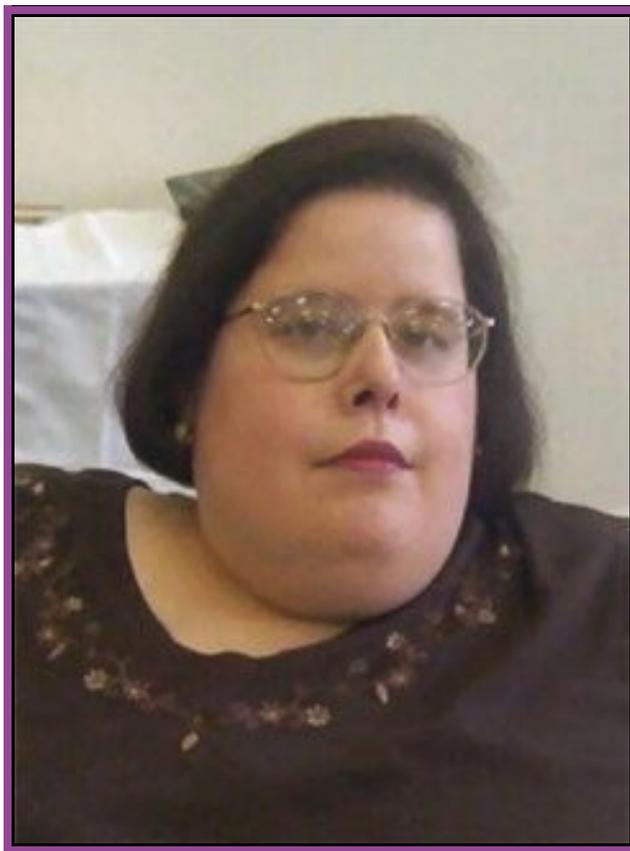


# **Under His Wings**

An Unfinished Story



by Beverly Stump Jones  
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Have you ever thought that you were going through the worst thing that anybody could ever go through and that you were all alone? If all of you are honest with yourself then all of you would say yes. That is a part of life. Anybody that says life is easy is not being truthful. I am here to tell you that life is not easy. It is not supposed to be, but just because life isn't easy, that does not mean it is not worth living.

I was born on May 29, 1972 to a married couple who were doing everything right. They loved each other with all their hearts and they were going to start a family and everything was going to be great. They had their whole life ahead of them. They were young but they knew that raising a child would be a great experience.

Well it didn't quite turn out the way they had planned. When I was born I didn't come in this world a healthy newborn. I was born with an open spine and lots of complications. They call it Spina Bifida. It is a birth defect that they are still not sure exactly what causes it. It is nothing that the mother does on purpose to cause this to happen, it is just one of those mysteries that only God knows.

According from what I have been told there were a lot of complications and they pretty much said there wasn't anything they could do and I was going to die or either just be a vegetable and would need to be in an institution somewhere. They wanted my parents to take me home and just accept the fact I was going to die. In fact, my mom didn't even get to see me and hold me right away because of all the complications I was having. From what I can remember being told, they transferred me to another hospital that also said there wasn't anything that could be done.

What the doctors didn't know was that they may have a lot of knowledge but there is a great physician out there that wasn't going to let me die. My parents took me home and decided that God was the one in control and so they prayed that His will be done. Can you imagine a mom that can take there child and say "Okay God, you brought her in this world and if you see fit to take her back then I will give her up" I admire my mom more than she will ever know because of that, that took a lot of courage and faith. My parents took me to church a couple of weeks after I was born and had the church pray for me and for God's will to be done. Word spread about me and my condition and that started people from all over praying for me.

After I made it for a little while I think the doctors realized that I at least needed to go through surgeries to try to help me make it through. I had to have my spine closed up which was a major operation for a baby to go through. I had to have numerous surgeries; the older I got the more surgeries that were required for me. I made it through each one of them with a lot of prayer and support. God definitely was there with me

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through it all. God was also there with my parents and my family during all of this cause they were always there for me. My parents were not the wealthiest people around but God always provided. They had to try to work while also being there for me and my surgeries. My dad wasn't real healthy himself due to the fact he had asthma since he was a child. But he was always there for me. They took care of me and made sure I had all the possibilities to have as normal as a life as possible.

My whole family including grandparents and aunts and uncles were always there to do what they could and to pray for me. I remember having to go away to a children's hospital when I was about 7 years old because of some surgery I had on my back. I had to lay perfectly flat for months. It wasn't easy on me and I knew it wasn't easy on my family because I was a couple of hours away and they did their very best to come see as much as they could. I also would get cards and letters from so many people. Lots of them were people that had just heard about me and what I was going through and I didn't even know them. They just wanted me to know they were praying for me. I will never forget that. Even though I saw my family as much as I could and I also got lots of mail I still felt homesick and I felt lonely.

There were times I felt all alone and like not even God was there with me but you know, even when my family wasn't able to be there I was not alone. At the time I may not have been able to see it cause I was very homesick and I missed my family very much. It was very hard having to go a week or more sometimes without seeing any of my family. Every time they came it was wonderful to see them but each time they had to leave it was harder and harder on all of us. But God was right there with me the whole time.

I think I was at that children's hospital for a little over a year and I saw a lot of things that I will never forget. To this day I wonder what happened to some of those kids I met there. I was not the worst off one there by no means. They had some very sick kids there. But I know God was there with them too.

Sometimes when I get down and think things are so bad I think of those kids and it makes me realize there is always somebody worse off than I am. Some of those kids didn't even have family to come see them. I remember one little boy that was there because he had been in a severe fire. About 90% of his body was burned but he always was the sweetest boy. But the whole time I was there I hardly ever saw any family come see him. I am very blessed to have had the support I had during that time in my life.

Never did I dream I would need that support as much as I have during my whole life. I was one of the first ones in a wheelchair to be able to go to a public school. We

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had to always meet with the principals and teachers ahead of time to work out details so I could get to all my classes. God always made a way for me to blend in as much as possible with the other kids. School was not my favorite thing to do because I, like a lot of kids, didn't like to take the time to study. But I did feel like I was accomplishing something by being in a public school with everybody else. I felt like that sort of paved a way for other kids in the future to be able to do the same thing. One of my problems I had in school though was being very shy. I think part of that had to do with the fact I wanted to blend in with everybody and I never wanted anybody to look at me and feel sorry for me. My parents had brought me up to believe everything happens for a reason. So it seemed like from day one I grew up thinking okay, God you put me on here with a disability and so you must have something special for me to do.

Being in a wheelchair was all I knew so it seemed normal to me. I remember having friends in school but I never would get real close to any cause in the back of my mind I always wondered if they really wanted to be my friend or if they were just being nice to me cause they felt like they had to. I don't remember a lot of kids teasing me or making fun of me. Yeah there were stares but I never really paid much attention to that but I did shy away from them and I wasn't one that could start a conversation with somebody. After school I would come home and I would love to go outside just to just watch the neighborhood kids play. I couldn't get in the middle of a lot of what they were doing but I could watch.

I was happy with that most of the time. A lot of the kids would try to keep me involved. I remember sometimes we would just get in a group and just go walking around the block and different ones would want to take turns pushing me. And we would just talk and cut up about nothing really. But I was included. and that made me feel good. My parents always tried to spend time with me and do things I enjoyed doing. I loved to go shopping, I still do. I have never had a lot of money and that is not really the point to me. It was just getting in the mall in the middle of everybody else and blending in and doing the same things everybody else was doing.

When I was growing up, I missed a lot of school because of frequent stays in the hospital for different surgeries. That would make it difficult to keep up but God always brought along the right people to help me get home bound teachers to come to the house to help me keep up. My parents also would help me as much as they could to get my homework done plus recover from surgeries.

Later on as I got older I started in the summers going away for a couple of weeks to an Easter Seals camp with other kids that had disabilities. That was a lot of fun. At first I would miss my family but then I would get in with the kids and get to doing the

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activities and I had a blast. I made a lot of friends while I was there. I even had my picture taken with one of the Harlem Globetrotters that came to see us. We went fishing and horseback riding and just learned how to do different crafts and I even went swimming.

To look at me now you wouldn't think I was able to do all that but God always seemed to make ways for me to be able to do things that I enjoyed. Yes I was a child with a lot of difficulties and I had to be in and out of the hospital a lot. There were times I was very sick and the doctors didn't think I was going to pull through a certain surgery or a certain sickness but the Great Physician would always pull me through and then I would go back to doing the things I enjoyed like fishing and shopping. As a kid I think that was the two things I enjoyed the most. I remember me and my daddy going off and we would spend all day together in a boat in the middle of a lake fishing. That was some of the best times of my life. I know he could have just gone without me cause it took a lot of work on his part to get me in and out of the boat and things like that but he never complained.

Both of my parents did everything they always could to make me have a great life and never showed that I was a burden to them. God would give them the strength to help me have a good life. Now I wasn't a perfect child I admit I got in trouble just like any other kid when I did something wrong. I didn't study like I should and I didn't always do things when I was told. Just because I had problems didn't mean I got out of doing things. Whenever I heard "Beverly Anne!!" I knew I was in trouble.

The main thing I was supposed to do was keep my room clean and I never saw a problem with the way it looked just the way it was. So I didn't think I ever had to put anything away. I had times I had to have my phone privileges taken away or couldn't be with my friends, it wasn't very much but when it did happen that was a lot to me cause there wasn't much else to do.

