistment to active duty as an officer for the U.S. Coastguard, once his degree in electronics is complete at Cal Tech.

No one in the family has any measure of a doubt,...
about,...
the not so subtle work of GOD.

In Reggie and Cara's lives through each circumstance, coincidence, and happenstance that GOD had brought them together as a family. Right in the very same little store in Watts.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

You

(For our Jr.High Sunday school class)

Over the next few years
You will experience
Much change, some laughter
And a few tears

At times with all of the change
You may feel lost
But never forget that Jesus
Loved you enough, to die for you
Upon the cross

Remember to always hold onto
What your parents, church, and family
Gave to you, in order to grow
For this I know

Society and so-called friends
Will tell you
That it's not cool
To live by GOD'S Rules

But don't be dismayed
And never be afraid
Because it will take courage and character
To stand against peer pressure

Hold onto what you know to be true
After all what you believe in
Is what makes you,...you

Confess to the I.R.S.

“ Dad are you gonna get that or not ?! “

The flustered woman in her early sixties was saying to her father as his black old fashioned Ma Bell rotatory style telephone finally went silent.

“ Guess not. “ He said.

“ Don’t give me that baloney pops you didn’t even try !’

In many ways Donna’s father now nearly ninety was more spry than she was with her bad knees from a lifetime of walking rounds upon many a cold hard hospital floor. Donna’s Dad these days did employ the use of a cane, but Donna was pretty sure that he had only taken to carrying the cane around only to shake it and threaten all the teenagers with it who had it coming, due to their misfortune of playing basketball on the paved asphalt court that sat a mere twenty feet away from the park bench by the pond that her dad spent most of his time making small talk with just about everyone that crossed his path.

Including that family of ducks that called the pond home. The ducks would squat on that bench and raise a fuss for their daily bread if her dad was ever more than five minutes late.

Donna checked in on her “ Pops “ a few times a week and called him at 7PM each and every day. And Yes dear reader pops did answer that call. He had too, or he would have an impromptu visit from Donna and then get her wrath and empty threats yet again.

“ You better answer my call pops , you know that I don’t like you living here all alone. “

Even though he lived in a small two room retirement efficiency apartment by the park,
As their only child Donna could not help but to worry and Pray for him living all alone.

Donna's mother, Pops wife had " run off with the Lord " as pops likes to say it, a little over ten years prior by now, and daughter Donna just could not ever get a handle on her father being all alone. He, pops that is, had always been the type of a man that a woman had to take care of. It was just in his nature. Donna never would understand that pops had found another woman to look in on him and to care for him. It was her !

Fortunately Pops was also one of these.
You know; the one in a million that never seem to age on the inside and are capable of independent living all of their days. By GOD's good Grace may we all be so fortunate.

The old style phone began to ring again.
" My goodness Donna thought, how loud those actual mechanical ringing bells used to be. "

Well are, that is in Pop's case !

" Hello? " Donna said.

" Stern residence? " The man on the other end of the line inquired.

Pop's had extended the cane in an effort to block Donna from answering the telephone as she brushed past him and his mutterings.

" Let it ring, what is the matter with people calling me all hours of the day or night."

Pop's was about to complain some more as the color drained from Donna's face telling him that this call was important.

" Yes,... Mr ? eh,... I'm sorry could you repeat your name again please ? " Donna said.

" Yes sir , we will be there , I know where the federal building is, 9 AM sharp."

Pop's shook his head in astonishment that his daughter Donna was nodding her head in agreement as if the man on the other end of the line could see her shaking her head in agreement with him.

" Thank-you we are looking forward to meeting you. "

" Have a good day and May GOD Bless. "

Donna said as she hung up the old style telephone.

" What have you done now Pops ! " Donna demanded.

" What are you talking about D ? "

" The I.R.S. Pop's, the I.R. S. !"

At exactly 9:05 the next morning Donna and Pop's were escorted into the I.R.S.agent's office for an interview.

" Just what on Sams Hill are we doing here today Mr.I.R.S. man ! "

Pop's demanded before the agent even shut his office door. The secretary walking past in the hall way made eye contact with the agent and rolled her eyes with a big smile.

Donna cringed inside thinking why did she even bother, as she remembered the fine lecture that she had given to her father all the way down here in her car, the re-cap of that conversation in the elevator, and the quick reminder for him to be on his best behavior and to let her do all the talking in the waiting area at the reception desk.

“ Good Morning to you too !
Mr.I.R.S. said, coffee anyone ?”

Mr.I.R.S.must have noticed the look of panic in Donna’s eyes as he in passing, gently patted her on the shoulder letting her know that he understood her situation.
Pops had taken notice and was immediately ticked off.
First bureaucratic nonsense and now this man clearly has the “ hots “ for his daughter Donna. The man can’t keep his hands off of her ! Pop’s thought to himself.

Then somewhere deep down Pops thought well maybe, if he does think she’s cute maybe that will get me some slack in whatever trouble he thinks I am in.
So Pop’s leaned over to whisper in Donna’s ear as he spoke out loud forgetting that not everyone had hearing as bad as his.

“ We might be Ok D, ole 007 here has his eye on you. “

Donna did not know what to say but thankfully Mr.I.R.S. did.

“ Actually it is you that I have my eye on sir. “

“ I asked you down here today to go over a few things on your most current 10-40. “

“ What about my 10-40 chief ? What concern is that of yours, I am retired now you know. ? “ Pop’s said.

“ Yes sir and that is what caused the problem, the computer rejected your tax filing sir, you see only the interest that you made on your savings was reportable as income.”

“ Your pension and social security retirement are all exempt.”

“ It’s just,…”

It’s just what sonny , uncle sam needs a bigger piece of my pie ? “ Pop’s interrupted.

“ Sorry, what is the problem sir ? “

Donna stepped in while silencing her father by giving him the evil eye at the same time.

“ Your fathers deductions to offset any tax upon the interest he accrued upon his savings Ma’am, shall we say, that they,... were unusual to say the least.”

Donna took a deep breath before she asked her father just what on Heavens earth could he have possibly written down as tax deductions that had garnered so much attention.

“ I don’t know, can’t remember that far back. “ Pop’s answered D.

“ Ice cream. “ Mr. IR.S. said

“ Excuse me? “ Donna replied.

“ Your father wrote off ten thousand dollars worth of ice cream as a legitimate deduction Ma’am. “

“ The Ice Cream is Legitimate ! “ Pop’s said rather loudly.

Donna thought that this was it, the moment in which she would have to face the fact that Pops could no longer continue to live by himself.

“ Sir your consumption of ice cream, no matter how fond of it that you may be, can not be a legitimate tax exclusion. Mr. I.R.S. said in a very gentle manor as he too was begging to doubt Pop’s rationality.

“ I know that you silly little man, tell me, were you always so dumb or is that something the commie pinko’s taught you in college ? “ Pop’s blurted out.

“ Ok I have heard enough. “ Mr. I.R.S. said while making a head notion to Donna to take her father from his office.

“ I will eh need you to sign a few papers Miss.”

The agent was speaking in code to Donna to let her know that once she had removed

“ Pop’s “ from the room that she should return so they could resolve the issue at hand.

“ I gave it to Dorthy. “ Pops said.

Donna froze at the mention of her daughter’s name of Dorthy.

“ What is that about Dorthy Pop’s ? “

“ I said I gave the ten grand to Dorthy.” Pop’s repeated.

“ After. “

“ Go on, after what Pop’s “ Donna prodded her father.

“ After that useless, spoiled, pilot husband of hers ran off with that flyng floozie, the stewardess from New Orleans last spring. “

“ You know the good book says that we are to forgive, is it wrong for me to wish for them to crash in the artic and survive with nothing but Bermuda shorts and sandals ?! “

“ Wait, what about Dorthy Pops and the ten thousand dollars the I.R.S. really needs to know. “

“ She would not take it, she said that I needed the money to live on in my retirement. “

“ So I did the next best thing. “

Pops said as Mr. I.R.S. was all ears now that money was being discussed.

“ What Pop’s, what did you do.? Donna again asked her father.

“ Dorthy wanted that little ice cream stand down by the park where I live, I offered to buy it for her so that she could rebuild her life again.”

“ But of course she said no.”

“ The bank also said no, so I went down and talked to Marge the loan officer, you know she has handled my accounts for years, and we came up with a plan that the bank agreed upon and one that Dorthy does not know about. “

“ I pay for ice cream from Dorthy’s custard stand every day for the retirement apartments and for the kids that visit the park.

Dorthy thinks it is the city, it is billed through the city, but it is my account that pays for it.

Ten thousand dollars a year the same as the interest I get on my life savings.

To Marge and the bank, that standing ice cream order along with Dorthy's regular customers guarantees business for the amount of her loan.

That and my agreement in writing using my savings account as collateral guaranteeing that the bank gets repaid from my account if the ice cream stand fails.

“ Whoa wait a minute. “ Mr.I.R.S. says, “ you say that you are donating to charity every day, Ice cream ? “

“ Yes sir I guess that I am. “ Pops says.

“ Huh,... that is legitimate, a true charitable deduction. “

The stunned looks upon each Mr.I.R.S. and Donna's faces said it all, as Pop's rose from his seat and never one to miss an opportunity, he shook his cane in the air at each of them while he said;

“ If either of you two numbskulls ever breathes a word about this to Dorthy; Ice Cream will be the least of your worries ! “

But when you give to someone in need,
don't let your left hand know what your
right hand is doing. ⁴ Give your gifts in
private, and your Father, who sees
everything, will reward you.

Matthew 6:3-4 (NLT)

Only Love
Can heal or kill
Strengthen or tear apart
Any heart
Wound or consume
Any soul
And yet we try
With all our might
But only GOD
Gets it right

I Do

Raymond had understood that his marriage to Patricia or “Pat” as he called her, had been a little rocky these last few years, but when he was served with her divorce papers at the fire station he was completely caught off guard. His mind literally swooned as his surroundings swirled inside his vision. Nauseas in his stomach as he thought this can’t possibly be real.

“When I find out who the prankster is that thought this would be funny I am really going to make them pay !”

Raymond actually said those words aloud as he paused while washing his fire engine. You see the firemen and women of engine 33 were always trying to one up each other with their in house practical jokes.

Take last week for instance, the newbie, as in rookie Jake, he, had been had.

It was Raymond himself who called the rooks wife and they all had played him as the fool. Trisha one of the two drivers assigned for engine 33, had put one of her under garments into the rookies gear bag as he cycled out to go home on his off days.

Then they all just waited.

You know, for the call from the helpless rookie for them to please explain to his wonderful wife that it was all just a joke. The young man was in such a panic that they did not have the heart to carry out that prank any further. They fessed up, they all did, even the rooks wife !

So that is why Raymond thought that this must be a joke. It had to be. A payback from the rookie and everyone else must be in on it.

Sad to say for Raymond and his soon to be ex-wife Patricia, this was no laughing matter. It was the real deal, divorce with a capitol D.

It was a real shame to for these previous two love birds had been together for over thirteen years. Three while still in high school and ten more as their lives together had begun.

Patricia left him.

Not that they each had lost any feelings for each other. He loved her madly, it was just the fact that Pat clearly understood by now that she would always be number two or three in the priorities of Raymond's life at that time. She could not continue to go on forever living that way. She had tried and cried and Prayed for years now, Patricia just was not made by GOD to live without a deep personal connection with her mate.

She had tried everything possible and imaginable to make him understand that she needed more from him. In turn he had tried everything conceivable to make her understand that every moment he spent away from her doing all of the extra little things to advance his carrier was for her, to secure their future together.

They were each still in Love with the person that they thought they knew from their past together, while in the reality of everyday living they grew further and further apart.

To put it mildly their divorce had caught Ray completely unprepared and emotionally he shattered as he watched his whole world fall to pieces.

Misery, loneliness, self-denial, depression, helplessness, you name it, Raymond had them all. Needless to say that his life went into a tailspin.

Before he crashed and burned his friends, really now his only family, that of engine 33 demoted him.

Get that ?

No one in the firehouse had the authority to make Raymond do anything that he did not wish to do. He was their engine chief.

They begged, prodded, and pleaded with him to switch jobs with old Rick for just a while. Rick was the former engine chief and on the short list for retirement.

He had given the high pressure job up to Raymond a couple of years back and took over as the number one pumper position.

“ Please Raymond. “

Rick had finally asked as the entire station had an intervention with Ray in private.

“ You’ve lost her, do you want to loose us as well? ”

“ You’ve worked so hard and long.”

“ Just switch with me until your head and heart clears son.”

It had been years since Rick referred to Raymond as son. Rick had taken to calling Reggie Chief even before he vacated the actual position to Ray.

That did it.

Raymond stepped down temporarily as engine chief until he got his life back into order.

Ray clearly understood that his colleagues only had his best interest at heart but deep down Raymond only seen the move as more failure in his life.

First my wife and now my career Raymond's heart cried as it endlessly bled.

Good thing that Raymond had some Faith.

But that was just it, all that Ray had left in order to hang on was to blame GOD for it all.

The anger and resentment was easier to pin upon the Lord making it all HIS fault rather than he trying to pick up the shattered pieces of his life and beginning to try and move on.

Raymond's doctor had wanted to place him on anti-depressants but with his job requiring a commercial driving license the prescriptions were out of the question.

To make matters worse it was the poor doctor who is a mutual friend of both Ray and Pat, that had the misfortune of having to be the one to inform Ray, that Patricia had met another and was planning to remarry.

" Oh " was all that Ray could say.

Deep down he had always felt that his runaway bride would come back to him.

It had been a little over two years by now and everyone was well aware that Ray had never been quiet the same since Pat had done what she felt she had to do in her own life.

Just the fact the Raymond still did not clearly see and understand the entire picture even after two years time, was a stark reminder that Ray and Pats relationship was doomed from the beginning.

Yet Raymond's torch for Patricia still burned brightly for all to see.

Raymond did hear the rumors about town that Pat had to move up their wedding date because her father had taken terminally ill. Ray felt for Pat as his memories of himself

not being there for her as much as he should have been when Pat's mother, a really decent hard working woman was suddenly and tragically taken by a drunk driver.

It happened right when Ray was taking his exams and field test's for his Chief promotion.

Maybe I should have postponed until the next cycle as his heart had told him to do. Raymond thought to himself, maybe I would still be married he could not help to wonder. But the simple truth was when Pat had said that having him around half heartedly with his mind on what he was missing was way worse than not having him home with her at all. Ray made his usual choice of putting his career first.

Raymond did feel genuinely bad about that, he had always gotten along very well with Pats family; truth is he missed them all very much. He considered visiting Pats dad or even making a call. But was unsure of how he would be received.

Then it finally happened.

One day as Raymond entered the post office he stood face to face alone with Patricia.

“ Hello Raymond, I have been Praying for you, for your peace of mind. “ Pat said.

“ Thank-you Pat. “

Ray stuttered as the blood ran from his face and a chill ran up and down his spine.

Patricia knowing him so very well noticed right away his body language of hurt and the tears welling up in his eyes.

“ I never meant to hurt you Ray, it's just that I could not continue to live as we were. “

Patricia said.

“ I Know,... I know, “ Raymond stammered.

Then he added;

“ I am sorry to hear about your father,... and I am sorry for everything. “

As a single tear dropped from his left eye that he quickly wiped away.

Patricia pretended not to notice as she said.

“ I know that you are Ray. “

Then Pat added :

“ Please Ray, try to move on, you are a good man with a bright future ahead of you, we just had our time. “

Ray felt a little better, Patricia always had a knack for saying things in a way to him that he could always understand. So he bit the bullet and said it.

For all of Raymond's faults being a coward was not one of them.

“ I hear that you are getting re-married ? “
It was each a statement and a question.

“ Yes Raymond I am. “ Pat replied.

“ Are you happy, you know really happy ? “

Raymond had to look away from her eyes with that question but each his heart, mind, and soul, needed to know.

“ Yes Raymond I am.” Pat repeated

After a pause Ray responded :

“ I’m glad, I always only wished happiness for you. “
Ray said and it was true.

“ Thank-you. “ Pat said.

And then for some unknown reason, one that Pat would spend the next few weeks trying to figure out and never would understand she said ;

“ If you feel up to it, you are cordially invited to the wedding.
“

“ I would like for you to be there. “

She could not believe that she had just said that, Ray could not believe that she had just said that. Even worse in both of their minds was Ray’s response.

“ Maybe,... if I feel up to it. “

Why had he not politely demurred they each wondered for the next several weeks.