But I appreciate my parents not just sitting back and giving me anything and everything I ever wanted just because they felt sorry for me. That made me the kind of person I am today. I was not a spoiled brat that had everything my way growing up. I had to earn things just like everybody else. And whenever I did do something right my parents were always showing me how proud they were of me.

I was brought up in church from day one and that helped me out a lot. Church has always been a place where I felt very safe. I remember going to church as a kid and listening to the choir and to our pastor preach about a God that could always be like a friend to you even when you felt like you didn't have a friend in the world.

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I also loved to hear my mom sing in church. She has a beautiful voice and I remember listening and thinking she sounded like an angel. I even remember getting in front of the church a few times and singing a song I loved called *He's Still Working on Me*, by Joel Hemphill:

***He's Still Working On Me***

*Words and Music: Copyright © 1980 Joel Hemphill*

*He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.  
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,  
The Sun and the Earth and Jupiter and Mars.  
How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me.*

*There really ought to be a sign upon the heart,  
Don't judge him/her yet, there's an unfinished part.  
But I'll be perfect just according to His plan  
Fashioned by the Master's loving hands.*

*He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.  
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,  
The Sun and the Earth and Jupiter and Mars.  
How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me.*

*In the mirror of His Word reflections that I see  
Make me wonder why He never gave up on me.  
He loves me as I am and helps me when I pray  
Remember He's the Potter, I'm the clay.*

*He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be.  
It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars,  
The Sun and the Earth and Jupiter and Mars.  
How loving and patient He must be, He's still working on me.*

I was involved in Sunday school and Children's church and we would have fund raisers and things and I would go out and join right in trying to raise money. To me that was a lot of fun. It gave me a chance to give back to God a little of what he had given me. I knew that I was here for a reason and I needed to do what I could for him to show him I was going to make the best of the life he had given me.

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Going to church was something that was a part of my life. My parents took the time to get me up and get me dressed and ready to go every Sunday morning Sunday night and Wednesday night. I even had to be pulled up and down steps to get to Sunday School classes and if my parents couldn't do it God always made sure somebody was around that was willing to do it. I would go to school and there was kids that didn't go to church and that seemed strange to me cause going to church for me was just like waking up every day. You just did it. Now it wasn't just a habit, it was something I loved doing. Whenever I had to be out because of being sick or in the hospital I hated missing church. I wasn't going just because my parents made me. I always knew that whenever I was sick or in the hospital that my church family was praying for me and making sure people from all over were praying for me.

During those times I had to be in the hospital so much with surgeries and illnesses I know I had so many prayers going up for me cause I would not have made it if it had not been for God helping me through. I also believe God can work through people here cause I remember so many times we would get cards or letters and money and we would never know who it was from. But whenever we did God got all the praise for it cause we know he is the one that was responsible for whoever sent it to us.

There was times we would even be gone and when we would come back home there would be a bag or two of stuff sitting on the porch with things in it that was very needed but to this day we don't know who put it there. I just know that God had his special angels looking after us.

My parents had to try to keep their jobs while also being there for me. My mom was trying to work and also be with me at the hospital around the clock whenever I was there. I also remember a time when I was in the hospital out of town and my dad was back home in the hospital with his asthma. Now I know that was hard on her but she was always there as much as she could be for the both of us. And I know she had her own health problems but she would always put herself aside to make sure her family was taken care of. My dad was the same way. I know there was lots of times he didn't feel like carrying me up and down steps to get somewhere and getting me in and out of vehicles wasn't very easy either but he never complained.

As I got older his asthma got worse but he always was there for me and did everything he could to make sure I had a good life. I remember going outside with him and I had a plastic bat and a plastic ball and he would throw it to me and let me hit it. I couldn't run around bases or anything he would just let me hit it and then he would go get the ball and throw it to me again. I also remember going outside to fly a kite. He

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would do all the work to get it started and then let me hold it so I could feel like I was flying it.

Those were some happy times in my childhood. I did have my times of being very sick but when I was feeling good God always made ways for me to be able to enjoy things. I was an only child but I remember when I was about 7 years old my cousin would come and spend the summers with us. Sometimes weeks at a time. It got to where sometimes he stayed most of the summer. He just loved to come stay with us.

Chris and my dad were real close. Plus I loved having somebody else there. He was a little younger than me so it was like having a little brother around the house. We had our times where we would fight like brother and sister too. But I feel like God brought him to staying with us because he was having some hard times and we loved having him around. We were able to show him love and he gave back just as much. He was so much help to me. We would go out together to the movies and to the mall and just have fun. We also had times where when nobody else knew it we would just talk. We trusted each other to tell each other things we wouldn't tell anybody. I needed somebody I could talk to that would just listen and he was there for me. He also let me know he wasn't going to feel sorry for me. If there was something I could do myself he wasn't going to do it for me, he pushed me. Which is just what I needed.

He only got to come during summers though cause the rest of the year we had school and he lived in a different town and went to a different school. God knew what he was doing in letting him come and stay with us some cause eventually down the road he decided he needed a change and he wanted to come live with us all the time. I would love to spend time with the other members of my family also. Both my mom and my dad's side of the family was kind of big with lots of aunts and uncles and cousins. Christmas at my grandparents house was always one of my favorite times of the year. My family has always been the biggest supporters for me in everything I have had to go through.

I have one aunt on my dad's side that I have been close to as far back as I can remember. She was always there for me and I loved to go to her house on Sunday afternoons. I don't know why I ended up being so close to her but it just was always easy to talk to her and she would come pick me up sometimes and let me stay the night with her. She was single so we had a lot of time we could do things just the two of us. I think she would baby-sit me a lot when my parents were working.

When I was real little like before the age of 3 we lived in a trailer right down the street from where she lived with my grandparents. I remember being at my

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grandparents house the day before my 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday and we looked out the back door and the trailer was on fire. Both of my parents were at work and there wasn't much that could be done to save it anyway. But I remember watching people try there best to get our stuff out for us and to save as much as they could. We had to move cause the trailer couldn't be saved but God made a way for us to find another place to live.

My aunt and I loved to go shopping and it also was a habit that after church on Sundays I would go spend the day with her. I was not happy if something came up to where I couldn't go. I remember when my aunt decided she was going to build her a house down the street from my grandparents. I loved being able to go stay with her. She was also my Sunday school teacher so we would have little parties for the class at her house. She would take me up and down steps just so I could get in and out of her house.

I didn't get to go spend the night with friends or with people very much cause I was a child that had to have a lot of care and as long as I was home my parents could do what needed to be done but that made it hard for me to go just anywhere overnight. But Charlotte would do everything that needed to be done no questions asked. I remember whenever she would pick me up to go stay a night with her when we got to the top of the road she lived at she would let me take charge of the steering wheel. At that age that was so cool to me. I loved being able to do that. And I always thought, well this will be the closest I will ever come to driving. I was like her adopted child cause she was not married and didn't have any kids of her own.

She always said she was going to stay single, but I told her if she ever got married I was going to be in her wedding. I wouldn't miss that for anything. Well in 1984 she did find her future husband and she did get married. I was to be in the wedding and I was so excited. I wasn't too crazy about her getting married in a way though cause I felt like she wouldn't have any more time for me. But I went right along with it and was going to be in the wedding. Well during that time in my life I was having a lot of problems with bladder infections. I would do okay until I start running a high fever and would have to go in the hospital for iv antibiotics. About a week of them and I would be okay and could go on with my life.

Just about the time my aunt was getting ready to get married I started getting sick with an infection and started running a fever. Plus my dad was in the hospital with his asthma. They decided I need to go in the hospital and get iv antibiotics, so I had to call my aunt and tell her I couldn't be in her wedding. I was heart broken. Something I had looked so forward to and I wasn't going to be able to even go let alone be in it. I felt so

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disappointed cause I had never been in a wedding and I knew with all my problems I would never have a wedding of my own.

My dad came home the day before the wedding and was able to go so I was glad of that. And it turned out okay because my aunt and my new uncle came to my room at the hospital, still in their wedding clothes, to see me before they went off for their honeymoon. Now how many people do you know that would do that? That made me so happy. And I also liked my new uncle from that day forward. He was another one that would always do everything he could to make sure I had as much happiness as I could. I wasn't pushed out of my aunts life I was just a part of both of their lives. They eventually had a daughter of their own. I was so excited for them and while she was pregnant it was a lot of fun talking to her about planning for the baby.

She had a beautiful baby girl and I remember thinking that I hope this child and I can be as close as me and my aunt were when I was growing up. I loved spending time with her and my dad also was crazy about her. I remember him telling my aunt one time that he was going to spoil her rotten just like she had spoiled me.

Well my dad didn't get to do much of that cause in September of 1985 my mom woke up one Sunday morning and saw where my dad had been up most of the night. There were a lot of times where if my dad couldn't sleep laying down because of his breathing he would go in the other room and sleep sitting up in his recliner. That made it easier on him to breathe, plus he had a machine right there that he could use if he felt too bad and that would help him most of the time. He had his share of having to be in and out of the hospital with his asthma but he would always come back home and go back to doing as much as he could for me and continuing to work.

My daddy also loved to work out in the yard. He had gotten where he couldn't work because of his asthma so he spent a lot of time at home. He would plant flowers out in the yard and he would also love to cook in the kitchen. I used to love to watch my dad cook. He would make pound cakes that were out of this world for me to sell to make money for the fund raisers I was involved in at church. I use his recipe to this day to make the same kind of pound cake. We got real close while he spent so much time at home. When he was feeling good he really enjoyed life.

That morning my mom saw where he was having trouble with his asthma and asked him did he want to go to the emergency room. He kept saying no. He didn't want to go. She felt like he needed to go but he insisted he would be okay. He was supposed to take part in the morning service at church so he was determined to go. It was very early in the morning when my mom was trying to get him to go and I was still in bed.

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My dad had a younger brother that worked not far from where we lived and sometimes he would come by our house either before or after work but never that early. But that morning he showed up at our door. I don't really know why but to this day I believe that God sent him there because when he saw my dad needed to go to the emergency room he didn't take no for an answer. He made sure my dad made it to the hospital.

My dad had been like he was that morning many times and went to the hospital and spent a few days and then come home and he was okay for awhile. I know by the time he left I just had gotten up and when he left out the door I said "Bye I will see you later" Thinking ok, if they put him in the hospital my mom will take me up there later to see him. My mom got dressed and said she was going to go up to the hospital and see how things were and that my cousin would be coming by shortly to stay with me while she was gone.

I called my aunt to tell her that my dad was at the hospital and she said somebody had already called her. Something about her voice I could tell that this was different then before. She was talking to me and right before we hung up she told me to try not to worry too much. As I was hanging up the phone I just said "God please don't take my daddy away" My cousin showed up and we watched TV and worked on homework to pass the time and I just thought it was going to be another one of those times they put him in the hospital.

The next thing I remember is my aunt showing up at my door and I saw her with my dad's suitcase and I was thinking "They must be letting him come home cause she has his suitcase" but I couldn't figure out why she was there and I didn't see mama and daddy.

She sat down beside me and told me that they had done all they could do but that my daddy had passed away. I can't remember exactly what she said but I just remember feeling so numb. It was like I was in a dream. I couldn't understand how that could be happening when I had asked God to not take my daddy away.

Shortly after my aunt told me, my mom showed up. When I saw her coming in the driveway I wanted to just go somewhere and hide. I didn't know how I was going to face her. She came in and I was still in shock. All I remember of what she said was that God would help us through this and that we would get through it together. I was also scheduled to have some major surgery the following week on my bladder. It was going to be a major deal and it was not even a guarantee I would make it through the Surgery.

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Because of everything going on we postponed the surgery for awhile. I remember everybody coming to the house. It was September 8, 1985 which also was the same day as his dad's and my mom's mom's birthdays.

There was so many people that came to the house. I was ok, still feeling like I was in a dream. I felt like I had to hold up because my mom was worried about me and everybody kept telling me to stay strong. So I felt like I had to for everybody else, especially my mom. But deep down I kept wondering how God could do this after I had specifically prayed for him to NOT take my daddy away from me.

Then I also kept hearing things that I don't know if anybody even knew I heard. Like it had looked like my daddy had not taken some of his medicine and that he probably had just decided he had had enough of everything. I couldn't figure out how my daddy could do that to me. Didn't he realize he would be leaving me behind to live the rest of my life without him? My dad was an inspiration to me to never give up. I figured as long as he could make it through as much as he had, then I could make it through anything.

I was starting to feel like my daddy just decided to quit. How was I supposed to go through everything I was supposed to if he even gave up. I held up pretty good with it all or at least looked like I was holding up good up until the funeral. There was so many people there but I don't really remember seeing specific people. I just remember the end of the funeral they took him out of the church and that is when I felt my heart really breaking cause I was thinking "This is the last time I will ever see my daddy"

I was mad at daddy for leaving me and I was mad at God for taking him away from me. I never would open up to anybody cause I wanted everybody to think I was a strong girl and that I was handling things okay. I felt so bad for my mom though cause she was all on her own now to take care of me but I felt like this would bring us closer and we would do okay as long as we just had each other.

I did miss my daddy though very much. God was with me during that hard time even though at the time I felt like it was God's fault. Now that I look back on it I realize it was my daddy's time to go get his reward in heaven. He had stood up in church sometime before this happened and said if God decided it was his time he was ready to go. Now, that is the way to go. He wasn't leaving me he was going home where he wouldn't be sick anymore and he could still watch over me and be my guardian angel.

I believe my dad has seen everything I have been through and seen how God has still had his hand on my life. I believe he is right there with me through everything. I

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still miss him very much and I feel like he would definitely understand what I am going through but I also know he is better off in heaven just looking out for me. I have times when I miss him so much and if I am alone I talk to my dad just like I would anybody else that comes in here. Two months after my dad passed away I had to go ahead with the surgery we had postponed.

I was out of town in the hospital during Thanksgiving that year but my mom was right there with me. I don't remember a lot but I know my mom was with me the whole time. I know it had to be hard on her cause they said there was a chance I wouldn't even make it. But once again God saw fit to help me through this trial and the doctors said everything went really well. I was in the hospital for awhile and then had to recuperate at home for awhile.

I was getting homebound for my school work while I was at home. I remember the day the Challenger Shuttle blew up because I just had finished with my homebound teacher and I turned the TV on. My heart sank when I watched that. I remember thinking those people had everything going for them and they had to lose there life so tragically and here I am just being a burden to everybody and God keeps letting me live.

I think that is when I started really wondering what my purpose on this earth really was. I would think about it every so often but never could put my finger on why my life was so valuable. I eventually went back to school but it was so hard to just go on with my life after I had lost my daddy. I had to stay strong for everybody but I missed him so much. I would go to school and couldn't wait until lunch hour so I could go to the pay phone and call my mom to see if she was okay.

I was so afraid I was going to lose her next. I know I shouldn't have but if I happened to call and she didn't answer I went into a panic. It got pretty much to where she had to let me know where she was going to be all the time. I just knew I couldn't handle losing my mom too. Holidays were hard without my dad that year.

Mom made Christmas be the best she could but I missed my daddy cause I remember Christmas's from past where he would get in the floor in the middle of all my toys and have just as much fun as I was having. I don't know how old I was but I remember playing in the floor with him and a race track he had gotten on Christmas Eve and we were watching TV and the news was telling the kids where Santa was so daddy was trying to hurry me up to go to bed so I would be asleep before Santa came.

I also remember one time when I was in the hospital I was getting released that day and mama and daddy had gotten me a present but wouldn't let me open it until I got

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home. When I got home and opened it was the most beautiful ballerina mobile to hang in my room. I loved it. I would just sit there and watch it and dream. I used to say when I was a kid that if I could have I would have been a ballerina. I was a kid with a lot of problems but I had my dreams just like everybody else.

God continues to help me make it one day at a time dealing with the death of my dad. God also had his hand in something at the time that I tried my best to fight but I should have known God was going to win. The cemetery where my dad had decided he wanted to be buried was not far from where we lived. Mom went and met with the manager to find just the perfect spot for him. She picked a spot where he would be close to a beautiful tree and where it would be easy for me to get to when I wanted to go to the grave.

The manager was very kind to my mom and stayed with her while she walked around to find the perfect spot. I know she was going through a lot having to make that decision but the manager was very helpful. A lot of times he came by the house after that to take care of the business side of burying somebody. I just remember him coming by and he was so nice to both of us. I think mom was comfortable talking to him too cause he came across as a friend and as somebody that cared. He would call just to check on us to see how we were doing and he had heard about me having to go in the hospital for surgery and I remember he called the hospital to see how I was doing. He talked to mama for awhile. I think that is when they ended up becoming friends.

I was a typical 13 year old and I had just lost my daddy and so I probably wasn't always the most friendly person to be around. But I did like him and thought he was nice. After awhile of being friends and coming by the house to see our Christmas tree something seemed to be happening. Mom and this man started talking more and she seemed to really like him. I think she really needed somebody like him to be a friend and to talk to but when they started talking more and more I started feeling a little left out. I was a typical 13 year old I think. I wanted my mom to be happy but I just remember her telling me right after daddy died it was just me and her now and we would make it through this together.

When her and Don got closer and started going out I started feeling like she had moved on and forgot about daddy and here I was still hurting and trying to understand why he left me. Plus there was no way a man was going to come in our lives and take my daddy's place. I didn't mind him being a friend but I didn't want him and mama to get so close. I felt like mama shouldn't be with anybody but my daddy. I know there was a lot of times they knew I wasn't happy. I didn't dislike Don as a person but I just didn't want him getting close to my mom.

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Don did everything he could to convince me he wasn't trying to take my daddy's place but me being a 13 yr old kid didn't believe him. They started dating more and more after awhile and a lot of people I am sure didn't think it was right but even though I felt left out I knew it was just what my mom needed. She was happy again and I always wanted my mom to be happy. Slowly Don and I did become friends. They included me in a lot of things. Don really cared about us. I eventually got to where I could be friends with him but I still didn't want him getting close to my mom but God won that battle.

God knew that mama needed Don in her life and I could see them getting closer. Eventually he asked her to marry him. I knew it was the best thing but I have to be honest at first I wasn't very thrilled with the idea cause he lived here in Danville and we were in North Carolina and I knew we would have to move. I would have to change schools and leave family and friends. And the hardest thing was I knew I would have to leave the house we had lived in for so long that had lots and lots of memories of my dad. But I accepted the fact it was going to happen and it must be meant to be.

So on December 27, 1986 they got married. I was a bridesmaid. It was a beautiful Christmas wedding and my mom was beautiful and looked so happy. They went away on a cruise while I stayed with my grandparents. When they came back it wasn't long before we moved into a house in Danville. It was hard to leave my hometown but I was going to do what my mom felt was best for us.