Finally knowing that he never could refuse her, Ray had decided to “ maybe “ show up and sit in the back just to get a little closure. But he doubted it, about either closure or going in the first place.

It was a beautiful sunny day, that of Patricia and her new husband Richards Wedding.

Why had they chosen this tiny little Church at the edge of town Raymond wondered as he was lost in thought with a million different emotions as he quietly slid into the last pew on the Brides side.

He still could not believe that he was actually here.
At the Love of his life's wedding to another man.
He must have asked himself fifty times;

“ What are you doing ? “

“ Where are you going ? “

As he shaved in the mirror just a few hours ago.

Even though they were now nearly two and a half years divorced, did he have to see her for what he felt like was one last time as his, he wondered to himself ?
Or did he just need to see her beautiful again in another Wedding dress he wondered?

But soon those thoughts all disappeared as Pat's family had taken notice of him in the last row, he could hear the whispers but not the details.
Then finally a few of them approached him and made some chatty small talk.
One rather tack-less Aunt of Pats blurted out;

“ I hear that you can not get over ole Patsy, this will do you some good Raymond.”

This Aunt had always been a bit pushy Raymond thought while her comments bruised him to the bone. He had to get away, he excused himself and went down stairs to regain his composure. As he splashed the cold water upon his face he spoke to the reflection in the bathroom mirror.

“ You've come this far, I am sick of hurting, let's finish this.”

But it was not his voice that got his attention, it was hers. It was Patricia's voice, he would know that sound anywhere. Her voice was distant and it was sad, without

thinking he followed the sound of her sorrows. Raymond paused outside the kitchen door as he listened.

“What am I going to do dad, I wanted so much for you to be able to come and walk me down the aisle.” Patricia said to her father on her cell phone.

Pat nodded and cried as she sat on the metal folding chair in her wedding dress as she continued her conversation with her fading fast father in the hospital.

“Yes dad, I promise from the bottom of my heart that we will stop and visit with you at 10 am tomorrow morning.”

Patricia’s father had insisted that the newly weds visit in the morning, he did not want to be a burden to them on their wedding day, and he was also hoping to keep the disappointment of his not being able to be there to a minimum.

For the next few minutes Raymond overheard only Pats end of her sad phone conversation.

“I don’t know what we are going to do dad?”

“But I don’t like Uncle Sam.”

“Patricia laughs, “You don’t like him either! “

“You never said that to me before! “

“But he’s your brother, you have to like him! “

“Oh Dad how can you Love someone but not like them?”

“But dad there is no one else here today that I feel close enough to who would truly know what it means to give me away, as in being able to walk me down the aisle with a sacrificial heart.”

"I so wish that you were here. "
Patricia said rather sullenly.

Pat's words trailed off in Raymond's mind as the Lord spoke to his heart informing Ray just why he had to be here today, for each Pat and her father one last time on this her wedding day.

Raymond took a deep breath and entered into the kitchen.

Here comes the bride, all dressed in white.
At the first chords on the splendid old organ as Patricia emerged a radiant vision of beauty, it was the man escorting her down the aisle that caused a collective gasp from the Brides side of the church. Loud enough that even the folks on the Grooms side knew that something was up.

That man was Raymond.

The Groom to be, had never actually met Raymond before, but he instantly knew who Ray was, his worriedly glance at Patricia was reassured by her smile and a little nod that all was fine.

When the Preacher finally asked;

"Who gives this woman "

Ray said;

"I do "

Then he added;

"Willingly for her happiness and on the behalf of her father."

There was not a single dry eye on the Brides side and not a heart untouched on the Grooms, as Raymond's shaking hand took his beloved wife's hand one last time and placed it upon Richard's arm giving her away forever to him.

Later, during the reception down below in the social hall Raymond slipped away to sit outside upon the steps in the cool evening air enjoying the sunshine as he felt like a million pounds of guilt and shame had been lifted from his soul.

It was a good day, good that he had come here today. He realized that he would always care for Patricia and that was OK, for they had some good times together. But today by the Grace of GOD, he had gotten some closure and some peace of heart, and not to mention being of some use to Patricia and her family one last time.

"That was a very beautiful thing that you did for Patsy today. "

From behind came a voice as sweet as an Angel to Raymond's ear.

Raymond had been so lost in thought, so much enjoying the release of his hearts burdens that he had not taken notice of someone else taking a seat behind him upon the Church stairs.

"Thank-You that was harder than anyone will ever know." Ray replied as he turned to see his mystery speaker.

With the sun in his eyes forcing him to squint them about half shut, but even at half shut with the sunlight streaming through her golden hair Raymond's heart skipped a beat at the vision of her Angelic beauty.

"Hi "The sweet voice said again as she reached down extending her hand to Ray.

“My name is Gloria.”

Exactly one year later to the very day, in this very same Church, Patricia's new husband Richard got to return a favor to her old husband Raymond.

Richard walked down the aisle and gave away his sister Gloria to Ray as his new bride.

Ray never again accepted the fire chief posting and as the story goes; by GOD'S Good Grace they all lived happily ever after with a lot to laugh and talk about because it is not time that heals all wounds rather Love as per Christ's example.

Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast,

it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor

others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices

with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always

trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

What would Jesus do ?
We hear that expression
Quite often today
Spoken to us
In many different ways
But the answer to that question
Should never be;
Merely human suggestion
For in Christ's darkest hour
He did not shirk
Or look for others to blame
Alone, He went into the garden
And called upon His Father's Name
JESUS Prayed,...
That is what He did do
And from Holy GOD He drew
Courage, strength, and peace
So that by Faith in His Grace
My dear friend, in your darkest hour
You can too

Our Hard Luck Story Of The Day

She laughed even harder as she said to her husband;

“ Oh you will, will you ? “

“ Yeah why not ? “

He replied as she happily embraced him.

Now, if you would; please allow me to share the inside information exchanged wordlessly between the married couple. You see the very first time, their first time, was also the very first time that they had each given in to not only their physical desires for each other, but also to their hearts.

The had walked and talked around that small lake, hand in hand for hours just getting to really know each other at their company picnic on July 4th.

The couple had discussed that “ they “ would be all the rage of conversation behind their backs for the next several weeks at work. If they only knew.

They already had been the topic of company gossip for months by now. Those two were in Love with each other and everyone knew it. Everyone except for them that is, as in admitting it to themselves and allowing their relationship a chance to grow.

All at work the next day were indeed talking about them, and most were very happy for them.

Oh the game of Love, You see at work for the last several weeks by now, they had each been pretended not to notice each other noticing , while everyone else noticed them noticing each other while pretending not too.

They each tried not to notice the feelings that had grown from at first; just being noticed by each other, and then being respected, to genuine friendship, to admiration, and finally to Love. They each had pretended that Love did not exist in their hearts.

For they had each been hurt before and neither had wanted to start a new relationship at this time in their lives. But GOD it would seem had other ideas in mind for them.

It was in that green pasture field beyond the tree's on the far south side of the lake, out of the view of the pavilion that the company had rented for the company picnic, where they had finally slipped away.

Only it was not alfalfa or even soybeans in that field. Susan was later quite miserably covered head to toe on her backside by poison ivy ! Keith did not escape completely untouched by the irritating rash, but his case was not nearly as severe as hers.

That day, their magical day, finally at last in that field; Susan confided to Keith her dreams. Keith shared with Susan his tears. They learned; That together they each could over-come all of their fears.

They would have to start again.
Fresh.
It was the only way.

Keith kept his name but he did put in for and accepted a transfer from Chicago to St.Paul. All of his family were very supportive so they as a couple could be happy and begin anew. Susan's family were ecstatic at the news, and actually already understood that it was best for her to exchange her identity. She just had never thought of changing even her

first name along with her maiden name that she had taken back after her divorce from her first husband, when she had gained her chance at freedom when he was finally mercifully brought to some form of justice and incarcerated.

Ivy.

Keith wanted for forever more to call his beloved Susan by the name of Ivy.

As a reminder of the consequences of their first day together as a couple.

He chided her for the rest of his days like the posion ivy, about how he had grown uncontrollably upon her.

She reminded him that he was nothing more than an irritating rash on her backside !

They Loved each other so, and that is the good news.

Ok my friend here is the bad;

Guess I should also fill you in on to as why; Keith and Susan, now officially forever in a new place in life, and she as a new wife, needed to be known as Ivy.

In her defense she really had not a clue as to; not only her first husband's true occupation but also to his true nature.

He was by trade a cheat and a liar, so cheating and lying to win the attention of a smitten seventeen year old as Susan was, when he stole away her affections, was sort of a challenge and a game to be won by the more mature and worldly twenty four year old street hustling drug dealer who had just made the big time.

Max had told Susan that he was a carpenter, and that he worked many strange hours for the city, as it's offices were closed at night. That being the only time the city allowed them to work in the public buildings. Once they were married the clothes he wore to work to do construction, that and his smooth hands gave away his lies to her.

Albeit much too late for Susan/Ivy's sake.

No more street hustling for Max, he had moved up the ladder and was now inside the supply side of things with his own contacts and contracts.

Even if that meant bustin' a few heads of those who had been loyal to him from day one. Yes, "Max" as he was known by all, short for Maxamillion McMillon, took out all of the very same people who had put him in, and kept him in business for the last six years of his life. He eliminated all of them without a single ounce of pity, a hint of regret, or even a whisper of mercy and took their place in a single moment.

Oh how he had dominated and controlled Susan once he had her. How he enjoyed promptly putting her in her place. Every foul deed or pressure of his existence was doubled and then disposed of upon her. She once tried to leave him, he put her in traction at Trinity Mercy Hospital for three weeks.

He visited her room only once at 2 A.M. in the morning. When she fully awoke to his pinching of her skin right where her IV port was inserted into her arm, he leaned down and said the next time you try to run, people will be visiting you at the graveyard.

He then pulled a switchblade knife from his pocket and said that maybe he should give her a reminder of his promise on her pretty little face, so that it would scar and she would remember to behave each and every time she looked in the mirror.

He tapped her nose with the blade and said;

"Don't make me, I like your face the way it is, but if I have too I will. "

Then he left.

Just how he was there within minutes upon her release from the hospital she never did know. His kind of power always found those in his need because of their greed. That is; he always paid someone off, to tip him off, on just about anything. Including Susan/Ivy.

The beatings became worse after that. Sometimes when he was using his own product, the beatings came without any provocation even in his own eyes. He was just a plain mean nasty person. And Susan,... was not, making her prime real estate to vent his rage.

She truly felt that she would soon one day die by his hand, never to be found and seen again, as he bragged to Susan/Ivy all the time about those who had dared to cross him.

Then a miracle happened. Two street thugs got pinched and they gave Max up to save their own hides.

Max then let that famous hot temper of his get himself put away. There was no evidence of course, but the jury regardless voted with their hearts and put Max behind bars for as long as they possibly could, on the only charges that the prosecution could make stick. Those of dealing and supplying. The complete disappearance of the two street hustlers arrested who had turned upon Max, even though Max was behind bars, he still reached out through his contacts and money and had them swatted like fly's.

Ten years. That was the Maximum that Max could get on the charges at hand. The Mayor took the Police Commissioner's job.

How could have those two hoods disappear from protective custody before testifying without corruption somewhere on the inside of the police department ?

The press wanted blood, they got the police chiefs.

It was not really his fault and an early retirement was to his disgrace.

Oh they had offered Max the same deal as the two pinched hoods, squeal and walk.

They had a big fish, but now they wanted a whale, Max could give them several.

He was just smart enough to go public for his own safety as in getting the word out;

He would never make any deals so just lock him away.

The media went wild when they realized that with good behavior Max could be out in as little as five years.

Susan/Ivy had to use a kind hearted public defender, who had also been through an abusive marriage herself to gain her freedom in divorce.

You see the female attorney sat in on her questioning about Max by the police, on her behalf as required by law from the state. The attorney felt compelled by GOD to help this poor kindred Soul and seen to her divorce free of charge except for the mandatory governmental cost and fee's, and that dear reader is why Susan became Ivy and relocated her entire existence, and by the Grace of GOD, she and her new family were happy and finally at peace.

Keith's story is emotionally heart breaking but by comparison to Susan/Ivy's it is tame.

He had a long engagement that ended quite bitterly.

Catching your bride to be in the arms of your best man will do that to a relationship, especially when the intimacy of their conversation that he had overheard informed Keith that this was no one off dalliance. His bride and best friend were quite familiar with each other, when he had

discovered them alone together at his mother's home while she was away on vacation. Keith had promised his Mom that he would keep an eye on the house for her. Oh did I mention the fact that his best man also happened to be his only brother?

It was the sight of his brother naked upon his knees begging for him not to tell his wife and take her away from him that each infuriated, and caused a deep feeling of pity within Keith.

"Why not, you've taken my wife away?" Keith angrily said.

"Please, please." His brother sobbed while reaching out and wrapping his arms around Keith's legs.

"Keith" She spoke, his name,... it was all now his ex-fiancée could say.

"You have a week to figure out how to come clean, because I will not be the one to bear your burden in front of your wife and children and to our mother."

"I refuse to keep that secret on my soul forever before GOD, and to others of just what, you two have dealt to me today. "

"I just,... will not, can not." Keith said as the tears rolled down his face as he reached down and scooped up all of their clothes and tossed them disgustedly to each of them.

"Go home to your wife where you belong." Keith said to his brother.

Keith paused and stared at his fiancée and never said another word to her ever again as he just turned and left.

Keith dreaded the thought of having to share the information to his mother and sister in-law that had torn his life to shreds. He prayed that an answer would present itself in the week of time that he had promised to his cheating fiancée and only brother to come clean. Two days later Keith's Prayers were answered as his former bride to be and his brother ran off together.

Then Keith did make "that" call to his soon to be ex sister-in-law and he told her everything.

That it was him who had discovered their illicit relationship. It lasted all of six months, in the end his fiancée was to be no more in any of their lives, and his brother paid dearly for his transgressions, Keith's brother lost it all.

Keith took the high road as he informed his mother that he would never make her choose between he and his brother. However that last plea from his brother for him not to tell his wife were the last words Keith and his brother spoke for nearly thirty years.

Add to that a few botched courtships, and Keith, after being hurt a few times had totally given up on the foolish notion of Love. GOD, just as of yet, did not have the opportunity to bring to him his case of posion Ivy !

Timing after all is everything, GOD had saved Keith for Susan/Ivy, for their is no other explanation.

Just so you know and understand, that it is at a large nation wide heating and cooling company that each Ivy and Keith work for.

He as a service technician and Susan/Ivy in the accounting division of the company. That is how they met and fell in Love. Quietly one day at a time while neither of them was looking for it.

Like we discussed earlier they each had accepted that transfer to St.Paul and together they begun to run a small satellite outlet for the company. She the office and he the installation and servicing of equipment.

They had exactly two employees. One a secretary who worked inside with Ivy who answered the phones and dealt with the walk in customers, while Ivy did all the scheduling, purchasing of parts, inventory of new units, payroll, taxes, billing, and all the other various important tasks such as workers comp and other state requirements. Their other employee was a young fella apprenticing and laboring under Keith's guidance.

Their lives were good together.
Their lives were sweet.

Then one day as the devil's bad luck would have it;
He found her.
Max, that is, Ivy's cruel ex.
When :

Max lay on the hotel bed furiously detailing just how he would rebuild his empire. Less than two weeks out of jail he had taken the courier job of running " product " from place to place. A lot had changed in the seven years it had taken for him to gain his parole. A lot had changed. However a lot had remained the same. Just the faces and the names were different, but the sins were the same.

Then something caught his eye, a remote feeling down in his brain caused him to focus his attention upon the television mindlessly dribbling on in the background. It took a moment but then the realization came.
It's her !
Max's mind screamed inside
Susan,... Yes it's her !!

It was her, a few years older, perhaps a few pounds heavier, hair darker and longer, but it was her face none the less. He would recognize that face anywhere, after all he had taken so much pride in all the thought and effort he had put into placing the black and blue marks upon that face without damaging it permanently. Max wondered just for a second or two about how her life had led her to a furnace company here in St. Paul, but then his cold dark heart had said no matter.

His fortune's were looking up each and every day. Fate it would seem was on his side, as he had been on the outside less than two weeks by now, and he had been approached for work without even trying to find it as of yet. Simply by his reputation alone, and that "rep" he realized was going to prove to be very useful, and now his betraying little Susie had fallen right into his hands !
Oh how he would make her pay !!
Make HER pay,...
for the last seven miserable years of his life !!!