I wasn't too crazy about the house we lived in because the neighborhood didn't have any kids in it my age. I remember going to school in Danville for the first time and being the new kid in town. It was in the middle of the year so I had to try to just jump right in. I was very shy cause I didn't know if people were being nice to me cause they wanted to be my friend or if they just felt sorry for me. I just pretty much finished up the year and didn't really make a lot of friends. I was really shy and wouldn't get too close to anybody. I know when it was time for me to start 10<sup>th</sup> grade which was high school I was real nervous. But I was glad I was still able to be in the middle of all the other students.

I remember the very first day I went to the school I was just getting there and was getting ready to go up the ramp to get into the building and a man come up behind me and asked me very nicely could he help me up the ramp. That made me feel very comfortable. We talked for a few minutes but I still didn't know who he was. Later in the day when I went in one of my classes there he was. He was my Health teacher. We

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got to know each other really well and to this day we are very good friends and he is always there for me for prayer or just to be a friend.

I also found out he was the basketball coach so that got my interest up in wanting to go to the basketball games. My mom or my step-dad would take me to the games and either stay with me or let me stay and come back and pick me up. I had so much fun. I sat at the end of the bleachers and was right beside where the team sat so I felt like I was right in the crowd with everybody else.

We also liked to go to the football games but we had to park up on a hill and sit away from the stands cause I couldn't get in the stands. The main reason I went to the football games was because my cousin Chris was on the football team. At the basketball games I felt more of a part of everything. Whenever our team won I could go out in the middle of the court along with everybody else.

The coach even at times when I couldn't go to a game sometimes he would have a game dedicated to me if I was in the hospital or something. That really meant a lot. That teacher/coach spent a lot of time with me and really helped me open up some and not be so shy.

I feel like God placed him in my life to help me manage High School cause I had no friends. I slowly made some friends and I had a lot of people that would speak to me out in the halls but I still wouldn't let myself get too close to anybody.

I did have one friend that was on crutches and had similar problems as I did. It was easy to talk to her and we liked to hang out together between classes and during lunch. I knew she was a true friend and didn't just feel sorry for me. We would talk on the phone a lot outside of class. She became one of my best friends.

I made it through high school okay and was in and out of the hospital some with mainly my asthma which has gotten worse over the years but they have lots of better medicine out there now so its under control most of the time. I liked high school really better then all of my other years in school cause I made more friends and opened up a little more. I still didn't make good grades though. I took some computer and typing classes that I enjoyed and a couple of other business classes. I wanted to do that in case I could ever get a job as a secretary or something.

I had to deal with some more deaths in my family while I was in High School but God was with me and my family during it all. Two years after my dad passed away my grandpa got sick and passed away. Then about 2 weeks, yes two weeks later his wife

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my grandma passed away. I feel like she died from a broken heart and because she didn't see any use for living anymore cause she had taken care of my grandpa for so long and after he had died she couldn't handle not having that to do.

I was out of school some in my senior year because of my asthma and I was supposed to go back to school with the rest of the students after Christmas break. Well the night or two before school was to start back I was up all night in severe pain in my side and back. I usually can tolerate pain but this was awful.

I ended up waking my mom up in the middle of the night and they took me to the emergency room. They kept me in the emergency room for awhile so they could do some test. They found out that my gallbladder was in pretty bad shape and needed to come out so they went ahead and got me ready for surgery. I just wanted the pain to go away. I didn't care what they had to do. The doctor told me to not be worried that this was a routine surgery and I would wake up in a regular room and go home in a few days and everything would be okay.

Well I woke up alright, but I was in intensive care. I didn't know what had happened. My mom said that during surgery some of the medicine they gave me made me go into anaphylactic shock and if I had not already been getting oxygen I would have died. I say if God had not been there with me I would have died but once again he pulled me through. So that recovery didn't go quite as planned but I ended up doing okay.

On top of all that in April of 1990 my uncle was found dead. He had died from alcohol poisoning. That was really hard cause it was so unexpected. We knew he had a drinking problem but he had went to church shortly before this and had straightened up. We really believe he was trying to quit drinking. He was a very kind man.

We were real close. He always would spend time with me whenever I saw him and we liked to play card games together even though he beat me most of the time that we played. That death was so hard to accept cause it was hard to understand. It hit my whole family very hard and it is something we will never get over but with God's grace we have made it through.

I know God was with my grandparents during that time cause if he had not been they would not have made it. I still managed to graduate that year on time and with my class just like I was supposed to. If it was not for God and his hand in everything there would have been no way I could have graduated on time.

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I graduated from high school in June of 1990 and that was one of the happiest days of my life. I remember feeling like I had really accomplished something that was practically impossible. I thank God every day for letting me get to where I could graduate. I was able to take part in the ceremonies just like everybody else and they said when they called out my name I got a standing ovation but I was so nervous and happy I don't remember. I just know I had my family and friends there with me and that coach/teacher I had met the first day of high school was the one that pushed me so I could get my diploma.

It was a very happy day but also a sad one cause I wish my dad could have been there but I know he was looking down on me and I know I made him happy to be graduating. I remember during the ceremony a woman sang "One Moment In Time" and I thought to myself, God just let me go out in the world and have that moment where I can just show somebody what all you have done for me. Even if it is just one person it is worth it all.

At our after prom party my senior year I had the winning ticket and I won the Grand prize that they were giving away. It was a cruise to the Bahamas. I was so happy. I had never won anything before. I got all the way home before I said anything to my parents. They were in shock at first. After it sunk in, we got to thinking about it and thought I may not get to go because it may not be handicapped accessible. My parents did some calling around in the next few days and what they had to end up doing is letting me go on a different ship (which happened to be the newest ship) that was handicapped accessible.

It was a cruise for two but we paid for an extra person so both of my parents could go. Shortly after graduation we went on the cruise and it was wonderful. When we got to the Bahamas people from the cruise line helped me get off the ship so I could do some sightseeing. It was so hot but it was nice to go in different shops and see things from a different place.

Being able to have a vacation like that was a dream come true. After I graduated I went to a rehab center where I would learn how to drive and get my drivers license. That was what I went there for, but boy did I learn so much more.

I didn't go away to college and the other times I had been away from home were bad times in the hospital so this was exciting in a way to be able to go away and have some freedom. Woodrow Wilson Rehab center was structured sort of like college, or at least it felt that way to me. It was for people either physically or mentally challenged to learn things to better their lives.

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There was so many different things there for every need. I was excited to go but I admit when I got there and my parents drove off, I kind of felt lost cause I had been so shy all of my life and now I was all on my own. If I was going to get anything accomplished or if I was going to make friends, I had to assert myself.

They had 3 parts to this place where people stayed. You had the hospital part that were for people that needed round the clock care but also needed the physical therapy department that they had there. Then they had a part that was for people that could be or was learning to be on their own but may need assistance at times. The assisted living area had staff always close by to help the ones that needed it whenever they needed help. Then you had the dorm rooms where people could totally take care of themselves but were there for the school training they offer and maybe for some of the physical therapy too. I was in the assisted living part.

My parents had always brought me up to be as independent as I could but I still had to have some assistance. They would help me get dressed in the morning and then I was on my own all day until that night then they would help me get in bed. I loved the freedom even though I missed my family.

Since the driving course I was taking was only a couple of hours a day, I decided to go into the school training part and take some classes. Now that really did feel like college. I signed up for classes that were for secretaries and computer skills. A lot of the classes when you pass will help people get a job. I took these classes and I actually enjoyed it. When you sign up for these classes it gives you a time frame as to how long it should take you to complete them. But since so many people had things that kept them from being able to work at the speed that you normally would, they pretty much let you work at your own pace.

I can't remember exactly how long my classes were supposed to last but I know I took longer, and yes some of it was cause I didn't try hard enough just like in school all my life. But some of it was cause I was also getting a lesson in life and learning so much more than school work. I remember at first being shy and after class all day and then driving class I would go eat supper then go to my room to read or to watch TV or write home.

I would talk to some of the people in class but not a lot. I had my days where I would get homesick so my parents or other relatives would get unexpected phone calls whenever I was down. I did like it there I just wish I had been able to see my family more.

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One day when I was in the computer class one of the students I had talked to some passed me a note to meet her in the snack bar (where most people hung out on campus) after school was let out. So after classes were finished, I thought why not, maybe we can be good friends. I went in there and there was so many people in there just talking and having a good time. And I was able to just sort of blend in. I was glad I was invited in there cause it helped me open up a little bit and not be so shy.

I got to where when I wasn't busy with class and on weekends I would spend all my free time in there. They had so many activities for people other than the snack bar. I would watch people play pool and basketball and they even had a big screen TV. And right outside they had a patio where you could go sit in the sunshine or even at night when it was warm.

They also had a chapel that I would attend on Sunday mornings. I liked going but it definitely was not like my home church. Being at this rehab center gave me such a sense of independence. I could do whatever I wanted right there on campus. The driving part was hard but I made it through and was learning to use hand controls. I loved the feeling of driving cause that had always been a dream of mine.

The friends I had made were mostly in the school part so I would see them all day then we would be together every day in the snack bar after class. After you have been somewhere like that and see people every day you make some special friendships that will never be broken. I still have a couple that I keep in touch with. The first girl that asked me to meet her in the snack bar is one of my best friends to this day and she only lives about an hour away from me.

I also had something else happen that had not happened before because I was so shy. Plus I think with my circumstances I just didn't think I could ever find a boyfriend. BUT one of the days I went into the snack bar there was a guy that was behind the counter doing the cooking. We started talking some and I found out he was also there as a student but also working part time as the cook in the snack bar. He had epilepsy which caused him to have seizures and he was there to get some training to be an architectural draftsman.