The knock upon the door was odd for this time of day thought the nanny who sat with Keith Jr. through the week. She was busy cleaning up after Jr's lunch and soon it would be his naptime.
The nanny kept an eye on Jr. as he tentatively cracked the front door open to see who was there.

" Hello there! are your folks at home ? "
Max asked Ivy's son.

" I am an old friend of your mothers,.... Susan. "

Max said to the boy with a pause just before her name.

The small boy shook his head and then he said;

" Ivy. "

Max was thrown off for just a little bit when he realized that maybe, just maybe she had changed her name.

“ Tell me young man, is your mom from Chicago? ”

Keith Jr. silently shook his head in agreement.

“ Your Grandparents live upstairs above the L subway ? “

Keith again wordlessly shook his head.

“ Well hotdog this will be better than I ever imagined it would be. “ Max said.

Then just as Max's hand reached out for the door the nanny's face filled the screen.

“ Can I help you sir ? “

She said as something inside her warned her that this man was a rattlesnake.

“ Just stopped by to see my dear old friend Sus,... I mean Ivy. “ He said.

“ No-one here by that name, you best move along now. “

The nanny said, as she continued to speak out loud to no – one.

“ George do you know an Ivy lady ? “

Max smiled, he would play her game for now, making the reward all the better he thought as he turned and walked away.

Later Ivy was the first home today; she usually was, but not always. The nanny fumbled a second or two as she tried to explain about the man she had a bad feeling about, how he had knocked on their door today.

But how could she explain to Ivy something that she did not fully understand herself? Fortunately for the nanny Max took the time and trouble to explain the incident for himself to Ivy and Keith in an effort to terrorize them.

The nanny had left perhaps less than thirty minutes prior and Keith had just walked in the door as he waved to Ivy while hugging Jr. deep in his arms.

The phone rung and the machine picked it up after four rings. Ivy and Keith had a rule; no phone calls or television and such until after their mealtime together. They always had their machine set to simultaneously record and let play what ever a person did say aloud through the speaker.

That way if a call ever was important enough they could pick it up immediately.

The caller with a dark ominous tone said :

“ No matter where you run.”

“ No matter where you hide. “

“ You are mine. “

“ You will always be mine. “

“ I am going to make you all pay. “

“ All of you. “

“ Even that fresh faced little son of yours Susan. “

“ or should I say Ivy ? “

Click,... the phone went dead.

An hour or so later the two police men in Ivy and Keith's living room had Ivy replay the message a few times again, as they tried to explain that they were very sorry, but just a verbal threat upon the telephone was not going to be enough for them to pick Max up.

“ Can you at least try to put a scare into him ? “ Keith inquired.

“ I am sorry sir, I know how you feel about your family and all, but as of now, you can not even prove in a court of law that it was this Max man who left the message.”

“ Besides I get the feeling that this man is not one to get scared as easy as by a menacing cop stop. “

The second policeman added as Ivy nodded her head in agreement with the experienced conclusion that the officer already had of Max.

“ Tell you what, we will make extra patrols around this neighborhood for the next few days, that might discourage him.” Policeman one concluded.

Everyone in the room except that is save for Jr., clearly understood that his words were a hollow excuse meaning that Keith and Ivy were on their own, that was at least until Max tried anything further. The Policemen each felt guilty as they exited the house and just as they each opened their doors on the squad car they made eye contact and silently exchanged their concerns that their troubles had not yet even begun for these people. These two officers must have been partners for a number of years as they communicated just like an old married couple, as one made a deep discouraging exhale and the other one said;

“ I know,... I know.”

Ivy was so shaken that Keith quietly ordered them some pizza and then he committed a household cardinal sin. He broke a rule, a rule that he had insisted upon in the first place. Keith turned on the T.V.,

Then he turned it up fairly loud to act as a distraction for each he and his wife. He knew their conversation tonight at the table was not going to be of much use while Jr. was there. No point in scaring the boy more than he needed to be Keith correctly thought.

“ How are we going to explain to Jr., to be aware, aware of his situation ? “

Ivy asked Keith through her tears.

“ I don’t know dear, but rest assured it is something we will handle together. “

Keith sighed.

“ Lord help us please. “ Ivy said.

“ Yes, please. “ Keith agreed aloud.

Then Ivy and Keith each said a Prayer for the Lords guidance and protection in their lives.

Two slices of pizza sat untouched on each of Ivy and Keith’s dinner plates while Jr, tore through his with reckless abandon.

“ Yummy – Yummy in Junior’s Tummy ! ” Junior said gleefully.

It was just the emotional release that the family needed as Keith and Ivy reached out and held hands together across the table each chuckling in laughter.

And now the television said; It is time for Todd and Connie and

“ Our hard luck story of the day.”

Todd and Connie were the local husband and wife fact finding news team of channel twelve. They are together somewhat of a local legend as they dig and snoop into every foul deal or rotten scoundrel that they can dig out of the wood work. The local's love them. A few years ago Connie became concerned that just doing negative news was a bummer, so they came up with the concept of : Our hard luck story of the day.

Just by getting the word out many people in dreadful situations were helped by this hard working news couple.

“ Well I bet-yeah dinner clean up Ivy, that whoever it is, whatever the news is about their life, it won't be as bad as our news was today. “ Keith said.

“ That is a sucker bet, but I have nothing to loose tonight my dear your on.” Ivy replied.

“ Tonight “ Todd began reading the details of this poor persons plight.
(Todd and Connie take turns reading in perfect concert as is their style.)

Ladies and gentlemen our hard luck story of the day, tonight our tale is going to amaze you with the set of circumstances that had to occur for it to take place in exact order with precise precision.

Todd paused as his wife Connie picked up the story.

Out on the highway by-pass, today in the transit only lane, a bus lost a tire, it came right off and speed down the road on it's own. How it missed all of the rush hour traffic is beyond imagination.

Todd then speaks again,
It rushed right through a set of flowers at the rest stop and tulip turned it's path east.

Connie continues;
The large commercial vehicle bus tire then proceeded to cross over both sides of the highway,

Miraculously across eight lanes of traffic. Todd added.

The tire then struck the front of an old Volkswagen beetle, Connie said.

Slug Bug ! Todd yells

The tire simple rolled right over the round shaped Beetle. Connie continued.

And bounced right over the Honda Accord behind. Todd explained.

Then the tire continued to bounce and it bounced right off the top of the safety concrete barrier on the side of the exit 4 overpass. Connie says.

It fell to the highway below striking a large mid nineteen eighties caddy right in the windshield. Todd completes.

Sad to say that this unbelievable series of events resulted in the instant fatality of the driver of the old Cadillac. Connie says with an amazed tone.

This man (and a picture of the man appeared on the television screen.)

Mr Maxamillion McMillon from Chicago was killed instantly, crushed to death by the big tire. Todd finished. (The picture was one of Max in a prison uniform)

“ However “ Connie added; it should be noted that inside Max’s Caddy was found quite a large stash of narcotics and several loaded automatic weapons.

And the best part, Mr. McMillion was discharged from federal prison less than two weeks ago. Todd spoke.

Then news reporter Connie actually said it,... she said it !

As the tears rolled down each of Ivy and Keith’s faces now standing arms around each other, in front of their television.

“ Sounds to me like GOD, just did someone a very big favor.”

Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant.⁸ Those who live only to satisfy their own sinful nature will harvest decay and death from that sinful nature. But those who live to please the Spirit will harvest everlasting life from the Spirit. Galatians 6:7-8 (NLT)

We reason
By emotional season
Marking our progress in obvious ways
Numbering our years, by months and days

But GOD sees us differently
HE measures us by our dreams
Our tears and yes, even our fears

So have patience and take the time
To be sure,... that your
Heart and mind
Always Rhyme

Then Love with full measure
For seasons shall come
and the reasons may go

Enjoy Living your life
In the moments quiet and small
For they truly are
The best moments of all

Jacks Redemption
(By HOLY Intervention)

Jack turned the lamp off on his night-stand and then with a strong conviction he knelt down beside his bed to Pray. It seemed to him that he had tried just about everything humanly possible to deal with his improper thoughts. Time to turn the trouble over to GOD, the only true higher authority he correctly thought.

You see Jack has the age old problem commonly referred to as every mans weakness. As we all know; most men as they mature learn to control their thoughts and attitudes by internally nipping in the bud such impulses concerning members of the opposite sex. But not Jack.

Jack was both impressed as a good example, and disappointed in himself at his own failings on this topic by the attitude of his best friend and co-worker Buddy. Jack and Buddy (his real name) have been friends since grammar school, they have worked together and stood as best man for each other, twice for Buddy in Jacks case. They Pray together at the same Church, they even play together, that is on the same bowling league. Tuesday nights if you care to know such things !

Jack has noticed one quality about Bud that he tries to imitate but alas it eludes his fate.

It never fails to make an impression on Jack when a pretty woman happens to grace their presence and if Buddy said anything at all, it would only be things like;

“ The dear Lord sure worked hard on her beauty.”

And that was it.

Not another peep would be said by Buddy about the lady, and the best part was; that Jack could tell that Budd had instantly moved on. He was no longer thinking about the lady at all. Oh how Jack wished he could do the same.

At this stage of his life Jack was ashamed of his lack of control, be it a sinful nature, weak will power, or just force of habit. Whatever it was, even Jack at this point in his life was very tired of his attitude towards women. Even if it was only in his internal private thoughts and usually by now only with strangers that he did not know.

Jack was mature enough to know that just because he did not know them, that fact did not make it right in the eyes of GOD, to let his mind and eyes wonder creepily all over them. But most disturbing to Jack was this:

There was a new young woman working in the parts room processing orders that need to be shipped out , and she also inventoried items keeping track of what needed to be ordered and such. Jack no matter how hard he had tried, he just could not keep his eyes and thoughts off her.

Jack was feeling a strong conviction in his heart each and every time his focus wandered to the pretty young thing behind the service counter that enough was enough. Time to grow up Jack and get control of yourself and your attitudes he thought to himself. Jack had lost that battle before it had really begun, but of course one has to be committed to victory in the first place in order to succeed.

Unbeknownst to Jack after an entire lifetime of crass rude behavior the “ parts lady “ would become the straw that broke the camels back.

In fact it was an ugly incident today that has put Jack on his knees at this very moment begging for GOD to help him. You see earlier today during lunch break at their usual spot Jack leaned in and whispered to Buddy;

“ Hey Bud, what do you think about Trisha ?

“ Man what a cutie ! “

“ Who ? “ Buddy replied with a quizzical look upon his face.

“ Trish the new parts lady. “ Jack answered with a big grin and a wink.

“ Jack,... Buddy hesitated with a cross between bewilderment and concern on his face.

“ Jack she is young enough to be your daughter, doesn't that feel, I don't know, kind of weird to look at her in that way my friend ?”

Jack did not know what to say as he sat there at the lunch table turning red in shame. He should have known better, Buddy was a stickler for proper etiquette, in fact Jack has heard Bud stop other men in their tracks before about this very subject on numerous occasions. Buddy never holds back. If he hears a man making derogatory, rude, or even lewd comments later in private he would gently one on one address the issue.

But the worst part was that Jack knew Bud was right. He was old enough to be Trisha's father, and once he had been reminded of that fact it did feel kind of weird to think of her in that way. The sad part was, why did he, at his age, need his dear old friend Bud to remind him of that fact?

So tonight Jack Prayed away.

Not even embarrassed about his feelings, it is the embarrassment over his short comings for years that has held Jack back even from talking to GOD on this subject. Emotions and feelings as well as attitudes were topics strictly taboo in Jacks mind. He was raised never to admit ones true feelings let alone ever display them.

It took Jacks wife years to understand that, and only then did she see the tiniest of little things he would do as expressions of Love both to and for her.

Things that most of us would not even notice or take completely for granted, but his wife knew the small gestures were a token of appreciation, an expression of gratitude, or a declaration of Love, from him to her.

She learned that anytime he did something for her even trivial in appearance if he looked into her eyes and held her gaze for just a second or two that he was telling her silently that this was for her. Now the bad part of this process is that it had left Jack without any means of communicating seriously on anything emotional, and since he had a real emotional control problem, he was without any means of improving his situation.

Jack Prayed hard and he had meant every word. He was at a total loss on how to deal with his problem and he was ashamed of it. His wife no longer saw it as amusing anymore either, not at his age. She had in fact by now taken to calling him a dirty old man trying to shame him. He was ashamed.

But his childhood upbringing would not allow him to discuss his feelings and thoughts with her. That was forbidden and quite distasteful as well as a sure sign of weakness. As he finished Praying Jack on his knees laid his head down upon their bed.

“ Please dear Lord help me. “

“ I don’t know what to do, I can not control myself. “

Jack said aloud as a single tear fell from his eye.
He hurriedly, disgustedly, wiped it away and said quickly and loudly;

“ Sorry Lord for the outburst, forgive me, but please remember me.”

Then he climbed into bed and drifted off into a troubled sleep.

The alarm goes off but it is not his normal alarm, it is an old fashioned built in the wall loud Klaxon. Jack would recognize that sound anywhere, the kind he had heard in military service and that are still in use today in some old public buildings. Am I dreaming he thought to himself as he pulled the pillow over his head?

Jack then realized that this is not my pillow and this is not even my bed ! They have a comfy Queen size and this is a single bunk style that is just barely big enough for him.

There it goes again !

That blasted Klaxon is sounding away !!

“ Fifteen minutes until orientation. “

Said a far away male voice on the loud speaker that is also built into the wall just underneath the Klaxon.

Jack sat up and noticed right away that he was not in his PJ’s that he had worn to bed last night but rather he was down to his skivvies.

While the Klaxon had reminded him of his days in the service, the room itself reminded him of college.

The room is very small, cement block construction painted white of course, a single bunk style bed, and a few books on a wall shelf, among them Jack will find later upon closer inspection is a Bible, and a few self help and motivational titles all Christian in nature.

No windows, no TV. And only a single sitting chair by a very small reading table next to the bed and a small bathroom.

“ I should be terrified out of my mind. “ Jack said aloud to no-one.

“ But I am not. “ As he answered his own question.

Jack was not even afraid when he noticed the deep blood red wristband on his left arm right where his trusty old Timex should be. The funny thing was that Jack could not feel the band on his arm at all.

He had to see it to believe it, That is that the red band was really there. He tried to pull it off to make a closer inspection of it but his hands could not touch it.

Literally Jacks fingers felt only his own wrist beneath the band. But there it was just the same, un-feel able to his arm, and untouchable to his hands.

While it was true, that Jack had not a clue, as too, What was going on and how he had gotten to this place. He was strangely not afraid. Not even a little bit.

Jack then noticed a blue jumpsuit the kind with a big zipper in the front and some under garments along with a pair of white sneakers sitting neatly folded in a pile on the lone chair. Jack then went into the bathroom and it reminded him of a hotel. A few towels and wash clothes complete with a few single size toiletries.

He was amazed to see the correct tooth brush.

A brand new shiny blue one of course, but the same make and model, even the same color that his wife buys for him, hers is always green, his is always blue.

Jack for the life of him could not remember the details about the brush for his wife took care of all the little things like that. She had picked it out specifically for him when she realized just how bad a regular brush tore his gums up.

Jack was all prepared sitting dressed in his blue jumpsuit on the freshly made bed when the speaker under the Klaxon next spoke again.

“ When the door unlocks please proceed down the hall to your right to the cafeteria,

“ There you will find your name upon a chair at one of the tables.”

“ Take your seat and please wait silently for further instruction.”

“ Have a good day today and May GOD Bless. “

“ Now please say with me the Lord’s Prayer :”

(and Jack did)

Our Father,
which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done.
On earth as it is in Heaven.
Give to us our daily bread,
and forgive our trespasses,
As we forgive those

that trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
Forever.
Amen.

Jack sat in his assigned seat in the cafeteria looking around while trying not to appear like he was looking around. About a dozen or so tables the round style with each spot filled by a man, woman, boy, or girl, each dressed the same as him in a blue jumpsuit. Everyone seemed to be avoiding eye contact and there was total silence. Apparently Jack thought that they had all heard the same exact instructions.

Jack's stomach did take note that something sure smelled good, the smell was wafting in from those closed serving windows along the back wall.

There was a metal railing just below the windows where a person would place a meal tray and slide it along as you proceeded in front of the windows.