We would talk every time I went into the snack bar and he would sneak me some free fries every now and then. He was a great guy. Something just clicked with us. We became great friends and yes I did start liking him as more than a friend. I didn't tell him for a long time cause I was afraid of getting rejected. I had never even been asked out before and never been interested in guys, so this was kind of scary.

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After a long while of us just being friends and we were together all the time. Late at night we would go sit on the patio and just talk. We were able to open up to each other about things in our lives we had never talked about before. He told me things that to this day I don't know if another soul knows. A lot of people would ask us if we were a couple and we would always say no we are just friends.

I hated that. I wanted to be so much more and I couldn't stand the words "just friends". It made me feel like I wasn't good enough for him. I had no idea what was going to be next. I got real bold one day decided to write him a letter, because I have always been able to write my feelings down better than say them face to face. I told him that I was glad to have met him and that we were great friends but I felt like I wanted more and I hope he felt the same way. I got a letter in return talking about how much my friendship means to him and how he felt like I was his best friend but that all he felt for me was friendship.

I was heartbroken....I felt like I had been dumped. I also felt like a fool cause I really did feel like he was feeling the same way or I would not have written the letter. I was worried that he wouldn't talk to me anymore after that but the very next time I went in the snack bar he was there and he talked to me like he always did, like the episode with the letter didn't even happen. I was the one having the problem. How could I keep being friends with him and know where the line was when I felt so much more.

We had our tough times where he would be acting like normal and I would act ugly or like I was hurt. I think he understood but he kept stressing to me he wanted to be able to be friends. I never did get a reason as to why he was not interested in me but I truly believe the problems I had physically scared him away from being able to get too close.

I knew that was it but it was still hard to accept. I felt like God had let this happen and I was angry and hurt. I couldn't understand why God wouldn't let me have somebody in my life I could love. I didn't know at the time that God had better plans for me years later. I kept being friends with this guy and making lots of friends. I was really starting to enjoy being at the Center. But there was still something not right with me inside.

My friends could tell and they were telling me all the time that I just somehow didn't seem really happy. Part of it was the rejection from this guy and always wondering what was wrong with me to make him not interested. I still was able to talk

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to him about a lot of stuff though. He helped me realize that through the years I had not fully dealt with a lot of the things that had happened in my life. Like my dad's death.

He suggested I go see a Psychologist they had there and just see if I was comfortable talking to him. He said he went to see him once a week and it really helped. I went to see this Psychologist and at first it was just like talking to anybody else. We sat in there and just talked about anything, nothing important just normal conversation things. But the more I went to him and got to know him the more I was able to really talk to him.

We got to the root of some things that had been bothering me. I had kept my feelings about losing my dad so bottled up, that nobody knew how I felt about that. But I got to where I could open up and realize that in the back of my mind I was angry with God because he had taken my daddy away and I also was angry cause my mom had been able to move on (which is what my dad would have wanted) and I wasn't. I had acted like everything was okay with all of that for so many years.

But I realized I had to let go and move on. Now that doesn't mean I don't think about my daddy cause I do every single day of my life. I have days where I just wonder what he would be thinking about things I had done or said. I miss talking to him and going fishing and just things we used to do.

I also felt like maybe I had contributed to him being so sick because he had to do so much to try to take care of me. I still have a little problem with that because I feel like my parents have had to give up most of their life to take care of me. It is hard too when I start having problems with my asthma, I feel like he is the only one who would understand what I am going through. Anyway, through talking to my psychologist realized I would have to move on so I could have a life of my own. He also helped me deal with feeling rejected by this guy I had confronted. I was still hurt but he made me realize it was probably for the best and that I had my whole life to find the person I would be with.

I made it through driving school and the business classes I was taking and it was time for me to come home and start my life. I never realized it would be so hard to leave a place like that, but after you had been there for over a year and a half and had lots of experiences and friends it was very hard.

I wanted to come home and be with my family and friends at home but it was a chapter in my life that I felt like was closing. God really helped me make the transition cause when I came home I felt like I still had my whole life ahead of me. Shortly after I

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came home I wanted to fulfill one of my dreams and get me a car, since I now had my driver's license.

My step-dad and I started looking around all over for just the perfect car for me. After some time I found a blue Cavalier that I fell in love with. I was able to get the loan to get the car and was able to get hand controls so I could drive. All of that was just another example of how God had his hand in my life cause I never thought I would be able to drive let alone own my own car.

I remember wanting to drive everywhere just because I knew I could. When I was at the rehab center they showed me how to get in and out of the car and to be able to break my chair down so I could get it in and out. The whole process took about 20 minutes or so. Then I would drive where I wanted to go and then do the whole process over again to get out. A lot of people would say that was a lot of work to just go somewhere but people did not realize that I felt God had given me the ability to be able to drive so that is what I wanted to do.

I had times where I would be getting in and out and people would walk by and look at me like I was so pitiful having to do that to just get around. This was not something my parents made me do. They were used to taking me wherever I needed to go so they would have kept doing it but it made me feel good to be able to do this on my own.

I had one instance where I was getting in my car and two ladies walked by and they were talking among themselves saying "I can't believe her family makes her do that to get around, I feel so sorry for her" I just had to say Lord forgive them cause they did not know how much joy I felt to be able to get in and out of that car all by myself. I felt like I was accomplishing something.

My best friend and I loved to get in my car on Saturdays and just ride around town. We never went anywhere particular we just rode and talked. That was some of the best times. I would leave my chair at home and she would leave hers at her house. We were just like the rest of the world for the whole day. I always felt like God was riding with me and protecting me from harm. I think he kept me from getting a few speeding tickets too! Ha ha.

I also got another idea while I was going through this freedom stage. I decided I wanted to go back to school. My mom was going to the Community College for some business classes so I thought maybe I could do it too. I just wanted to take a couple of classes in the summer so I could drive myself. I was so excited to be doing something

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with my life. I signed up for a computer class to start off with. I liked it pretty well. School was not my favorite thing but this was different. I was taking something I wanted to take plus I was going cause I wanted to.

It started off real well but just a few weeks into the class I started having trouble with my asthma. I ended up in the hospital for a couple of weeks with iv medication and having to have test done and lots of medicine. I had to drop the class I was in and I lost the money I had paid to be able to take the class. I felt like I had really failed but when I was in the hospital and realized that I was developing the asthma worse than I had had it before it reminded me that God had been there with me through my whole life and so he was going to help me through this and show me what I should do next.

The doctors told me and my mom that it looked like every time I got a cold or Bronchitis I would probably have trouble with my asthma. That was hard for me to accept because I knew how much trouble my dad had with his asthma and I was afraid that would mean I would end up just like that. They started me on all kinds of medicine to take every day to try to keep my asthma under control.

While I was in the hospital I remember my cousin (that lived with us) was graduating from High School. I was so proud of him and it hurt that I was not going to be there at his graduation. I know he understood and he came by to see me but it still hurt. They let me go home from the hospital and once again God had helped me through so I was able to just go back to enjoying life and doing things I wanted to do.

I decided going back to school wasn't such a great idea being I never knew when I would land back in the hospital. I remember when I was growing up I missed a lot of school so I felt this was not where God was wanting me to go with my life. I stayed around home not really doing much except enjoying my family and friends and in the back of my mind still praying and always wondering what I was supposed to be doing in my life.

While I was in the hospital the local baseball team started up here for the first time. A friend of the family had bought me season tickets right behind home plate. But the timing of me ending up in the hospital was right when the games were starting up. My step-dad had tickets also so he would go to the games and tell me about them the next day.

It seemed like it would be a lot of fun, so I couldn't wait to be out of the hospital so I could go. Don had told me that when he went he ran into a guy that I went to school with. He would tell me that this guy would say to tell me hello and that he hoped I got

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out of the hospital soon. All I remembered about this guy was that we did go to high school together and he was in a wheelchair just like me.

The year I graduated he was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. We would see each other every now and then but he really never talked to me that much. Plus I was so shy I didn't talk much either. I didn't think much about this guy whenever Don would tell me he said hello just that it was nice and I would tell Don to tell him I said hi also.

After I got out of the hospital and got to feeling better I started going to the games. It was so much fun to be in the stands in the middle of everybody else and be able to enjoy the game. My step-dad and I would sit together then a few seats over this guy Mike from school and his mom was sitting together. Mike would say hi and speak some but that was about it....at first.

On the way home from one of the games Don told me that he thought Mike wanted to ask me out. I didn't believe him cause Don always likes to joke around. He said that he had been talking to Mike some and he really thought Mike would be asking me out.

That made me really nervous. I had never been asked out before and Mike was a guy I didn't even really know. It was nice to think that he was interested but I was confused. I wasn't sure if I wanted to just be friends or what. I knew how it felt to be told that somebody you cared about wanted to be "just friends" but I also didn't want to lead him on if I wasn't really interested. I remember feeling really nervous.

I called my best friend the next morning and told her she was going to go with me to the game that night cause my step-dad couldn't go and I was not going to go alone with the prospect of Mike asking me out. When we got to the game he was already there and we just went by and Mike said hi and so we spoke. I was nervous but I tried to just act normal and I was praying the whole time that if he did ask me out that God would let me know how to handle it.

Right before the game started my friend that was with me decided she needed to go to the restroom so I was there by myself waiting for the game to start. I was looking at the program that we got at the game and I looked up and there was Mike. He was really nice and asked me how I was feeling and that he was glad to see me coming to the games.

Then sure enough he asked me did I want him to give me his phone number and maybe we could talk and go out sometime. I told him I would give him my number and

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we could talk and maybe sometime go out. He went back to where his seats were then my friend just happened to reappear from the restroom. God seemed to know exactly when to send Mike over while she was gone.