Ah there they are Jack thought, the serving line must start on the right end of the windows as he took notice of the small stand containing the trays, napkins and silverware. But for now the big roll-up serving windows about waist high were closed.

Just then the big dual doors leading back into the kitchen area swung open and out came eleven people each dressed alike but slightly different.

The each had on black dress trousers and black shoes, they each had the same exact cut and style of top. Be it man or woman, except for the color of their shirts which were all different.

“ The same as the wrist bands. “ The woman beside Jack on his right whispered.

“ What,... what was that ? “ He asked her also in a hushed tone.

“ Their shirts are the same colors as all of our various wristbands. “ The lady responded.

Jack realized that the whispering lady was right. Each of them in the blue jump suits seated at the round tables had a colored wrist band on their left arm. Only ladies notice things like that Jack thought to himself.

His eyes immediately searched the line up of the folks who had just entered the room for the one wearing a red shirt just like his wristband.

“ Oh dear Lord she is beautiful ! “ Jack thought.

Long dark brown hair that was braided and he would swear, that it would fall all the way to her knees if she let it down. Then Jacks mind reminded him to take it easy, to control himself. Fat chance of that now he thought.

The Lady wearing the pink shirt in the middle of the group steps forward, Jack does take notice that there are no pink wristbands. The only color present in the line-up that does not correspond with a band color.

“ Hello my name is Dora; and I am the administrative assistant here at Answered Prayer University.”

“ You will find that each of the instructors to my left and to my right are in charge of their charges. “ That ladies and gentlemen is you. Your length of stay is also determined by you. You are here for however long it takes to rectify each of your individual situations.”

But please rest assured, that GOD is good, not matter how long your stay here visiting with us may be, you will be returned to the exact moment at the conclusion of your program that you were taken from in your lives.

So do not worry about missing anything or anyone on the Earth while you are here in training with us. No-one on the Earth will even realize that you were ever gone. No one likes lengthy speeches and if you are as hungry as I am then you are getting anxious to dig into those wonderful smells coming from the kitchen!

Rest assured friends, you are among friends. All I will say for now is that you were right in your Prayers, that you each need desperately some help in various areas of your lives. Starting today you will get that help.”

Then Dora the administrative person concluded her remarks;

“Now that is the official word ladies and gentlemen, the unofficial one is that maybe you should have been more careful in what you Prayed to Almighty GOD wishing for, because you are each about to receive it ! Ready or not! “

With that all eleven of the instructors started to laugh.

“ Please stand and repeat after me as we give thanks to the Lord; “

We thank you Lord
For making sure that we are fed
As you give to us our daily bread
For we know and we believe
That we receive our fill
From thy good will
In JESUS name
Amen

“ Let’s eat ! “

Dora the lady in Pink said joyfully and loudly as the serving windows were rolled up.

After breakfast there was no standing on ceremony as each of the instructors rose from their seat, the instructor team had all sat and ate together at the only long square table against the far wall. One by one they announced if your wrist band matches my shirt than you are with me. Team blue was first as a man of American Indian heritage announced;

“ Those with blue wrist bands follow me please.”

Team yellow was next followed by the third instructor to rise from her seat, Jacks heart skipped a beat as it was the long dark haired captivating beauty in charge of Team Red, red as in his own wristband.

She walked fast down the long corridor, one that resembled an old style high school. She was speaking out details and giving general information about the who’s and why’s they were each there.

Jack did hear her say something about that the Lord had indeed answered their Prayers and that is why each of them were present here today.

The pretty fast talking and even faster walking teacher for the lack of a better word did mention that it was a given, that each of them had a problem that was so deeply engrained into their being that they could not possible handle their situation without intervention and help.

That was just about all the information that Jack had gotten from her, because he had lost his battle of trying not to notice how her long flowing dark locks swayed gently back and forth across her hips.

They as a group had finally entered into the “Red” classroom.

It was barren except for the small single style table top desks complete with a roll up type chair, and a larger teacher’s desk at the front of the room.

Jack now noticed that there were seven students in all. Six male and one female.

As Pretty Miss Hairy Hips, as Jack was now referring to his teacher in his mind entered the room, she had paused and held the door open for her students to enter as she mentally checked them off one by one in her mind, then she closed the door as she said one word aloud;

“ Activate.”

The room came alive with an electronic interactive flat-screens built right into the desktops. Each desktop was displaying a students name in bold red type.

Jack seated himself at the desk displaying his name.

Not bad he thought, not referring to his position in the classroom, but rather his line of sight to his easy on the

eyes teacher and he could steal a glance or two from the corner of his eye at the only female student in their group. She was not half hard to look at either. He realized that he had a tremendous view here and just might enjoy his task here of getting taken to school !

Then Pretty Miss Hairy Hips spoiled all of that by giving out her golden rule !

My name again for those of you who may have forgotten, or may have missed it, or just were to pre occupied at watching me rather than paying attention to their situation is Sharla. She stared right into Jacks eyes, he could feel her gaze boring down into his brain, he shifted and squirmed in his seat with shame with his face turning as red as his wrist band before he looked away in defeat from her eyes. With his eyes in shame cast downward Jack never noticed that each of the six men in this group got the same stare from Sharla, one that clearly spoke, how dare you look at me in that way.

“ Let’s begin again with a small demonstration, here at Answered Prayer University you will all receive what you need, what YOU each Prayed for, ... including correction and discipline. You each have went far too long without realizing that your actions not only harm others by degrading them, but also destroy your own morals and growth as human beings.”

“ That stops now.” Said Instructor Sharla.

“ Your Red wristbands are for the heat of lust. “

With that Sharla reached down to the display on her desk top, her desk contained a big screen like the smaller ones displayed upon the student desks, but hers also contained a row of seven buttons with a students name beside each one, and one rather large red button.

Sharla reached down and pressed the button containing the female students name.

Her name and the button turned from red to white,
(temporarily deactivating it)

Oh so sorry, I am not allowed to give out any of the other students names than Jacks. Who is the subject of our story, you see GOD does not permit gossip or the carrying of harmful tales about any of HIS children's problems.

“ Let me introduce you gentlemen to Big Red. “

Instructor Sharla said; as she reached down and pressed the large red button.

Zap !!,... BZzzzzzz,...HMmmnnnn.

As there was an audible snap as vast Spiritual electric power filled the room and was being dispensed through their wristbands upon the six male students who had offended Sharla.

Including Jack.

Jack shook and quivered uncontrollable as his Sin of ogling Teacher Sharla and even thinking of her as Pretty Miss Hairy Hips was no longer a laughing matter.

He said two words that come out haltingly with the flow of volts like a child talking while being bounced around.

“ Ssss- - Tttttt---- Ooooo----- Pppp P-P--- LII---EEEE ---
Aaaaa ---Sss ---Eeee !!

Finally the shock and pain came to an end.
It was only a few seconds, but to Jack, it seemed an endless eternity.

“ Sorry about that fellas but you all creeped me out.”
Teacher Sharla said.

“ Don’t worry the first day is always the hardest, the review of your past sins, especially when you did know better but continued to go on sinning.”

Now that Jacks attention was fully back to the matters on hand, a crazy thought popped into his head. You see Jack had realized that the only female student in their class was seated diagonally behind him, she did not get zapped for watching inappropriately teacher Sharla.

Which meant obviously that she was in the class of lust for uncontrollably ogling men, with Jack perfectly seated with his hind quarters in her direct line of sight.

Jack had always been on the handsome side and had always used this to further his flirtations with the ladies. Nothing serious , but now he wondered as he grew uncomfortable with the female student seated behind him whom Jack was now all too well aware of her sin that being of thinking improperly of men, well it just made him more than a little uncomfortable.

Jack took a sideways glance at her and his suspicions about her were right on the money. She was intently staring him down with a ravenous hunger deep in her eyes. He could almost feel her eyes boring into him as the hair on the back of his neck stood up.

It was an almost unbearable feeling like he was openly on display for her viewing pleasure alone. Was it poetic justice Jack wondered to himself, that she the lusty woman behind him, was in fact giving him a good healthy dose of his own medicine?

Then he wondered, how many women had he made feel uncomfortable in this very same manner with his not so well disguised leering. It felt bad, that is the feeling of being inspected by her, and he felt even worse for all of the ladies that maybe he had made feel the very same way over the years.

“ Lady and Gentlemen please observe the following video presentation upon your viewing screens. “ Teacher Sharla said.

The screen began playing an introductory video about Answered Prayer University.

Jack had already deduced and properly concluded most of the general information and Teacher Sharla had already discussed the moral implications of their sin of lust and how it harmed others and stunted their moral and Spiritual growth.

And quite frankly, and now for the very first time with the hot breathed lady seated directly behind him leering away at him, Jack knew exactly how humiliating it felt to be degraded as an object in someone else's eyes.

However Jack did take notice of the video's explanation of the various colors of the wristbands:

Blue : Selfish, as in cool to others needs.

Yellow : Timid IE chicken of living out your life.

Red : Lustful attitudes.

Green : Envy of coveting

Purple : Royalty, as in thinking you are better than others.

White : Self righteousness.

Brown : Judgmental without mercy.

Black : Gossip, vindictive, strife maker.

Gold : Greed of wealth and or power.

Jack also noticed the explanation of the bands themselves. They are Spiritual by design.

Once you have been enrolled here at Answered Prayers University by your very own plea for divine intervention in your life, the admissions Angel then will place the appropriate color band upon your Soul.

Get that dear reader ?

Not on your physical body, but Spiritually upon your essence, upon your very Soul.

Which explains why a person who is still alive in their human body can not even touch or feel the wristbands at all. Also only those who have a wristband can see the bands. That is how it works.

But the worst part, the part that caused a deep collective groan from the entire classroom of students; was when the video presentation said that the bands are for life.

As in even when they leave this institution, the bands will remain fully operational tied to their very thoughts and are permanently attached to their Souls while their bodies live.

For the next hour Sharla gave a few prepared talks and each time someone's mind began to wonder they got Zapped!

Every student got " lit up " so to say at least once or twice including even the female student.

Then Sharla announced;

" I hate this part I really do, but it is for your own good, besides how else would you really learn to behave without seeing and re-experiencing a sampling from your own memories from different moments in your very own lives ? How often do we really comprehend just how our actions make others feel ? "

What in the world is she talking about Jack was wondering to himself when his attention was drawn to his video monitor which had begun playing.

“ Well I’ll be “ Jack actually said aloud.

If it isn’t my old Teacher Mrs. K ! Jack correctly remembered.

Hey it’s me ! Jack saw himself in his student desk as a young thirteen year old again.

The video monitor showed Mrs. K approach the chalk board as she began writing out various spelling words.

Then to his shame Jack saw himself act out about the teacher as she did her work. We shall not discuss the bawdy remarks and gestures of an adolescent but we will mention that Jack got to feel Mrs. K’s actual embarrassment and her internal conflict of just what she should do. What could she do ?

Make a complaint that one of her teenage boys made an off color remark about her behind her back. That would hardly be a big surprise to the Principal. Then Mrs. K next had in mind to try and talk to Jack in private but she quickly dismissed that notion as well, for her experience warned her that if she asked him to stay after class that he was capable of saying just about anything later to his friends, and she did not need that, she had to deal with enough rumors about herself and her life with her soon to be final divorce.

So Mrs. K abruptly turned and pointed right at Jack.

“ That’s enough Jackie ! “

A small round of giggles went around the room and with that the teacher realized that she had just rewarded Jack with a round of applause from his peers.

That one does not need any further encouragement she felt. Then Mrs. K 's internal thoughts really cut Jack deeper than he thought they would.

Yes, you read that right dear reader, GOD was now making it possible with this review of Jack's sins, for him not only to see them again, but also to experience for himself just how he had made others feel at that time.

“ I will be so glad when this year is over in just a few months and that slime ball will be forever out of my classroom. He gives me the creeps ! “ Mrs.K thought inside.

Jack only had a second or two to reflect on his own behavior and to soak in how it made even his teacher feel because now it was time to pay the piper !

“ ZAP !!,...BZzzzzz,...EeeeOooww. Jack yelped !

Jack closed his eyes and inside he really did feel bad for he would not be able to apologize to Mrs. K on this side of life for being a rotten student because he had heard that she had passed of an illness a few years back.

The video monitor come on again and this time Jack was a little older at fourteen years.

“ What am I doing ? “ Jack thought aloud.

As the video monitor showed young Jack shimmying through some dense forest foliage.

“ Oh no, “ Jack said as he actually remembered this moment.

It was the day that his neighbor lady at the time, Kate, had caught him peeking through the bushes at her while she lay out sunbathing. Jack had noticed her around town and he knew that her property was next to their own, meaning his parents ground. Nearly an acre of heavily wooded ground separated their actual homes, Jack knew those woods like the back of his hand. He was practically raised among those trees. Over the past few weeks since he had taken notice of her, he had gotten braver and braver at inching his way forward ever closer to Kate each and every day during his summer break from school. Until finally he had taken to hiding himself under the brush right at the edge of her lawn. He would lay as still as midnight with a hunters lack of motion and not a whisper of sound did he ever make, all in an effort to maybe catch a glimpse or two of her completely unawares. Kate did not fail to meet his expectations.

Dressed in her comfortable clothes as she avidly enjoyed working outdoors amongst her garden and flowers as well as maintaining the yard work. She had become Jacks source of entertainment. He did not have a clue or even care that he had no clue as too; just how out of line and unacceptable his behavior was becoming.

“ Jack has hit the pot today ! “ Jack thought to himself as he saw Kate sunning herself on an old style glider just a few yards ahead of him out in the privacy of her back yard.

Jack had taken to phrasing his name in a positive light using the word Jackpot when things went his way. Kate had no reason at all to believe that out here surrounded by brush, and an acre deep on her own ground that her privacy had been intruded upon.

Lucky for her today that given the circumstances Jack was breaking his own rules and was ever so slightly maneuvering himself in for a better view at her.

Kate for some reason had that odd feeling once again.

Call it what you will, GOD, karma, or just plain old women's intuition, she had been getting a funny feeling these past few weeks. It was almost at times a feeling like she was being watched.

A twig snaps, Kate opens her eyes and looks around, however the birds continue to chirp away. She ignores it.

“ Just a bird, or maybe a bunny. “ She thinks to herself.

After a few more minutes Kate takes in and lets out a long breath. You see it is only a few weeks away from her husband's birthday and she decides that it is now or never at giving to him a great surprise for his birthday present.

No tan lines,... that is what she has in mind for her man on his birthday. Kate sits up and reaches her hands behind her back when; Snap ! Another twig, but this one is so very close to her.

“ Funny for a bird or even a bunny to be so close. “ Kate thinks.

“ A deer , yes that's it a deer ! “

Jack see's Kate sit up and then much to his surprise he see's her reach behind her back to remove her swim-top. He jumps up onto his elbows to witness the show. He never even heard the twig snap beneath his arm due to the pounding of his pulse in his ear.

“ She's going to do it ! “

“ She's actually going to do it !! “ Screams in Jacks mind.

She does it all right.

Praise GOD just not what Jack had expected at this point.

Kate had to go for it, the deer was right there !
She could rush up and get a very close look at it.
Kate was born and raised a city girl and had actually been quite uneasy the first few months out here in the sticks that is after she and her husband had purchased their home. It was his dream to have a home in the country and it made her happy, to make him happy.

Oh sure Kate had seen many a deer by now but always from a distance but never one up close and personal.
Trust me,... this is about to get very personal !

She swung from her glider and began moving toward the sound of the deer very quickly. The deer was so close, or so she had thought. Jack watched her rise,

“ Now what is she doing ? “ He wondered.

Then it was actually Jack who froze when he seen her coming right at him.

Jacks mind panicked and went blank with not a thought or a clue.

Kate stared hard into the underbrush inching ever so closer, She slowly reached in and grabbed a handful of foliage and gently pulled it back.

“ That’s not a deer. “

As Kate’s mind was for just a second confused as to what her eyes were seeing.

“ It’s a MAN !! “

Kate’s mind screamed as her very Soul froze in uncontrollable terror.

“ I am fully exposed ! “

“ I am all alone ! “

“ I am completely vulnerable ! “

Her thoughts raced in a sheer panic.

Her instincts were just about to kick in with the fight or flight reaction when Kate's body failed her. Her knees wobbled and she felt faint. She trembled all over in the most horrid absolute fear that she had ever felt.

Without thinking about it, she crossed her arms over herself, and as her bladder tried to betray her she had to cross her legs as well.

She then took two long steps toward the house when,

“ Wait , it is not a man, it is a BOY !! “ Her tortured mind shouted to her heart.

Flight had lost, fight it was now to be !

“ How DARE You !! “ Kate screamed at the top of her lungs.

Jack was now back pedaling through the briars and was half entangled in them as the woman quaked in anger at him.

Kate was still quaking fearfully in her body but her mind had been set aflame.

“I have seen you too ! “

She screamed as Jack was now up and running full on through the briars.

“ I know your face !!”

“ You peeping pervert !! “

“ My husband and his biker friends are going to beat you beyond recognition you little creep ! “

“ You are going to get yours, then you are going to JAIL !! “

That was the last of her curses that Kate yelled at him that Jack had heard as he plunged into the stream that separated his families and her's property.

He turned away from his house and tried to make as much noise as possible as he escaped in the exact opposite direction of his home.

Jack never again dared to ever set foot on Kate's property. But of course Kate never knew that.

Kate's husband when he returned home from work three hours later found her behind locked exterior doors and the interior doors were also bolted shut from the inside

She was still crying and trembling.

He held her all that night and neither of them had slept a wink. He even took the next day off so she would not be so afraid and all alone.

Jack had done it.

He had robbed Kate of her security and he had taken away the sanctity of their home.

Oh her husband had tried his best at making her feel safe again as he paid quite a sum for a dog. A big one, a German Police dog officially trained exclusively to protect her. Kate had never cared much for pets, especially pets in the house, and most especially one as large and mean as this dog.

But she did take some comfort in those completely loyal canine teeth of his.

Kate's husband next paid a king's ransom to install a security fence around their home.

He had even offered to place some of his hunting firearms in hidden spots for her to retrieve in a moment's notice.

Kate had never even held a gun before in her entire life, and just the thought of handling one, especially a loaded one, unsettled her even more.

Just the notion that she actually might need such a weapon to protect herself in her own home had made matters even that much worse on her very fragile psychic.

Kate's husband loved her deeply and after about a year of failing at trying to restore her peace of mind he willingly gave up for her sake; his dream of a home in the country, for she had never ventured outside again to do anything. So together they sold the place trying to regain her happiness of home.

It worked by the way, Kate's husband wisely bought her a place with a large yard for flowers and gardening just a few minutes from her parents' house.

Kate was home again, and she felt safe and secure there.

Jack in the meantime had learned to watch over his shoulder for Kate and to check every parking lot for either hers or her husband's vehicles before entering any place around town. He never had a clue until GOD showed him in this video review of just how badly he had scarred Kate, and all that he had taken from each her and her husband.

Their peace of mind, their feeling of security, and finally their home itself.

As this video came to a close Jack had never felt more ashamed in his life of his actions as he did in this moment.

Teacher Sharla was right. We never do fully comprehend just how deeply our actions or inaction have an affect on others.

“ I didn’t know, it was all just in good fun ” Jack said.

Referring to how much he had hurt and frightened Kate.

“ I deserve this one, Please forgive me dear Lord. Jack said as he grabbed both ends of his student desk and awaited for the inevitable shock of his wrist band.

As Jacks thoughts returned from being blasted away by the shock or reproof, he realized for the first time that the classroom was full of the sound of yelps, yells, and cries as each student was getting a review lesson from their past. It was the terrible sobs from the lady student behind him that made Jack feel so sorry for her.

And so it goes,
That is for the next twenty minutes or so of what was left in Jacks’ video review.
Literally the lowlights of Jacks life.

The presentation ended with Trisha the young parts lady, at work about how she just loathed him and was hoping that she did not have to approach her uncle Steve about Jack. You know uncle Steve,... the owner of the corporation.

That made Jack swallow hard, for he had not a clue about Trisha being Steve’s niece.

But that was not the worst, the worst in Jack’s mind was when the Lord revealed to him just how he had made the women in his life feel with his deplorable behavior.

His mother ashamed, his daughter embarrassed, and how she had avoided at all costs while she was growing up at ever bringing any of her friends home.

Jack had never even noticed before that she had never brought a friend home to hear him speak and carry on. But the worst of the worst was how it made his wife feel. She had grown so weary over the years of just saying that it was Jack's way.

“ We all know that Jack will be Jack.”

She would say as an excuse for his behavior year after year. But it was the turmoil that she had to face every single day that if she had realized in the beginning just how bad Jack was, would she have married him in the first place ? That crushed Jack.

Not that she didn't Love him, just every day she had to weigh in her heart if he was just worth the aggravation, the hurt, and the embarrassment that he causes her. Jack was deeply disappointed to see just how many days that his wife actually felt that no, he was not worth it.

But she had made a promise before Almighty GOD and by golly she was going to do her absolute best at keeping it. She had placed imaginary lines in her mind and if ever Jack crossed one of those lines then it would be over.

Fortunately for Jack he never dared to cross one of those lines. But that in itself also saddened Jack, seeing just how high a tolerance of his behavior and how low her standard was that his wife had set as acceptable behavior from him before she would even consider it a breach of trust in their marriage vows.

A shiver ran down Jack's spine as he wondered how would he feel if it was she, his wife who acted in the very same

manor toward men that he does toward women. He realized shamefully that he would not be able to endure it.

Jack then realized for the very first time just how good and how strong a person his wife really was, not only for putting up with him, but un-imaginably to Jack, she still Loved him. He would never be able to make up to her all that he had done, but he would try from this moment forward, for her sake because he Loved and needed her so.

Finally the lights had come back on and all the student video desks turned off as Teacher Sharla re-entered the classroom and offered these words;

“ I hate that part, the thirty minutes of the “ pain of shame “ portion of our program. “

“ You will be given a short break now, with time to process what you have just observed and learned about yourselves and how your actions made others feel.”

“After some time for reflection and Prayer you will each have a visitor.”

“I suggest that you be as open and as completely honest as you can be for your guests know more about you than you can possibly imagine.”

Jack had his head down on his desk and was lost in thought and Prayer, ashamed of himself and how he had made so many feel uneasy or the downright loathing of him. However for the very first time Jack felt like his eyes were open and he had a small glimmer of hope, a light at the end of a very long tunnel.

This crazy program just might work for me Jack was thinking as he took notice of the chair right beside his desk.

Funny he thought it was not there before and I did not even hear Teacher Sharla placing it there while I Prayed.

“ OK now it is visitor time Lady and Gentlemen.” Teacher Sharla spoke.

And for the very first time in his life; Jack actually felt like maybe, just maybe, that the term gentleman could finally be applicable to him. It felt good.

The classroom door opened and six women and one man entered, each a guest of a student. Jack took in a double take and even then it was a second or two for him to realize just who his guest was.

“ Mrs. K ! “ Jack exclaimed.

“ Yes “ she said.

“ But your,...” Jacks voice trailed off.

“ Dead ? “ She said.

“ Well Yeah. “ Jack replied.

“ And who says that you are not ? “ Mrs.K asked Jack in her best teachers tone.

Jack started to turn white and then Mrs. K burst out laughing.

“ Dear Lord that felt good ! “ she said.

“ Imagine after all these years, I finally got one back on ole Jack !! “

Mrs. K laughed and laughed.

“ But seriously “ she finally said.

“ Yes about that, I am so very sorry Mrs. K. “ Jack said.

“ I know Jack,... I know.” She said.

Jack, big tough Jack, show no emotions Jack , never let them see the real you Jack,

Began to sob and snuffle and finally when Mrs.K held out her arms to him he fell into her crying like a little baby.

Jack told her everything, all that he had done, how many ladies he had made feel degraded, his shame, and the fact that he was now quite aware of just what a shame it was, that he had to be here; in this place, in the first place.

“ Well Jackie at least you had the good sense to cry out to the Lord for help when you did. Said Mrs.K.

They must have talked together for a solid hour.
It was a first for Jack, to his shame he had never talked to anyone like this before.

“ I have to go now Jackie, but I know you will be alright now. “ Mrs. K said as she gave him a hug and a pat on his wristband.

“ Look at you ! “ Jack said, “ And I do not mean that in a bad way. “

Mrs. K was again in her prime without a single flaw in her appearance.

“ You’ve turned a corner Jack, I did not look half this good and you acted like a real creepo towards me. “ Mrs. K said.

“ I didn’t mean it like that. “ Jack said.

“ I know you *did-not*, she stretched out the words *did not* as the English teacher in her to her former student come to life over Jacks use of the word *did’nt*, GOD knew that you *did-not* either.”

“ Your band Jackie,.. it *did-not* go off ! “

“ Seems like you still had a lesson for me Teacher !,
I thank-you.“

Jack said as he stood and shook her hand.

“ I must say that you are a finer student today than you were just yesterday ! “

Mrs. K said and then she left.

“ I CAN do this. “ Jack said aloud to no-one in particular as he retook his seat.

Jack was tired they all were, Teacher Sharla announced that we are going to go to lunch now and that will be all for today. Tomorrow we will begin to try and help you control your habits and reactions in real life situations from this moment forward.

As Jack stood he noticed that the sole lady student was approaching him.

“ I’m sorry for making you feel that way, you know like an object not a person. “ She said.

“ It’s alright Jack said, I guess we are all guilty of that in this class ! “

The lady smiled and held up her arm showing him her red wristband the same as his.

“ You know she said,I am glad that I have this thing.”
And for the first time Jack realized that he too was glad for his wristband as well.

As they all walked together down the corridor toward the cafeteria everyone noticed teacher Sharla again, except this time it was to see just what it was that had caught her attention.

“ Shh she said with her index finger over her mouth, then she pointed toward a Library.

“ Test run of a new class. Sharla whispered.

As they walked by the open door to the library they all stole a peak inside. Four young teenagers’ two boys, two girls each seated at a round table.
They had on Orange wristbands and in front of them on the table were tons of electronic devices.

Cell phones, Ipads, laptops, you name it and each time one of the youths reached for one they got a ZAP !

In the lunch line Jack noticed a woman from another class right ahead of him. But not in the way that he would have noticed her just a few hours before. You see when he had seen her; he had a chill run all the way up and down his spine and then he truly felt for her. For she had on not one, but two wristbands one purple, and one of white.

Jack awoke in his own bed in his own home just like nothing had ever happened. But he had been gone for a little over a week. He was actually sad to leave Answered Prayer University, especially when he had been one of the best in his class at resisting his previous urges.

Believe that my friends.

Jack was by the Grace of GOD, and some good old fashioned hard work, he had changed.
From the worst to first in his class that is.

Yes I will secretly tell you now that Jack was the worst in his class, and if he can change so can we all my friends,... with whatever problem it is that you may face.
With Prayer and Guidance from the Lord found in the Good Book and old fashioned hard work.

“ Honey hurry up or your going to be late ! “ Came Jack’s wife’s voice from downstairs.

Jack held his arm out and the red band was still in place.

“ Thank-You Lord. “ Jack said and then he added.

“ I have to know. “

Jack turned on his TV and flipped through the channels, no he said, no, no, each time flipping a channel then he landed on Baywatch.

“ Sorry JESUS,... I just have to know if my trusty wristband still works. “

“ I always used to call this show Babewatch Lord. “

Soon enough a bronze beauty made her appearance and below in the kitchen Jacks wife heard him first yelp in pain and then yell Praise JESUS ! all in one loud sentence.

“ This is going to be a very long day she said. “

But this was a glorious day, one that Jack embraced forever and he was never the same old Jerky Jack ever again. The end !

“Blessed is the one whom God corrects;
so do not despise the discipline of the
Almighty.

Because the LORD disciplines those he
loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Job 5:17 NIV & Proverbs 3:12 NIV

(I have heard this song in my sleep and can only
remember these last few lines)

On the third day Christ arose
Deposing all HIS foes
O' what joy it brings
For us to sing
To the glory of
the risen king
To the glory of
the risen king

GOD'S Gift of Time
(for a working mother)

“ Mom ! “

The shrill cry for help seemed to cut right through Tammy as she noticed her hand trembling while holding out her worn out standard number two tooth brush with the glean tooth paste. You know the kind with the sparkly sprinkles. Yes, she had run out of her own toothpaste yet again, and was having to use the only brand that the kids seemed to use on their own. That is without the many moments of agonizing frustration while pleading with the kids about their avoidance of brushing their teeth.

Tammy clamed her nervous twitching hand as she said out loud;

“ Please GOD just a little help today.”

“ I am at my wits end.” She added then paused, finally she continued in a pleading Prayer :

“ Worn out Lord, Just a little time today to catch my breath, please Dear JESUS.”

She had just finished preparing breakfast for each Tommy and Tami their six year old twins, and she had practically begged her husband Thomas for just five good minutes of help, so that she could at least try to get ready for work herself. The man must be deaf as a stump she thinks about her husband, while she was wondering in amazed astonishment of how?

How could he just sit there in the middle of a raging squabble over the last eggo ?

This war was being personally supervised by Mrs. Butterworth and it had just reached nuclear defcon 3.

But yet Thomas, just continues to sip his coffee and read the sports page without seemingly a care in the world? Yeah right, Tammy's mind snickered. Sports page my foot. He is reading the funnies and is too macho to even admit that!

Tammy did her best not to notice her reflection in the mirror, as she hurriedly finished applying her makeup and quickly run the brush through her hair. The thoughts of dark circled raccoon eyes and tired crows feet crossed her mind.

"Hon " came Thomas's voice from down the stairs.

"Where is the creamer?" He added.

"In the same place it has been for the last eight years!"

Tammy yelled back down at her hapless,helpless husband, while holding tight her tongue for the twins sake her real feelings on the matter.

"Mine!" Tommy's voice yelled in the background.

"No it's not !" answered Little Tami's

"Why don't you two just split it?" questioned daddy Thomas.

How did I ever marry such a foolish man wondered motherTammy, does he really believe logic and reason will work on two six year olds?

Tammy descended down the stairs and onto the maple syrup covered battlefield being careful to avoid the mine field of toys scattered about the stair treads in break neck fashion.

I just picked up these steps less than fifteen minutes ago !
Tammy fumed inside.
At the first scent of her reaching the ground floor Thomas announced;

“ Oh good, gotta run, don’t want to be late you know.”

And before the echo of his words had left the room Thomas was gone. Away from the fray of kiddie combat, and out the door faster than even their tiny chi Wawa named Nibbles runs out. Nibbles bolts out that door at every chance he gets to maul their mailman Scott. It is good thing that mailman Scott graduated from the same high school class as Thomas. Basketball buddies they are, well,... were that is. Niether Scott or Thomas now days ever get any closer to an actual hard court than the living room sofa ! Scott always keeps a rolled up Sears sales ad just for the occasional task of swatting at Nibbles!
This indignity only fans Nibble’s flames higher as he spends his days lying in wait for poor ole unsuspecting Scott. Someday he will get his,
For we all know that every dog gets his day!

Anyways.

At mom’s arrival to the scene of the crime;
The pleas to the higher authority now begin in earnest.

“Mommy Tommy has already had two eggos!” Tami shouts out.

“Liar!” Tommy retorts as he makes the accusation of untruthfulness upon his sister.

“ Hey!,... what is the rule about name calling in this house?” Mother asks out loud as she gives the mothers eye to both of her children.

Silence.

Then Mom continues.

“ And not to mention the fact that I am none to happy about all the yelling as well.”

“ Is that allowed in this house?”

“ Is that how you show respect for others?”

More silence followed by blank stares upon the faces of two twin siblings.

The battle is over.

Peace had just been declared by default because mom had reminded each Tommy and Tami of how close they each were of receiving punishment.

“ Now go and get dressed for school immediately, MOVE IT ! “ Tammy says as she issues marching orders to her feuding troops.

Tammy had to give her namesake little Tami, a further stern look as she pushed in her chair just a little bit too hard and stomped a step or two in the direction of the toy covered stairs. Tami in her fury got her foot caught inside a slinky and had to pause to untangle herself.

“How many times do I have to tell you two not to leave your toys on the stairs?!”

“Someday, someone is going to get hurt bad when they trip and fall over them!” Mom then added.

“ The slinky is Tommy’s” little Tami snaps back at big Tammy.

“ Little missy you are going to start something that I am going to have to finish.” Mom Tammy then says.

Little Tami opens her mouth to respond with a fresh smart remark as her mother raises an eyebrow, the sight of that causes the little one to hold her tongue.
She turns with her foot now free from the slinky that she leaves purposely in spite on the steps as she stomps up to go and get dressed.