She says when she got back I looked so excited. I was really about to bust to tell her that he did actually ask me out but I still wasn't sure about it all. But it did feel good to be asked out. The very next day he called me and we talked for hours. We just talked, not about anything particular. We decided that since we both had season tickets and that pretty much took up every evening that we would just start sitting together at the games and we would consider that our dates until we could go out on a real date.

What I didn't realize was that everybody in the section where we sit could see what was happening and realized that now me and Mike were a couple. They would go on and on about how sweet we looked together. It did feel really nice to have somebody that really seemed to care about me and that would call me everyday and talk to me on the phone for hours at a time. Some times we wouldn't hardly say anything but we just wanted to be on the phone together. Even at night we stayed on the phone until we both couldn't hold our eyes open anymore.

One night I went to the game and while Mike and I were both waiting on our rides he put his arm around me and kissed me for the first time. I was so nervous. I had been through my whole life and never been kissed.

I was happy, and excited but still very confused. I had not been looking for somebody like that since back when I was at the rehab center. God had placed this in my life when I was least expecting it. But it felt right after awhile.

We continued dating and finally went other places besides the ballgames. I would go over to his house or he would come over to my house. We also enjoyed going to the movies or to the mall. He says he liked me a lot when we went to school together but just never would ask me out. I was finally happy and felt really loved.

We started dating in June of 1993. I would say by August we just knew that we were going to get married one day. I had prayed about it so much and felt like God was letting me know that if I had dreams to get married then it could happen.

We even mentioned the fact that we were talking about marriage one day and I remember him telling his mom we were talking about it. Nobody could get really happy for us cause they just felt like it would not work. Two people in wheelchairs talking

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about getting married, that's a nice thought but that is all it could ever be. We would need too much assistance.

Well, God had other plans. On Christmas on 1993 Mike gave me an engagement ring for Christmas. I was not expecting it cause we had only been dating for a short time plus whenever we talked about getting married everybody just acted like we were just dreaming.

Once Mike and I got engaged and we both knew this was what we wanted, I was determined it was going to work. I knew we had God on our side and he would see that things would work out. That didn't mean we would never have hard times and we would never have to have help but it meant we would at least have a chance to have a happy marriage.

Planning the wedding was so cool. I really enjoyed being able to plan every little detail of how I wanted things. I had to have a lot of help though. It was fun but was not easy. My mom was a great help to me. We decided we would get married in May of 1995 and that would give us over a year to plan and to get a place to live.

We would need a place we could afford and that was also handicapped accessible. I decided to have my wedding dress made by someone that was highly recommended because of me being in a chair and plus being overweight I knew I would need to have it specially made. He came by and looked at a picture of a dress I liked and talked to me and said it was definitely able to be done. I could have as beautiful as a dress as I wanted even though I would not be able to walk down the aisle. Just another answer to prayer from a little girl that always wanted to get married and have a beautiful wedding dress.

Planning the wedding like I said was great but there were definitely times it was stressful. Getting people to commit to being in the wedding, the colors and finding bridesmaid dresses, making a guest list and so much more. God made ways for everything to work pretty smoothly.

The most important part for me was the vows. Since I couldn't talk Mike into us writing our own vows we just talked things over with the Pastor until we got everything just like we wanted. I did not want obey in the vows cause I feel like a marriage isn't about obeying it is a commitment and both people have to work very hard to keep it going the way God intended for it to go.

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We had plenty of challenges while we were planning the wedding but things always seemed to work out. The financial part was the worst to try to work out because at the time I was getting money each month from where my dad had been disabled and then passed away. I had to try to find out about our money situation before we got married so we would know how it was going to be financially.

We had more than one person to tell us because of the fact we would get more money by staying single that we should just live together. That always made me furious cause I knew it was in God's will for two people to be married and not living together. We would have to give up a lot of money just to be legally married and in the eyes of God, but I knew it was the right thing to do and as long as we were in God's will that he would meet our needs.

I also started looking for an apartment for us to live in. I called one place that had apartments for elderly and disabled and they also decided your rent depending on how much your income was. The only income we had was our monthly checks plus a little where Mike worked at Wal-Mart.

They said I would have to be put on a list and when an apartment became available they would let me know. I started this early cause I had been told that sometimes you have to go on a long waiting list and it could take months for an apartment to open up. I just prayed that one would become available before the wedding. This was the September before the wedding so I figured we would have enough time but I still was afraid it would be close.

Two weeks after I put in the application they called and said that there was an apartment available and if I wanted it then it was mine. I could not believe it. They said that was the quickest one had opened up for somebody. I could move in whenever I wanted. I didn't want to turn it down cause I was really afraid there would not be another apartment available before the wedding.

Another thing I had to think about was having the apartment from then until the wedding, we had to pay rent even though we were not living there yet. I decided I would go ahead and move in and that way we wouldn't have to deal with both of us leaving home at the same time. It was not the easiest thing to do but I knew God was preparing me for the future he had planned for me. I moved in on September 17, 1994. I had learned pretty much how to take care of myself. Every now and then I would have to call on my mom if I had to have a lot of help. She never seemed to mind but I hated doing that cause I still felt like I was having to be a burden on her.

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We kept getting closer and closer to the wedding and making more and more plans. The guest list was growing cause everybody was wanting to witness this wedding cause it was definitely God that brought us together. Mike and I were getting to know each other more and more and things were going great. He was always so sweet to me and was always there for me.

We spent the year also getting to kind of know each other's family. He has 2 sisters and a brother. His brother I already knew from school. I am an only child so it took some getting used to. Mike is the youngest so he is like the baby of the family and also with him having extra needs, he always felt like he would always have to depend on his family. I was brought up different, to always be independent and to do as much for myself as I possibly could.

So that was one thing that was different between us that sometimes caused some tension but we always made it through. Nobody gets along perfect, not even a couple that seemed like it was just picture perfectly made by God. God doesn't say he will take away all your problems but he will be right there to help you through them.

We got married on May 6, 1995 on the most beautiful day weather wise I had ever seen. I remember the night before at the rehearsal is when it all hit me that this was happening and I was so nervous. I was so afraid something was going to go wrong. At the rehearsal everybody was trying to say what should and shouldn't be done but Mike's sister that was helping me told everybody that I had already thought about how I wanted things and for everybody else to just listen. Everything went pretty smooth after that.

The day of the wedding I was happy, nervous, excited and even sad all rolled into one. I was so happy that this day had finally come cause I never thought I would get married. I was nervous cause I knew this was going to be a day where all eyes were on me and Mike and I really don't like being the center of attention. And I also knew this was a start of a whole new life for the both us. I was so excited too cause I really did want to have a new life of my own and I also wanted this to be a beautiful wedding cause we had over 300 friends and family there to share it with. But, I was also sad cause I knew my dad and my grandparents and my uncle that had passed on before would not be there. I missed my daddy so much and wished I could share all this joy with him.

Just five minutes before I was to go down the aisle Mike's mom came in the room and said "I have never seen so many people at one wedding" and I just started crying. I think I had just held it in all day and when she said that I couldn't stand it anymore. I

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felt like there was so many people there but yet some of the most important people in my life was still missing.

One of my bridesmaids told me that my daddy and the others were looking down on me and that they were seeing how happy I was and that they would be right there with me. I got myself together and went down the aisle and to this day I remember the feeling that my dad was going right down the aisle with me. I felt like I had my dad and Don with me. I felt my dad's presence during the whole ceremony and that gave me such a great feeling. The ceremony went great and I was even able to pull off a surprise I had planned for Mike during the ceremony. His sisters were the one that sang at the wedding and I had asked them to sing a special song that was "our song". They sang it right at the end and I think Mike was really surprised. It was great to see all my family and friends there and at the reception. It was definitely a great day and a dream come true.

We stayed a couple of nights at a hotel here in town then we went to the beach for a week. It was kind of an unusual honeymoon cause we had to have my parents and his mom along. I had to have some personal care help and Mike has to have help every morning and every night so we could not just go alone. We had a great time anyway.

It was more like a family vacation. But Mike and I did have some time to ourselves. It was the start of a great partnership. We were together cause God had brought us together and we knew that so we were determined to make this work and give him all the praise for it. Now, that does not mean the marriage would be perfect, it just means that we knew from the beginning that God would be there to help us in anything that came up along the way.

People to this day I think wonder why we would get married since we could not have a "normal" marriage in every way. But that wasn't what was important. We loved each other and everything else would fall in to place. We have been married 5 years now so something must be going right.

The day we were to come home, I was not feeling very well but I thought maybe I was just tired so I didn't think a lot about it. We came home and got settled in our apartment and everything was going good. But the next morning I woke up about 6 am having trouble breathing. I was really scared cause it had never quite happened like that to me.

I called my mom and she said it sounded like I needed to go to the hospital. I ended up calling the rescue squad and this was on Mother's Day. I felt bad for ruining

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my mom's day and also for messing up our first day at home together. I spent most of the day in the Emergency room then they decided they needed to admit me cause I would need some IV antibiotics for the chest infection and to get the asthma under control. What a way to start off a marriage!

It definitely made the part of the marriage vows "In sickness and in health" become tested really quick. Mike was very supportive and was there with me as much as he could be. I think I ended up being in the hospital a couple of weeks. Our marriage throughout this 5 years has been tested many times with sickness and things but God has always made a way for us to get through these things together.