I am not going to cry, I am not going to cry, I am not going to cry, repeats in Mom Tammy’s mind over and over.
Then it changes to; I am not going to over react, I am not going to overreact,...

But Tammy knows it.
She is at her limit
Her breaking point.

Someone, someday, is going to break her today.
Then lookout, may the Lord have mercy on their Soul.
As Tammy ‘s mind uncontrollably in the proper fashion, one by one, begins to review completely in deserved self pity, the checklist within her mind of her normal regular day.

Her routine.
The exhausting never ending, never appreciated, never a break from; grinding routine.
First thing in the morning get the kids up, a chore unto itself.
Then breakfast.
Get everyone dressed.
Drive the kids to school.
Go to work.
Then put up with Mr. Misery
(as he is known by Tammy and all her cohorts at work.)
Pick up the kids after school.

Attend their band, T-ball, cub scouts, and the after school Church youth programs.
Fix dinner.
Help with homework.
Clean the house.
Do the laundry.
Get the kids ready for bed.
Row upstream against the current all the way, as the kids have learned to stall their bedtime more imaginatively with each passing evening.
Clean the house,... Yet again.
Then fall into an exhausted, never near long enough sleep.
All the while as Thomas complains;

“ That you never talk or spend any time with me anymore.”

And this is an easy day.
A normal one.
Throw in a flu, a holiday, or the dreaded;

“ But all the other kids are doing it,”

You are being unreasonable shout, you know dear reader, the logic of a six year old with the soon to be followed melt down when they don't get their way, and insanity would seemingly be preferable to her life Tammy feels. When did it all get so out of control she desperately wonders inside?

Tammy is regrettably still thinking about all of these things to herself, as she returns to the kitchen to retrieve her car keys from the top of the refrigerator. She keeps her keys up there out of the reach of the children, inside her Grandmothers old two piece rooster cookie jar. You remember those don't you?

Those gaudy heavy ceramic things, bright yellow and red, tug on his head and the top half of the jar lifts free from his lower bottom half that is supposed to contain his treats.

Tammy absentmindedly removes the roosters head with her left hand and reaches in for her keys with her right. Her fingers can barely reach the bottom of his plump belly, that is if she stands all the way up on her tippy toes. She scoops up the metal object with her outstretched fingers into the palm of her hand. Instinctively she just knows something is wrong. Tammy stops in her tracks and her mind freezes at the sight of what it is.

A gold pocket watch.

Often times when folks unexpectedly come across an ordinary item out of place, and out of time, it takes a minute or three for our brains to catch up. And no, that is not a pun about the time piece, but rather a simple fact about our normal reactions to the good GOD given world around us.

It was an old fashioned gold pocket watch. Very familiar to Tammy. The type men used to get in days gone by, when retirement came after many years of service. Then it hits her,... Grandpa Walt the legend himself had such a watch. Not unlike this one if her memory recalls correctly.

Grandpa Walt was the man without limits, who could always be depended upon to do it all. Tammy while looking at this watch was reminded of Grandpa Walt and his gold retirement watch. The one that he received from the railroad that he had proudly showed to her on many occasions as a young girl. Oh how Grandmother Nana had been so distraught that the undertaker had forgotten to remove the watch from Grandpa Walt's pocket in order for it to be kept and treasured as a family heirloom, after Grandfathers last showing in the funeral parlor. She was inconsolable about that watch being lost forever.

Grandmother, the very same roster cookie jar Grandma, had said some pretty strange things on that day, she had everyone fearing that Grandfather Walt's passing might be more than she could bear. She said things like;

"How the watch had never worked for her."

"And that Walt had hoped that the watch would work for another in their family someday."

Whatever that meant young Tammy had thought at the time as she had puzzled inside about how anyone could have trouble working a simple pocket watch? Then Grandmother Nana had by herself, just suddenly snapped out of it, saying that;

"Maybe it was all for the best?"

As she further stated to no one in particular that GOD is good, and GOD is wise. Grandmother was better after that.

How many moons ago was that? Tammy thought to herself as she wearily come back to her reality, as she realized that they all really needed to get moving, meaning herself to work and the children to school.

It was plain curiosity that caused Tammy to take one final glance at the watch as her mind began to form the thoughts that Thomas,... yes it had to have been Thomas, who must have picked the watch up somewhere and put it in her rooster for safekeeping.

Her fingers instinctively just as Grandpa Walt had showed to her many years ago, depressed down on the watches winder to open the lid covering it's face. You see Grandpa had taught her how to work the watch on his lap a lifetime ago.

Press down on the winder and the lid opens to see the
watches face and know the time.
Pull up and it stops, then you can set the time by rolling the
hands forward or back.
Wind it to make the watch run.

“ But not too tight!”

“That is how most watches get broken you know?”
Grandpa Walt had explained.

“ By over-winding them.”

“Nothing likes to be overworked.”

“ Not man, not beast, nor even machine.” Grandpa Walt
had added.

“ Ain’t that the truth Grandpa.”
Tammy says aloud as she recalled his words about being
overburdened while thinking about her own Soul draining
demanding life.

Then the watch lid popped open.

And inside was the following inscription:

TO WALT
1946 – 1986
40 YEARS
OF SERVICE

Tammy’s mind locked up.
For this was simply put, in a single word,... Impossible.

Tammy stares at the watch in disbelief of what her eyes are
telling her.

That she is holding in her hand, Grandpa Walt's retirement watch, that was buried with him by mistake almost ten years ago. Absurd her mind screams, foolish superstitious notion, replied the calm voice of reason of her conscience thought.

But here it is.

How she wondered?

And better yet, why now, why me, just plain why?

Tammy began to feel dizzy as a wave of nauseas feelings began spiraling inside her, both inside her body and mentally. Then almost imperceptibly she heard it.

The small voice of the one crying in the wilderness, far back in the land of her densely cluttered and confused mind. Listen ! Tammy thought to herself.

But did she listen, no of course not, not right away.

It had to have been Thomas, yes that's it, the weekend before last !

When we all rode up to the retirement village and spent the afternoon with Grandma Nana. She must have given the watch to Thomas then. Tammy's mind quizzed itself trying to make sense of it all.

But what about Grandmothers breakdown years ago when she thought the watch was lost forever?

But was it lost?

Perhaps during Grandpa's funeral in her distraught state Nana was emotionally unbalanced, mistaken about a few things? Perhaps, maybe Tammy reasoned.

Then why did you not notice the watch in the rooster cookie jar before now for yourself she wondered?

You put in, and take out, your keys several times each and every day in that old jar.

Nothing else but my keys have ever been inside her mind bantered back and forth within itself.

Then came that small voice yet again,

“Did you not Pray for MY help?”

“Do you not believe in answered Prayer?”

But this is real, the watch, it is in my hand, was the hesitant reply in Tammy’s mind.

“Oh I see, the creator of the universe can not handle a trinket safely buried in HIS earth?” The voice again questioned her.

Of course HE can ! Tammy snapped back, silently sinking inside as she realized that she was speaking to a voice inside her own head.

Am I crazy?

She wondered to herself, has my hectic life caused an actual breakdown within me?

If you are aware enough to ask yourself that question then that means you are not crazy in the first place Tammy correctly thought to herself.

“Then Believe!”

Again came the voice with conviction.

Who are you ?! Tammy demanded.

“A friend.” Was the reply.

Then after a brief pause came;

“You know who,... I AM.”

And Tammy did.

Just something about the way the voice inside her speaking had said the words I AM.

It was both simultaneously an answer and a affirmation.

Now all was silent in Tammy's mind.

As she correctly realized that GOD had answered her Prayer.

The gift of time.

That is what she had Prayed for, and it was just what she had received.

She did not know how, or entirely yet what it meant, but she did realize that with GOD everything is possible.

Even Grandpa Walt's long lost watch there in her hand at that very moment.

But what if there is more?

Feels like it.

Her mind questioned as it finally coalesced into actual working thoughts again.

" Mo-o-a-a-m" came Tommy's voice to her; as he was tugging on her arm trying to get her attention.

Tammy gave her son a glance; both he and his sister were standing there dressed and ready for school.

How long had they both been standing there waiting on her Tammy wondered.

" Ok let's get to the car." Mom announced.

The kids started to move, Tammy looked down again at the watch and was amazed to see that the time was right. Odd because the little second hand was not moving.

She held Grandpa's watch to her ear. She would never forget that ticking sound.

Nothing.

But the time was right on the watch face?
More mystery Tammy thought as she very gingerly twisted the knob a single click then she followed it up with two more.

It works !
The watch seconds hand moved a few spaces and then it stopped again.
Tammy then winds the watch, all the while once again hearing Grandpa Walt's voice from her precious childhood memories;

“ Don't wind it too tight !”

She didn't.

Now what Tammy thinks to herself as she finished winding. Just what did you expect in the first place? She scoffs at herself inside, as the kids open the kitchen door to head out to the car, mom pulls up on the winder for no reason at all.

Now what?
Mom thinks as the kids are motionless half in and half out of the kitchen doorway.
But then Tammy also notices that there is no noise.
None at all.
Not a single bird chirping, no sound from the street, not a peep from the kids.

Then Tammy just gets it.
No way!
She thinks, as she gently pushes the winder back down into the run position.

“ Shotgun! “ Yells little Tami as she pushes past her brother and quickly squeezes between him and the door.

“ We can both fit up front! “ He yells while trying to catch up with his sister.

“ No way Hosea!” came little Tami’s voice back into the kitchen.

Then Tammy reacts and yells out loud not caring a bit about who might hear her:

“ Thank-You JESUS !”

“Praise be the Lord !!”

“You have answered my Prayers GOD Almighty !!!”

Tammy tucks Grandpa’s watch her gift from GOD, into her purse and gleefully strides out to face this wonderful glorious day.

One that promises to be full of wonder and delight, by the might, of the most high HOLY GOD.

It is good to be alive she thinks as she backs out of the drive ready to take on the world.

It was near mid-morning just a few hours later as Tammy was just thinking about slipping away in order to try Grandpa Walt’s watch again during her lunch break, the new purchasing secretary whose actual name is Wilma, is however forever to be known by the misnomer of “ Willy.” It just seems to tickle people to call her by her male nickname.

Well Willy like Tammy, is a hard working mother of one in her case. A young son whom “Willy “ and her husband actually named William as an inside family joke. However this moment is no laughing matter.

You see little William’s babysitter has to leave just a bit early today herself in order to attend a function in her own life. “ Willy “ has just made the fatal mistake of asking the

boss Mr.Misery in front of others, if she could please leave just for today, fifteen minutes early to tend to her son.

You remember him; Tammy's thoughts touched on him once before, he is the one who is always only a single word away from the lawsuit for being a true misanthrope, he just seems to have a natural disdain for the entire human race. Just how anyone could have ever made him a general manager in the first place is beyond all notion of reason. His total lack of tact and with him not possessing a single ounce of people skills, that fact alone makes you wonder just how bad was his previous manager who had to have promoted Mr.Misery to this position?

Anyways.

It was silence.

Baited breath by all, as Willy had just asked Mr.Misery if she could leave a few minutes early today.

Tammy automatically said under her breath 45 seconds. Sam at the desk directly behind hers whispered 30 seconds.

Gladis who sat next to Tammy on her right side said one minute.

What this working trio were referring too unfortunately, was the amount of time it would take for Boss Misery to reduce poor Willy to a quivering mess.

Well let's just find out which one of the three coworkers is a true prophet :

As in who correctly predicts the amount of time it actually takes for the boss to crush all the hope inside of poor hard working, needing a small favor, a break,...Willy. Just like in a real train wreck we know emotional carnage is about to occur, but we can't help but to watch and Pray.

“ Whoa,... right there Ms.sweet tea ! “ Mr.Misery said quite loudly.

“ Cool those jets pronto !.”

“ You want to do what? “ He demanded from her.

Willy then very timidly repeated her request to leave just a few minutes early.

“ Well golly,... and shame on me ! “ Boss Misery states even louder.

“ To think that one of my own would not understand that work is King in these parts!.”

“ I suppose that it is my own fault for being far to lenient on the hourly help.”

“ Just my weakness I Guess.” Mr. Misery then added.

“ Well Silly Willy,... guess what!?” “ You ladies wanted equal rights and you gott’em !.”

“ Equal rights and responsibilities, suffrage succotash my dear.”

“ I do not care, nor do I dare, to whisper a single mercy about your little brat, and neither does this fine institution,... Ever ! “ You best better be productive at your work until the bell tolls or else !!” “ Comprehenday ?!”

“ Of all the nerve! “ Mr.Misery adds to no-one in particular as he begins to power stride away in a self induced fury.

“ Guess Sam is the winner Tammy thinks to herself.

Poor “ Willy “ seemed to tear up at less than the thirty second mark.

Then it hits her, that it has become the norm for all of them to accept their Boss’s boorish behavior as Tammy’s own long held fury against the micromanaging Mr.Misery boils over. Without thinking Tammy reaches down into her purse and retrieves the watch.

She pulls the winder and the world stops.

With reality now on pause, the total effort that it was costing poor Willy to keep her composure was clearly displayed all over her frozen face.

Wilma Willy's tears were being held back by sheer willpower alone.

Tammy turned to look at Mr. Misery with his left foot high in the air like a goose stepping buffoon. The expression on his face sickened Tammy's very soul.

Tammy slid from her chair and approached her nemesis, Mr. Misery.

I am a Christian was on her mind as she walked toward him, control, easy does it, were her inner thoughts.

Tammy took the metal waste basket by the water cooler that was filled with all of those crumpled up cone shaped paper cups and placed it directly in front of Mr. Misery's planted foot. She then proceeded to top it off with as much papers and trash as she could find. Then she settled back into her chair, watch in hand ready to enjoy the show!

Tammy with a big smile presses the winder down on Grandpa Walt's watch.

Mr. Misery continues on in his buffoons march quiet unawares. His planted foot rises and kicks the metal trash can square just like a football.

It sails, paper and cups flail !

He shoots,... He scores !

Better than Tammy had even imagined !!

The metal trash can takes the bottle right off the water cooler !

The big plastic bottle still about half full rolls and spills water everywhere as the cups and papers seem to explode in every direction!!

There is some collateral damage; but such is the case in events such as these.

The pencil cup on the interns desk in the line of fire takes a direct wadded up paper hit and falls spilling bic paper mates and sharpies all over.

A collect gasp fills the room.

Tammy has to literally hold her hand over her mouth to stifle her squeal.

“ Horsey feathers stuck on doggie sweaters ! “

Mr.Misery yells out loud !

As he has the helpless look of a deer caught in the headlights upon his face.

“ Get maintence to clean this mess up undelay ! “ He yells again as he is almost running away from the scene of his crime.

Anticipation.

Is the build up just before a uncontrollable release !

Good thing Mr.Misery exited quickly before everyone lost their composure.

He had to have heard their laughter coming from that office all the way down the hall.

Even Willy was laughing a little bit and smiling as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

Two weeks later :

Tammy lifts her foot from the sudsy water to turn the hot water handle and add just a little more warming comfort to her relaxing moment of sinful indulgence.

“What was that?” Tammy thought to herself, that last fleeting thought of hers that we accidently just happened to overhear.

Sinful indulgence were the words of her inner thoughts right? Tammy wondered.

As she had her very first feeling of regret about how at this moment she was abusing the gift of time that GOD had granted her.

Tammy's self defense mechanism quickly responded in a tirade of denials to these charges inside her heart, mind, and soul.

You are Super Mom!

That is the latest pet name for her that her husband Thomas had taken to calling her as of late. Tammy rather fancied that one she had to admit to herself. Especially the way Thomas said it with enthusiasm in front of their children as he was never ceased to be amazed with all that she was accomplishing. That is with GOD'S help in the form of Grandfather Walt's watch.

While it was true that she had begun to use the time keeper to improve in every way, every area, of their everyday lives. The nagging thought still remained that she was to an extent taking too much personal advantage of HIS gift of time.

"No! "

That part of her that we call human weakness screamed internally.

"Just look at what we have done! "

Her thoughts rested upon the word " we " as in herself and the watch. A small warning bell went off somewhere deep in her soul as the fallen sinful human nature part of her, loudly and proudly, listed all of their achievements of the previous two weeks since GOD had given Tammy the gift of time.

The yard and garden in a word,... perfect !
Not to mention all of the wood trim around the doors and windows of their house all bright with a fresh coat of white.
(Paint that is)

This was the only exterior maintenance required on their brick ranch style home.
The inside of their home in another word,... spotless !

But more than that,... just like the kids toothpaste it gleamed sparkling clean !

Again not to mention each little Tami and Tommy's rooms painted in the colors of their own choosing! It was not even all the homemade baked treats that daily sit on the kitchen counter top, or even the generous amount of time each and every evening that Tammy now spent with their children helping with their homework, and still even more time she spent tutoring each of them with their studies.
It was the sweeping and tidying up of the garage that had caught Thomas's eye.

This caused him to take notice and then upon closer inspection of their lives together, that the astonishment of her, and her achievements had dawned upon him and had awakened his brain from mundane.
(Routine that is)

When Tammy had washed and waxed their vehicles, that act had sent Thomas over the edge being properly impressed calling his dear wife Tammy Super Mom!

But there it was, that small warning bell still tolling away as her heart told her to Pray.
Pray about what? She thought.
Then she knew.
You see glance back a paragraph or three,...

Tammy had thought to herself; all that “we “had accomplished.

Remember those words of hers dear reader?

Tammy felt shame.

You see the “we “was herself and the watch.

She had in pride put herself into the “we “equation.

Was it not GOD behind this entire miracle Tammy wondered to herself?

“Of course it is GOD.”

Tammy actually said out loud as she climbed from the tub and opened its drain.

“Dear Lord it is my shame running down that drain.” she said aloud.

“Forgive me Father, I will do better, I promise. “

“Guide me Lord; I am ready to listen now.”

“Nana.”

She heard it,... Tammy actually heard that word, GOD’S Word spoken in her heart.

“Of course!” Tammy exclaimed out loud.

“Nana! “

Why did I not think of her before? Tammy wondered to herself.

Nana,... if anyone knew anything further about the watch and GOD’S gift of time it had to be Nana !

Nana was so upset when she thought that the watch was lost forever.

Me and Grand father Walts watch are going to have to pay a visit to Nana!
Won't she be surprised!!

"Thank-You Lord,... for everything in JESUS name. "
Tammy said as she finished dressing and reached for Grandpa Walt's watch resting on it's back on the sink top with it's face open.

Tammy smiled as she said;

"Time to re-join the living and make this gift from GOD as it was intended to be."

She smiled and snapped the lid shut, she held the watch against her heart and closed her eyes and then said a private Prayer between herself and GOD.
She opened her eyes and clicked the winder down into the run position as Tammy returned to normal time with the beginning of her thoughts that maybe the watch was meant for her, to help more than just her and her loved ones immediate needs.

She thought of Grandpa Walt again.
The entire town in his time had referred to him as the legend. The one, everyone, could count on.

" And he dear daughter counted upon ME. "

The voice of GOD answered Tammy's thoughts internally.

At the retirement home;

Nana's smile lit up the entire room.

"Well this is an unexpected treat."

She said as Tammy shut the door to her small room and hung her jacket and purse on the silver metal hook on the backside of the door.

"Hello Nana! " Tammy said with a bright smile of her own as she crossed the room and embraced her Grandmother with Love in her heart.

Tammy then slid one of the two wooden chairs from the dinette set by the window over to Nana who was seated in her old rocker that she had brought with her from own home when she came here to stay. As Nana reached her arm up with the remote control shutting off the TV, Tammy noticed on the bulletin board behind Grandma on the wall that the pictures she had pinned up there of her great grandchildren Tami and Tommy were at least six months old, she made a mental note to herself to send Nana some new ones in the mail just as soon as she returned home.

"What brings you up here today on this fine Sunday afternoon unannounced my dear?" Nana asked Tammy.

"And where is that husband of yours and my fine Great Grandchildren?" She added.

"Just me today." Tammy said.

"What, am I not allowed to visit my favorite Grandmother in the whole wide world?"
Tammy added.

Nana laughed as she reminded Tammy that she always used to say things like that when ever she wanted something from her.

Tammy smiled and said that all she wanted today was to ask her a few things about Grandpa Walt. Nana was intrigued for she really enjoyed reminiscing and sharing her life past with her Loved ones whenever the chance arose.

“Tell me about Grandfather Nana, not just the everyday rumors of his legend of being the man everyone could count on, but what really made him tick.”
Tammy asked her Nana.

Nana paused as her mind both drifted back to the memories of yesteryear and also as to what she could really say about Grandpa Walt and his legacy to Tammy. Tammy now clearly understood that Nana was holding back because of the secret she had to keep about the timekeeper watch.

Besides Tammy realized, from Nana’s perspective she had to feel that no one would believe her anyway and would in fact question her rationality if she even tried to speak about GOD’S gift of time that first was given to Grand Father Walt.

“He would always say what is the GOD thing to do, as in the right thing to do.” Nana said.

“Would you say that GOD helped Grandfather to be the man that he became to be?’ Tammy inquired.

It was an odd question, one that hung in the air of the room as the silence then was deafing as the conversation paused for a second or two before Nana responded;

“I would most certainly say that my dear, and in more ways than you will ever know.”

Tammy rose and retrieved her purse and sat back down beside her Grandmother.

“ I have something to show you Grandmother, something that will both surprise you and make this conversation a little bit easier.” Tammy said.

Tammy reached in her purse and cupped the watch under the palms of her hands in order to conceal it until the last possible second. Tammy said a small Prayer for the shock not to be too great on Nana as she placed the watch sight unseen in Nana’s hands.

Tammy could not make out the expression on Nana’s face as she just stared at the watch for a few minutes. After a minute or two she flipped it over and seen the inscription on the back side.

“Your Grandfather could never find anyone who could translate these words.” she said.

As her fingers slid across them as if that would unlock their secret.

Then Grandmother Nana pressed down on the winder and opened the lid.

The watch opened revealing it’s dedication to her dearly departed husband Walt.

“Just as I suspected.” Nana said, she knew that watch without even opening the lid.

Nana closed the watch and handed it back to Tammy.

“I would say that I am surprised but nothing surprises me anymore about that watch.”

“ You know it never worked for me, I thought it was lost forever as it was meant only for your Grandfather.”

“Tell me, does it work for you my dear? “

“Walt always had the hope that it would work for another in our family.” Nana asked Tammy.

“Indeed it does! “Tammy answered her.

“Then we do have a lot to talk about don’t we?” said Nana

“I was wondering why you did not just call and ask me those questions you did earlier?”

“Now I understand.” Nana added.

For the next hour Nana and Tammy exchanged their stories and information that they each had about the watch.

“Be careful my dear.”

Nana had finally said and it caught Tammy’s ear.
Walt always said that unto one much is given much is expected by the Lord.
And that he felt the abuse or overuse of GOD’S Gift was a sin.

“I am just starting to realize and understand that part myself.” Tammy said.

“That is why I came today.”

“Why GOD sent me here to you.”

“Is there any more?’ Tammy asked.

“Yes” Nana replied and she continued.

“I had a hard time grasping this, maybe it was because that for a very long time deep down, it bothered me that the watch did not work for me, but Grandfather over time began to realize that the watch in a way is a cheat to the user, to Walt , and now to you my dear.”

“What do you mean? “ Tammy quizzed.

“That while you are using the watch, you are not interacting with your family and friends.”

“Each moment that you use the watch, is one you loose in your life.” Nana replied.

There it was, the answer Tammy was looking for, and just why GOD had sent her here today.

Nana had put into words the nagging feeling that had been without definition inside Tammy. That there is a personal cost for using, or even not using, but most especially abusing, any gift or talent, because gifts and talents are a gift from GOD.

That it does not need to be a timekeeper watch or anything else miraculous.

That our time and talents themselves are a gift from GOD and we will be held accountable as to what we chose to do with our gifts and time.

Did we use them to help others in need around us?

Or did we use and abuse them for our own selfish purposes?

“Why don’t you try and get that inscription on the back of the watch translated?”

Nana next said.

“With all of the computers and things these days it just might be possible.”

“That is a good idea! “ Tammy replied.

Tammy reached for her purse to place the watch inside when she stopped. Something just did not feel right. She opened her hands to inspect Grandpa Walts watch, Tammy did hold a watch in her hands, but it was now a different watch.
Literally, another miracle!

It was smaller, brighter, and in a word it was more feminine. She held it up by the chain and Nana too noticed the change and actually gave out a small squeal of delight while clapping her hands together.

“The inscription on the back is the same Grandmother.”
Tammy said.

“I don’t understand the writing but I can tell it is the same.”

“Open it! “ Nana said.

Tammy did and it was beautiful.
Studded inside upon the face were diamonds, pearls, and precious gems.
While for Grandfather Walt the watch was very mechanical and masculine, for Tammy the watch was a piece of art. Maybe just the way GOD had made each of them; it also reflected each of their personalities?

“What does it say on the inside lid my dear?” Nana asked.

Tammy replied it says;

To Tammy
My Gift of Time

“Well the watch is clearly all yours now my dear ! “
Grandmother Nana said with a big smile.

“Then Nana added;

“ GOD gave me the gift of seeing the watch as it was one last time for your Grandfather, and as it is now, for you our Grand daughter my dear “

“And to one much is given,... “Tammy’s words trailed off.

“Much is expected.” Nana finished her sentence aloud for her Granddaughter.

“You will do fine my dear.” Nana added.

“I will try to do my best.” Tammy answered half talking, and half Praying.

“I know that you will.” Grandmother replied.

On the drive back home Tammy Prayed to GOD with thanksgiving upon her heart for the gift of time that HE had each given and entrusted to her. Tammy had finally realized the magnitude of the trust and responsibilities that GOD had really bestowed upon her with the timekeeper.

She had gotten an understanding from Nana that the watch was really a present of possibilities, rather than just a means to keep under control her very own needs and means of life.

She asked GOD to lead her with open eyes, a compassionate heart, and a submissive willing spirit, to those people and situations that HE desired for her to help with.

Tammy from this moment on became much more selective to the times in which she paused time. Having learned her lesson about how important it was that the gift was meant to be a helper and not really meant to be used as a selfish game changer.

That following Saturday morning Tammy rose early while the sun itself was still resting and had not come to work as of yet. I know, I know, it would have just been easier to have said that Tammy got up before sunrise, but did that not have more flare and sound better?,... I needed the practice!!

Anyways, on the internet it took Tammy awhile to really get started on the translation of the inscription on the backside of her time keeper. First she had tried a comparison of the arrangement and style of the letters themselves.

She had tried just about every language that she could think of off the top of her head.

Then she searched languages from a compiled list the computer had given to her. Finally she realized that she was approaching this problem all wrong.

The words were concealed only because she felt that they were concealed. Meaning the words are engraved right on the watch in order to be seen she correctly thought.

So Tammy took a whole new approach to her effort in obtaining a translation to the letters. She made a quick search as to the original languages of the text in the Bible. The language of GOD in Tammy's mind.

She discovered that most of the Bible was comprised of Hebrew and Greek. But neither of those were the correct starting point either. But it felt right, that she was searching in the right direction now.

“Think Tammy” , she said aloud to herself.

So she next researched on how the Bible was written and preserved in ancient days. She almost skipped right over it when in her mind something said wait!

Go back, what was that? She wondered inside.

She was referring to a section about scholars and scribes, the educated class of the past. There her eyes found the part again that her mind had been racing through.

That most scholars from the past realized; that kingdoms, and governments, even vast empires, each rose and fell as both conquerors and conquered, much more frequently than we realize in modern society. For example the Greek empire had given way to Rome, Seemingly overnight languages and customs would be discarded at least officially.

However one language was used by the officials of many ancient societies as a means of a common breakdown in record keeping. That language was Latin.

Tammy did not even bother with a complete search into the history of Latin itself, just when she learned that all the educated people in the ages past had used Latin as a second universal language to their own, as a supplement that others could understand she started a fresh new web search.

It looked right,... the writing on her computer screen compared to the engraving on the back of her watch. Tammy started another internet search on how to translate the letters from Latin to English.

When she was disappointed to learn that it was not quite that simple. You see English is a very limited language compared to the complex languages of the past.

Language was then a complete tool leaving no room for error or misunderstanding. Precise feelings and emotions were each phrases and individual words in the ancient tongue. By example there are many different words for Love in the Greek language.

To say in Greek that you love chocolate, or that you Love your spouse, used very different forms of the word Love. But in English we have the only one word for love.

OK another way Tammy thought as she took a sheet of paper and placed it over the back of her watch. She then used a trusty old number two pencil and made a rubbing of the inscribed letters on the back of it. A few hours later she took a chance by having then already asked Thomas to keep an eye on the twins as she went down town the local community college that she had attended herself and attained her degree. She was hoping and Praying that she would be able to find someone there who could help her with the Latin.

The information desk sent her Professor Provanzano's way, he is the ancient cultures history teacher. Tammy was in luck. The Professor had a class in session that morning. Tammy simple waited on a bench outside in the parking area while watching two bluebirds play as the class ran it's course. After the students had left Tammy then approached the Professor inside

She knocked on the door and entered.
" Yes " The professor said.

The man appeared to be sixtyish wearing small gold framed spectacles with short white hair and a neatly trimmed equally white goatee.

Oh excuse me my bad, forgot to mention the green school sweater he was sporting.

“ Excuse me Professor the information desk said that you might be able to help me,
I have a family heirloom inscribed in Latin but I can not seem to be able to translate it.”

“ Well it is not as simple as that my dear.” The Professor answered then he continued,

“ Latin is very complex, but Yes I should be able to help you, or at least point you to someone who can help you.”

Tammy stepped into the class while holding the rubbing out to him.

“ Could you please take a look?.” She said.

The professor took the paper and studied the words for a moment or two lost in thought.
Finally he said:

“ Oh I see now,... my dear there is latin and there is Latin.”

“ The common spoken variety and the official documentation one.”

“ This is the later, and it is in a very odd dialect by it’s own right I might add.”

Then the professor said a few lines about GOD and then he just smiled at Tammy.

“ Those words my dear,... they are your inscription.”

The professor paused knowing full well that he had left Tammy in the dust.

After a second or two Tammy produced a small pad and pen from her purse as she smiled and then asked the professor if he would be so kind as to repeat his words again?

“ I would be happy too he said, it has been a very long time since I had to pass a test for myself you know ! “

The professor was clearly looking at the translating of the Latin on Tammy's paper as a pop quiz of his very own now.

Here are the words the kind professor read again aloud to Tammy ;

I AM the answer to your Prayer
But Tammy be aware
Each moment you gain today
Is another that I will take away

“ Odd the Professor said lost in thought.”

“ What's that?” Tammy inquired.

“ The IAM is obviously a reference to GOD, but in the Latin scribe language it is passively possessive.

“ I do not understand Professor.” Tammy said to him.

“ That is alright my dear because neither do I.” He replied to her.

“ I can only tell you what it says and how it is structured in composition.”

“Which does have great meaning in Latin, you will just have to trust me on that.”

“ You see my dear the way the words say I AM they do mean GOD,”

“And the phrasing indicates the item in question, what these words are inscribed upon, are also an extension of GOD.”

“ As in the item is speaking to you, saying I AM (watch) is the answer to your Prayer.”

“But it is also actually saying that GOD is the real answer behind the item (watch) to your Prayer.”

“In short the Item inscribed (watch) is the I AM in the first line, but it is also lessor to GOD, I AM who is the real answer to your Prayer.”

“ Compish? “ The Professor said with a smile to Tammy.

“ I think so professor, in fact I know so.” She said.

“ Thank-you very much for your time, you have been a great help today.” Tammy added.

Tammy turned and started to walk toward the doorway.

“ Miss? ” The Professor said again asking for Tammy’s attention just before she left the classroom.

“ Yes Professor? “ She said while pausing to turn and face the teacher one last time.

“ I have to know ma’am,... is your name Tammy?”

With a very broad smile, Tammy clearly understood that her next answer to the Professor would leave him with more questions than an answer.

She said;

“ Indeed kind sir,... my name is Tammy. “

Have you ever noticed that GOD HIMSELF quite often will do that very thing to each of us? That is giving to us exactly the answer we were looking for, only to discover that we had not a clue as to, the bigger picture in the first place.

The look on the Professors face said it all as Tammy left his life forever as quite a mystery. The Professor was astounded knowing full well that a mystery greater than he could possibly even imagine had just left his classroom as he once again looked at Tammy's paper and pencil rubbing that he was still holding in his hand.