Mike had even started going to church with me some cause he knew that God had his hand in our marriage. He was not into going with me at first but he was always supportive about me going. He never has tried to keep me out of church. At first when he didn't want to go with me I would try to push. I prayed and I also felt like I needed to keep pushing. Finally God told me that he needed to go cause he wanted to not cause I was forcing him to. I had to quit trying to force him to go and then when Mike would want to go I would know it.

Through the years Mike has shown more interest in wanting to be involved in church. He doesn't go with me all the time but we have made God head of Household in our lives.

In 1997 I went on a weekend called "A Walk To Emmaus". My parents had been the previous year and had been asking me if I wanted to go. It was a weekend that would show you how much God loved you and wanted to be more a part of your life.

Every time my step-dad would mention it, I was reluctant to going. I kept telling him I would think about it. Both of my parents when they came back were very excited about the things God had done that particular weekend. I was really happy for them but I wasn't so sure it was for me. I had made some really great friends though through this.

My parents would go to a gathering for the people that had been on one of these weekends and just fellowship once a month. I went a couple of times and enjoyed it. The people were wonderful. I had never felt so much love from people that I didn't even know. I wanted to be part of this more and more.

I mentioned it to Mike a couple of times but he did not seem real interested. The way it worked was each spouse would go at different times. The men one weekend and

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the women another. The weekend had a lot to do with each individuals personal relationship with God.

I had made a good friend that Don had gone on his weekend with and just seemed to fit into our family from then on. Mark was a great guy. Mike and I call him "Uncle Mark". He would call when I was in the hospital or something and always ask about me. There was just something about him that made us great friends. I felt like it was easy to talk to him. He was always there for me if I needed help with something. I asked him one day if we could go out to lunch or something sometime and so we did.

I was able to talk to him about things that had been bottling up inside. During our lunch he suggested the weekend and said that I would really get a lot out of it. I told him I would think about it and he said that he wanted to be my sponsor (sponsors pay for your weekend) and said whenever I was ready to just let me know and that he would not push. I came home and thought about it a lot and prayed about it.

Mike said he would not try to keep me from going if I did not try to pressure him into going. I called Mark and told him I was ready to fill out my application so I could go. Mom would also be there on the team so she could also help with the personal care needs I would need while I was gone. They called me sometime later and told me that I had been accepted to go that particular weekend in May.

I was excited but nervous. I still did not do very well around people I did not know. I ended up having the best weekend of my life. I have never felt as close to God as I did that weekend. He made me see things in my life and my attitude that needed to change. I also made friends through this that I will have for a lifetime. These friends I believe were definitely a gift from God to help me through some very trying times to come in my life.

Mike ended up going on the weekend retreat the following September. The same friend that had sponsored me had told him the same thing and Mike was getting to where he wanted to know what all this was about. God knew what he was doing letting Mike be able to go that particular weekend cause he got saved. Mike had thought he was saved cause he believed in God and cause he went to church every once in awhile. Mike realized that he was not and he desperately wanted God to be in his heart.

When Mike got home things were great. Things he and I had been struggling through as all couples do, seemed to be getting better. We started communicating more like we should have been doing. When you go on your walk you find out that even though the weekend is great that there will be times when things will not be good and

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you have to hold on to God and let him take over. One of the most important things I learned was to Let Go and Let God. There was a poem that was read there that I will never forget. I keep a copy of it in my wallet and whenever I get down I take it out and read it:

**Broken Dreams**

As children bring their broken toys  
With tears for us to mend,  
I brought my broken dreams to God  
Because He was my friend.

But then instead of leaving Him  
In peace to work alone,  
I hung around and tried to help  
With ways that were my own.

At last I snatched them back and cried,  
"How can You be so slow?"

"My child," He said, "what could I do?"  
"You never did let go."

- *Author Unknown*

To me that poem says so much about how we go through things and want to try to take care of things on our own but if we just hand things over to God he will make it work out the way it should. I still struggle with that everyday of my life.

While Mike was on his walk our friend Mark drove me up there where he was at on the day he was to come home. We had a van that whenever we needed to go somewhere somebody could put us in the van and drive us. It was old, we had it for a long time and it needed a lot of work on it. It was still a blessing cause it was getting us where we needed to go and was allowing me to get back and forth to church. The windshield in the van had been cracked and we were unable to get it fixed as soon as we wanted to cause it cost too much. Mark got concerned about driving it 2 hours away where Mike was with the cracked windshield so we just prayed all the way that nothing bad would happen.

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From that day forward I would pray that somehow we would be able to get a more reliable van. I know it sounded silly to be praying for that but I was taught if you needed something specific to pray specifically for what you needed. I prayed for a way to get a newer van that we wouldn't have to be so worried anytime we went anywhere. Things were going good for us when Mike got home and he also joined me in praying for a way to get a van.

Later on in December I got sick again with my asthma and had to go back in the hospital. I have had to do that every so often for the last few years just to get some IV meds in me and after a few days I would feel okay again. I was upset cause it was Christmas season and a lot of churches were having their Christmas programs while I was in the hospital. My friend Mark went to a different church then us but he had wanted us to go to the Christmas program they were having on December 14<sup>th</sup>. Well the week before that is when I went in the hospital. I told him it looked like I would not be able to go. I was disappointed but there wasn't much I could do.

Mark would come to the hospital to see me and would keep telling me that I would get out before the 14<sup>th</sup> and that I would still be able to go to their program. I thought he was nuts cause everybody knew that I usually had to stay in the hospital a week or more plus once I go home the doctor does not want me to go out for a few days. I was feeling better that weekend but I still did not think he would let me go home. The doctor walked in on that Sunday morning on the 14<sup>th</sup> and said I was better and that I could go home. I was really surprised that he said that. Me and my mom both asked him was he sure and he said I could do the rest of my recovery at home and that he felt I would do okay.

He actually said for me to go home, go to the program I wanted to go to and enjoy myself. I couldn't believe it but I went home rested just a few minutes, got dressed and was ready at the time Mark was here to pick us up to go to his church. He said they were having a little get together in the fellowship hall before the program and he wanted us to go cause we were like part of his family. So I went thinking, if I don't feel up to staying he will just have to bring me home. We went in the fellowship hall and just started talking to different people just thinking it was like he had said. I was too tired and weak to question things too much.

But a few minutes later my best friend and her husband came in, then Mike's family came in, then after that OUR pastor and his wife came in. I really started feeling like something was up cause our pastor should have been getting ready to go to our church that night. About the time Mark could tell I was going to start asking questions, he started talking to everybody and telling him they were glad they could be there and

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then he told me and Mike that this was more than what he had said before. It was a reception honoring me and Mike.

I was so surprised. I wasn't quite sure why they would want to honor us but I was happy they thought enough about us to do this for us. Mark proceeded to talk about how loved we were with the church family and with the "Emmaus Community". He handed us a wrapped gift box and said that it was to show us how much everybody and God loved us. I think I was in a daze cause we opened the box and there was two sets of keys and I kept looking at them like "what is this for?" The next thing I knew people were pushing me and Mike outside and there sat a beautiful white van with Gold trim and it had a brand new lift on it. Those keys we had been handed belonged to that beautiful van.

Mark had worked very hard to get money together from people in the Emmaus Community and through churches to get us that van so we would be safe whenever we went somewhere. I was in shock. I loved it and I thanked God for it but I still could not believe it was ours to keep. Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought God would have answered my prayers with a brand new van that we would not have to worry about paying for. But I did know that this was definitely an answer to prayer.

Mark and so many others had worked very hard to pull this off as a surprise and not even our families knew about it. Mark had talked to my doctor about letting me out at least for the day since it had already been planned and people from out of town were also coming to see us get presented with this Gift from God. This was just another example of how God had used people "special angels" to help us out. Through out our marriage it was happening too cause we would be struggling with bills or something and money would just show up to help us get caught up. We will never know who all was involved in getting the van for us but we consider it a gift from God and it is definitely God's van. It has helped us get around and it gets me to and from church and to church functions out of town that otherwise I would not have been able to attend. We did not find out until about a year later though the true reason that our prayer was answered when it was.

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, just another day here at home, Mike was getting ready for bed and the aid that was helping him told me I needed to come in the bed room cause Mike was bleeding. I went in there and it looked like Mike was bleeding pretty heavy from either his kidneys or his bladder. That alarmed me so I called his mom. Mike seemed okay other than the bleeding. She came over and just in that short time he was bleeding more and more so we decided the best thing to do was call the rescue squad and get him to the hospital so they could check things out.

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I started praying that this was not serious and I called my friends and family like we always do when something happens, so we can get them to start praying. I just had a bad feeling this time so I called my mom and asked her if she would come pick me up and take me to the hospital. I wanted to be there with him. It was about midnight that his dad came out and said that it was a bad bladder infection and that they were going to send him home on an antibiotic.

I went back there to make sure he was okay and I told him I would be in the waiting room when he was ready to go home. Just a few minutes after I went in the waiting room I heard over the intercom "303 emergency room, 303 emergency room". I knew from being in the hospital a lot that meant there was somebody in the emergency room that had quit breathing. I remember thinking "That is really bad" and asking God to be with them but I knew we were getting ready to go home.

The next thing I remember Mike's mom was coming out of the emergency room doors with a lady from the hospital but without Mike, and I could tell something was very wrong. This lady took us to a private conference room and told us that when Mike went to get in his chair he stopped breathing. She said that they were working on him but that it did not look good. She told me that if there was any family I needed to get in touch with I needed to do it right then.

I could not think straight. The only phone numbers I remembered were my parents and my friend Mark. Mark and a couple of other people had just left cause they came by to check on things and I told them Mike was going home. I gave this lady those two phone numbers and she called them for me and told them that they needed to get back to the hospital cause it looked like Mike may be having a heart attack.