I AM the answer to your Prayer
But Tammy be aware
Each moment you gain today
Is another that I will take away

A few days later Tammy awoke feeling nearly as exhausted as she did when she had retired to bed the night before. This past Monday you remember the one following her week-end visit to Professor Provanzano, she had started anew, fresh again by learning to wean herself of total dependence upon the time keeper. As to not using carelessly the gift of GOD'S Time.

Tammy had discovered just how much she had already become reliant upon the watch in only the few short weeks of using the time keeper, and since she was on vacation this week, it was the perfect opportunity to try and find a balance between real time and GOD'S Time.

She was trying to be able to learn to discern, that which was important enough to use the watch for in the first place. As Tammy's mind began to clear she was pleased with the fact that she could recall only using the watch twice yesterday.

First when she had truly made a mistake, you see in her zeal to appeal, she had overcommitted herself. She literally had to be in two places at the same time. Fortunately one of the items on her over booked agenda was a minor errand for her husband Thomas. The other was volunteering to work at the local soup kitchen for lunch after Church service. You know the place,... Yes that's it, in the basement of the other Church across town. Tammy's Pastor was right about suggesting that the members of her congregation should also help out being that we are all members of the body of Christ.

Tammy had simply paused time and then quickly ran the first errand for her husband
Then she dropped the twins off at her sisters place and then proceeded across town to the other Church for their mealtime service.

The second time she had paused time was when someone had dropped a large pot of tomato sauce onto the floor causing an almost indescribable mess.
Spilled sauce was not the worst of it, for they actually had plenty of sauce for today's guest turnout. It was the loss of help as in people, that it would take to clean that mess up. Right at their peak, their rush time so to speak.

" Go ! do your thing, I'll get it. " Tammy had announced to everyone.

Meaning that she had just volunteered again my friend, that is as the one to yet again clean up one of life's well not so little messes with the gift of time that GOD had Blessed her with.

She was very careful in this public setting as she paused the watch in brief intervals making sure that each time someone had taken notice of her progress. As in not having the appearance to others that the colossal saucy mess was instantaneously miraculously cleaned up.

Tammy made sure that it took at least an hour in real time by using the watch in spurts
In actuality it took her nearly three hours of back breaking scrubbing upon her hands and knees to get it all. All of the other Church volunteers were very grateful and amazed at the speed of her help.

As Tammy lay awake now in bed her smile had spread, as she remembered the previous days events.

When,...

She finally realized that it was just too quiet.
You see Tammy had already become accustomed to sleeping in the total silence of paused time in order to get a complete uninterrupted complete rest.

But she had not paused the watch last night as she laid down to sleep.
Now the mother part of her had finally woken up and realized that the house was just too quiet at this time of the morning with two six year old twins.
Then she remembered, Thomas had gently told her that the kids were up and it was his time to leave for work. Still exhausted she must have dozed off again she realized.

In a flash Tammy jumped from the bed and raced first through the upstairs of their home, nothing, not a trace of little Tami and Tommy.

Tammy practically leapt down the stairs as she remembered Thomas's words to her this morning in her mind;

“ You looked so tired this morning so I let you sleep as long as I could “

Tammy never even noticed little baby doll “ dry or cry “ you know the one little Tami actually bottle feeds and then it wets itself laying upon the third from the bottom step.

Tammy tumbled in a heap upon the floor knocking the old wire stand complete with two ferns into shambles. She never even noticed, nor had she hardly even registered the sharp pain in her left ankle that she had severely twisted.

Tammy never even took stock of the fact that the kids had left their toys on the steps yet again, or even had a regret about not using the watch in what seemed like a hundred times a day in picking the house up behind the children

She seemed oblivious to the limp now profound in her gait as she quickly searched from room to room for her children while calling out their names over and over.

She found them.

“ Praise the Lord and Thank-You Dear GOD, they are A-OK “

Ran through Tammy's mind at the first sight of little Tami and Tommy in the dining room.

“ I think we broke it Mommy “ Tommy said to Tammy all glassy eyed.

In her panic and subsequent relief in finding her children alright it took a few seconds for the entire picture to register in Tammy's mind.

Upon the table was Tammy's time keeper as Tammy finally recognized it Tommy picked it up by the chain and held it out to her.

“ It stopped ticking Mom “ Little Tami said.

At first Tammy wondered if the watch was actually engaged and was working for them just as it works for her, you know that time was actually paused.

In an instant she finally realized it.

The simple truth was that it had taken generations for her to finally grasp the handle of, all of those years ago upon Grandpa Walts lap.

Get it dear reader ?,...

It worked for her, for Tammy in her hands, upon her Grand fathers lap.

The watch that is.

In what was his watch at that time, Tammys future had revealed itself to Grandfather Walt by working in her hands. He had been wondering if the watch would work for another in his family and had been in a easy going style been testing as many in his direct circle as he could time permitting of course.

That is why he took the time again and again repeating the words to a child about how to set the time, how to pause the winder, and of course the warning not to ever over wind it.

“ Not over wind it ! “

Tammy's mind screamed inside

Nibbles was now bumping up against Tammy's now throbbing ankle begging to be let outside in a stark reminder that time was not paused.

Tammy took the watch into her hands and just as she had feared the winder felt tighter than a banjo string. Again from deep inside GrandPa Walts words returned to her from what now seemed like another lifetime to her, in actuality it was you know, another lifetime. It was in his lifetime and just where his and Tammy's time upon GOD'S good green earth had overlapped a little bit.

" Now remember Tammy never to over wind it."

" That is how almost all watches get broke you know. "

" By over winding them. "

" Nothing likes to be overworked, not man, not animal, nor even machine my dear. "

" Nothing good can ever come from pushing anything too hard."

Grandpa Walts words of warning had now come back to haunt Tammy.

Tammy felt sick to her stomach.

" No matter how tired I was, how could I have been so careless? "

She wondered to her self.

It was broke.

Her gift of time from GOD.

Lost in her despair and along with the children's fear to speak up at this moment, I do possess a small secret that neither Tammy or the children had picked up on that morning. Remember when Tammy awoke a short while ago and she felt like time was paused? You remember,... when it was total silence?

Well guess what ? That is because time was paused!

I am not going to tell you just which one of the twin six year olds that GOD'S gift also worked for in their hands as who are part of Tammy's line. The kids were having some fun. It was the dog. First it was following them begging for it's morning meal and after Nibbles had left the room to check it's bowl yet again the other twin would say :

“ Do it again ! “

And the other who the time keeper is also destined for, would pull the stem and back the hands off a single minute.

And Wall-la ! ,... The dog was back, just like that !

Oh how the children had giggled.
They even checked the kitchen to see if their were two of their dog's just like their was two twins of them.
The other twin was also desperately trying to get the watch to function for them.
Sadly it was just not GOD'S fate for that one.
Yep you guessed it, that young one had accidently in desperation attempting to get the watch to work for them had over wound it.

What was that again my friend ?

Why you say ?

Why Tammy, why her child, why GrandPa Walt you say ?
As in why would GOD give to that family such an awesome game changing gift ?

The answer to that question is simple, GOD gives to us all, game changing gifts and talents or resources to use in HIS Service.

The time keeper just happens to be a very unique awesome gift of responsibility for a very select few in Tammy's family.

Tammy got herself and the twins dressed and fed , even that pesky Nibbles that unbeknown to Tammy, had caused all the trouble to begin with, got fed as well !
She had asked Mrs. Taggart their neighbor lady if she would be so kind as to come over and sit a spell with the children while she had errands to run.

An hour or so later Tammy entered into Owings five and dime. Mr.Taylor's son " Buck " was the one running the place now. Oh my bad,... Mr.Taylor is a jeweler who went to work for Mr. Owings many uncounted moons ago, and as Mr. Owings the store's original Pharmacist had retired the Taylor family stayed on and bought him out.

You see this five and dime is very unique.
Just as the different family members of either the Owings or Taylor families are unique.
As each one added to the store using their unique talents the store gained a broader array of services. The building is quite large, actually it is three originally separate store fronts that have been taken over by the five and dime many generations ago.

The store is yes a five and dime dollar type retail store, but it also contains a rather complete hardware, a pharmacy, and of course a quite fine jewelry counter.

Remember this facility had grown up in the years before large shopping malls and such, and in this small town environment and with it's hands on personal service this store still thrives to this day.

OK back to Buck Owings,
He runs this place now for his father, and is actually a personal friend of Tammy's.
He was only a year or two ahead of her in grade level and in high school they had actually attended a few local football games together, not officially as a date per say but just as friends. Buck was also now married and had a family of his very own.

But our reason that Tammy came here today is that rather famous jewelry case that Bucks father had installed over fifty years prior.

You see he is an old school jeweler,... the real deal.

Buck was busy with a rather flustered lady in the hardware side of the store with some drain cleaning fluids when Tammy approached him.

She respectfully waited until the distraught woman had checked out with her foaming pipe clog remover as Buck then asked her what he could do for her on this fine day.

“ Is your father in today ? “ Tammy asked.

“ Indeed he is “ Was Buck's reply.

Buck crossed the room and stuck his head inside a private office doorway along the back wall.

“ Pops a very pretty lady is here to see you.”

Buck told his father sight unseen behind the wall.

“ Well we best not keep her waiting then. ”

Tammy over heard the elder Taylor reply.

After pleasantries were exchanged and Tammy had told Bucks father her tale of woe about their treasured family heirloom she asked,

“ Can you fix it Mr.Taylor ? “ Tammy asked.

The jeweler then placed a very soft clothe on the top of the glass jewelry case,

“ May I examine the time piece please ? “ He asked Tammy.

Tammy pulled the watch from her purse and handed it to him as it's pure spun gold and all the perfect precious stones glimmered brightly in the stores florescent lighting. Even Buck who was across the store who was preparing the use of his large rental drain-snake, because he knew that the drain glop that the woman had just purchased was never going to clear her pipes had taken notice of the reflective bright color show.

Buck had told the woman that she needed more than the simple drain cleaner, but would she listen, no, of course not. She'll be back he thought, and in an even fouler mood than before when the twinkling of Tammy's precious time keeper filled the store in a kaleidoscope of colors.

Mr.Taylor let out a small whistle as he said to Tammy
“So beautiful.”

“ No wonder you want it repaired “ He added.

Mr. Taylor gently laid the time keeper upon the soft clothe as he swung the long tubular magnifying glass that was attached to the right lens of his glasses that all the old school jewelers seem to use down, in order to take a closer inspection of the watch.

Tammy hardly had the time to realize what happened next as Mr. Taylor's well experienced hands, those of a mechanical surgeon did their job.

In an instant unseen from his pocket he had a small metal tool that opened the watch at it's seam and in a half heart beat causing much panic inside Tammy, at the mere sight of her precious gift from GOD laying in pieces on that clothe upon the glass jewelry case.

She was frozen in fear.

Mr. Taylor was totally oblivious to Tammy's predicament as he inched his face down toward the watches inner workings. He poked and prodded a bit at the watches insides. Next he held the mechanism up to the light above his head to get a better inspection. HMMM, was all he said.

He gently laid the internals of Tammy's watch back down upon the clothe and in the way that only elderly people can get away with, he rolled the clothe up and walked away! Much to Tammy's dread as he entered into that very same back room where he was when she had first entered the store, then he yelled aloud back to her :

“ Come back same time tomorrow dear. “

That was it.

Just like that,
Buck's father and her precious gift from GOD were gone!

Tammy was certain that she would still be standing here at this very time tomorrow for her feet were frozen to the floor.

How long had she been standing there like that she wondered to herself ?
When it was her trusty old friend Buck who had gently walked up behind her and placed his hand upon her shoulder.

“ It's alright Tammy, if anyone can fix it, it's pops.”

Needless to say Tammy did not sleep a wink that night and she had much practice with her many a Prayer.

Tammy was about fifteen nervous minutes earlier the next morning than she was the day before.
It was just about all she could get away with in her estimation of not being too pushy or actually not giving Mr. Taylor enough actual time to do the repair.

Tammy again entered the Owings five and dime.

Buck was at it again.
Explaining just how to use the full size take no prisoners drain machine to that very same distraught lady who was back again just as he had predicted.

The thought crossed Tammy's mind that she hoped it was not the only working toilet in the ladies home that was plugged so tight. Poor thing she thought to herself.

Excuse me Buck said to her, as he once again approached the very same office along the back wall of the store.

“ Dad, your pretty woman is back. “ Buck announced to his father.

“ Oh goodie, I have a treat for her. “

Was today’s reply sight unseen from inside the office by the elder Taylor.

Mr. Taylor was smiling broadly as he in slow motion pulled Tammy’s once again complete watch from his upper pocket holding it by it’s chain out to her.

“ Fine day to see a beautiful lass once again. “ He said with much joy in his words.

“ We shall see about that. “ Tammy replied a little bit too tartly.

Nothing was going to soften her mood until she knew if GOD’S Gift would still work for her. Tammy closed her eyes knowing full well by the high spirits of Mr. Taylor that he had repaired the inner workings of the watch. That, and the now very familiar ticking the Time Keeper was making as she had placed it against her left ear.

The ticking calmed her some reassuring her that GOD’S promise was always there.

Only one way to find out Tammy thought.

With her eyes still closed she held the Time keeper against her heart and said just two words;

“Please Lord. “

As her experienced fingers lifted the winder and slowly turned it backwards to it’s limit of ten minutes back.

Tammy again entered the Owings five and dime.

Buck was at it again.

Explaining how to use the full size take no prisoners drain machine to that same distraught lady who was back again just as he had predicted.

Dejavue thought Tammy.

Excuse me Buck said to her as he once again approached the very same office along the back wall of the store.

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“Fine day to see a beautiful lass once again.” He said with much joy in his words.

“Yes it is Mr. Taylor!”

Tammy replied to him with joy abound as she added;

“Indeed it is a wonderful day that the Lord has made!”

For unto whomsoever much is given,
of him shall be much required
Luke 12:48b (KJV)

Pilate Demanded: What is truth!
Yet he could not see
Nor could he hear
Can You?

*Jesus said to him,
"I am the way,
and the truth,
and the life;
no one comes to the Father,
but through Me.
John 14:6 NIV*

The Prayer of Truth :

Lord,
Thank-you for reminding me
That my life is not worth living
If I live it for myself
It's only worth living
While i am living it for you
Amen ✝
<LS><

Shackled and shamed
by my very own name
Dear Holy Christ
Oh how I long
To escape
Mine own life

Conflicted torn asunder
How do I Pray
I often wonder

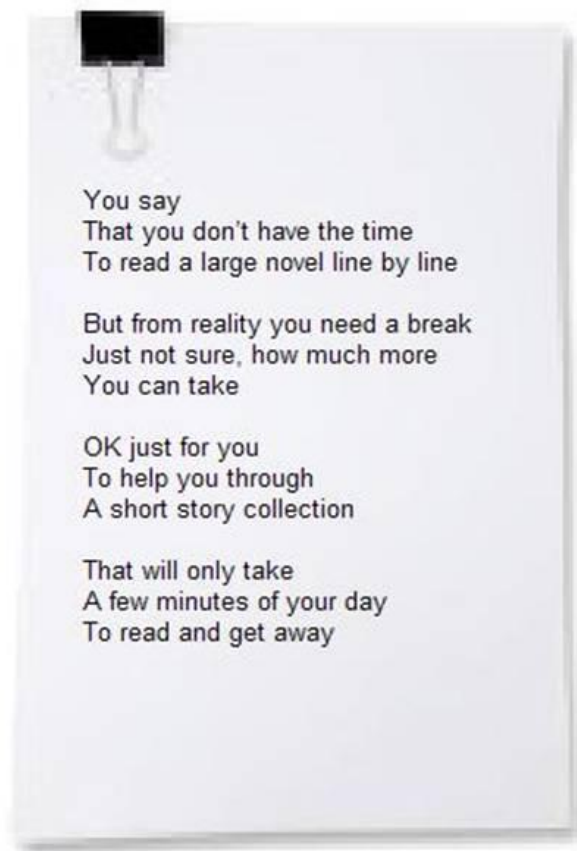
Longing to be free
Free of me
How can that be ?

I crave for no excess
I weep for no success
So what can be the root
The cause of internal dispute

Scars that are ever evident
Yet I carry them no more
Your Love is the evidence

Conflicted yet divine
Tranquility boils inside
Where can I hide
From thyself of thine

Back Cover



You say
That you don't have the time
To read a large novel line by line

But from reality you need a break
Just not sure, how much more
You can take

OK just for you
To help you through
A short story collection

That will only take
A few minutes of your day
To read and get away