I was in shock and I could not figure out what went wrong. All I kept saying was "But they said he was going home". The rest of the night is still a lot of a blur but I remember friends and family showing up from everywhere. Word has spread and we had so many people praying for him and coming by. Some stayed with us in that room all night. It was 6 am the next morning before they could get Mike stable enough to go to a room in the Intensive Care Unit.

They were still not sure what happened but before they could do things to try to figure that out they just had to try to get him stable enough. They transferred him into the Critical Care unit and so me and the rest of the family went into the waiting room. After awhile they would let me go back there and see him. He did not look good at all.

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He was so out of it he did not know what was going on around him. It was very touch and go and he was on a ventilator cause he could not breath on his own.

I was very confused with God and trying to figure out why he would let something like this happen. What had we done wrong? Everybody was begging me to come home and get some rest, but I was not going to leave. The thoughts of not being there for him or not being there if something happened, I couldn't bear that thought. I sat up day and night and went back there every chance I could to see him. Things were so up and down. One minute we would see a glimmer of improvement and the next it would look like we could lose him any minute. I finally let my mom take me home long enough to change clothes and just being home that short amount of time was awful. This place felt so empty without him and it broke my heart to think he may never come back home.

During the weekend the doctors came to the conclusion that somehow maybe through a bad bladder infection he had for awhile and we didn't know, he had gotten Septic Shock which meant his blood was full of poison and that it was starting to affect all of his organs one by one. It was going to take a miracle to see him through this.

We had so many people constantly praying for him and people calling the waiting room and coming by to give us their love and prayers. It really meant a lot to me and the rest of the family to have all that support but it still was so hard to see Mike going through this and we could not do anything to help him. I think it was on Monday that Mike was alert for a little while and things were looking up. They had taken him off the respirator and we thought things would start to get better.

I went home long enough to change clothes and when I got back the doctor was in the waiting room talking to the rest of the family and saying that Mike had taken a severe turn for the worse and that he had to be put back on the respirator.

I could not believe it. I was really scared by this point. Me and my mom and his mom and sisters were there. My aunt Laura called to check on Mike and as soon as she heard what happened she came straight to the hospital. My friend Mark called and asked to speak to me but I couldn't even think straight enough to talk to him. I told whoever was on the phone with him to just tell him to get to the hospital. He came and all of us stayed in that waiting room all night praying and hoping Mike would make it through the night.

The next morning the doctor came in and said that Mike had not gotten any better and that he felt like that our hospital had done all they could do for him. He said that if

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Mike had any chance to make it at all he would need to be airlifted by helicopter to the University of Virginia Medical Center in Charlottesville, where they knew more about dealing with people this sick. He said we had to make a decision quick because there could be a chance he would not even make the trip.

Me and his parents talked it over and decided we had to do everything we could to save Mike. He was too young for us to just give up. His mom and my mom and I got our things together and made sure they were going to fly Mike then we got in our vehicle and took off. It was the longest 3 hour trip I had ever taken. Mike would get there before we did cause he was flying.

When we got there they were getting him settled in the Critical care unit and trying to see what all was wrong with him. They let me and our pastor go back to see him and he still looked very critical. You could look at the doctor's faces and just tell they were not sure if Mike was going to make it or not. They wouldn't say how much of a chance he had. All they could tell me was that it was very serious and they would do the best they could.

From that night forward for many weeks there were so many ups and downs. Me, my mom and Mike's mom would sit vigil in the waiting room day in and day out while they did numerous test and tried many different things to help Mike. It was hard cause we were out of town so it wasn't like we had people coming in and out for support.

I could feel people's prayers around the clock though and we also got lots of calls each day from people wanting to know how he was doing. We hardly ever left to come home and when we did it was just for a day or two then we went right back up there because things were always changing with Mike.

One day he could be looking like he was improving then the next day he could be worse. I remember one day we were sitting in the waiting room and there were other families that had been in there constantly that after awhile you talk to and get to know. One day a pastor of one of these families came in and was talking to them and my stepdad was there visiting and asked this man his name cause he looked familiar. We came to find out that this man was involved in the Emmaus community and that my parents knew his parents very well.

After that day he would come in and also check on Mike and was there for support for us. I remember going back to see Mike once and getting him to go with me. The nurse said Mike's temperature was 103 so Bruce prayed for Mike and his fever.

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Shortly after that they took him temperature again and it was down a whole lot. God answered our prayer with letting his fever go down.

We also had another friend that lived close to the hospital that was involved in Emmaus that when she heard about Mike she would come by almost everyday. Whenever we did have to come home for a day or two she would make sure to keep a close check on Mike for us. I feel like God sent her our way because we needed the support since we were so far away from home.

Mike had so many ups and downs during the four weeks he was in Critical Care but God saw fit to see Mike through this and in about four weeks Mike was in a regular room. He was alert but he had totally missed a couple of weeks in his mind so we had to kind of get him up to date on things. He seemed to be improving but they said he would need to go to a rehab center there in town for a few weeks to get his strength back and to wean him off of oxygen.

I could not stay there night and day like I had been so I came on home. It was so hard being here at home with him that far away. We were going to go see him the following Sunday to spend the day with him and also to take some things he had asked for.

During the night on Saturday, my phone rang. It was the rehab center and they said that Mike had to be rushed back to the hospital because of his breathing and that they may would have to put him back on the respirator. I called his mom and we got up and got to the hospital as soon as we could. When we got there he was back in critical care but he was alert and seemed to be doing some better. He was just really scared because of what happened and the fact that we were not around. We ended up staying the night and they moved him to the regular floor the next day. I stayed a few more days so he would not be alone.

After he got better they decided he could go back to the rehab center but somehow something had happened to one of his shoulders and he could hardly move his arm. When he went to the rehab center they had to work with him to get his strength back on his arm. We prayed constantly that since God had seen him through the last few weeks that he would see him through this thing with his shoulder.

We went to see Mike after awhile at the rehab center and he was up and doing good. When I first saw him roll himself across the room I cried....it was a miracle to see him up and rolling his chair. Once he got his strength up and got to feeling better they let him come home but said he would have to stay out of work until the first of the year.

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He has worked at Wal-Mart as a people greeter for years so I think he was a little disappointed to not be able to go back right away. Wal-Mart had been real supportive and had even taken up some money for me to have while I was at the hospital with Mike. But something happened the day after he came home, we had another spell with Mike bleeding so we got him to the hospital and they kept him to check him out.

The infection had not gotten in his blood but he did have a bad bladder infection so he had to get IV medications for a few days. Once he came home from that he seemed to do real good and was able to go back to work at the beginning of the next year. I was just glad God had seen us through this very serious time in our lives and had let me keep my husband with me here on earth.

We were able to have a good while of everything going okay until later on in the year my mom noticed I had a sore on the bottom of my right foot. I had gotten pressure sores before and been able to take care of them and they would go away so we started treating it just like we had all the others. We got home health care to come check it out and I went to the doctor about it. We tried numerous things but nothing seemed to be helping. For some reason this one would not get any better. We tried so many different things and I was going to the doctor to try to get this sore to go away.

Months went by and it just kept getting worse and worse. We tried everything we could. Finally the doctor started me going to whirlpool therapy everyday to soak the foot and for them to work on it to try to get it better. Everybody was praying for me too cause I needed something to change or I was going to be in serious trouble with my foot. It started looking like it may be really infected so they sent me to an infectious disease doctor here in town and he started doing all kinds of tests. It turns out the infection had gotten into the bone and it was going to be very hard to treat. He said he would put me on IV medication for at least 6 weeks and I could do it at home.

He said if that did not work there may be a chance I would have to have my leg amputated from below the knee down cause the infection had spread.

After the six weeks were up and I seemed to be doing okay, with no fever and not feeling bad the doctor decided it was time to stop the IV medication cause it wasn't good to take them much longer than that. I was on my way to recovery, or so I thought.

Two days after I stopped the medication I was at home and started all of a sudden feeling really bad. My mom came over and we checked my temperature and it had gone from normal to 102 in just minutes. We called the doctor and he said I needed to go

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straight to the hospital and he would admit me cause it looked like the IV medicine had just been masking the infection and now it looked like the infection was probably in my blood stream.

I was really scared. We had tried for about a year to save my leg and I knew the doctor had said if the IV medication did not work that the only other option was to have my leg amputated. I knew when he told me to get to the hospital that I was probably facing amputation. It also scared me to think that I had this infection in my blood cause I had seen what that could do and I knew it could kill me if they didn't do something.

But I couldn't fight it any longer. I was feeling so bad, so quick. They admitted me in the hospital and started me on IVs again and ran a lot of blood tests. The infection was in my bloodstream. The doctor came in and said that I had to make a decision quick cause we could not wait much longer. He said he felt like having the leg amputated was the only way to get rid of the infection. He felt like once we did that I would be okay and would not have any more problems with the infection.

So, on September 23, 1999 I had a below the knee amputation on my right leg. I felt like I had really failed cause I had tried so hard to save my leg. I had been prayed for time and time again and it still did not help. I was angry that God would let this come down to this. When I got back in my room after surgery I found out that during surgery I had so many friends and family waiting and praying for me. It helped me so much to know they were all there and that they did not look at me as a failure. They were trying their best to be upbeat and positive about the whole thing. They will never know what their support meant to me that day and the weeks to come after the surgery.

I did not use my legs cause I was in a wheelchair all my life but it was still so hard. How was I going to be able to go out in public without people feeling sorry for me. I felt like I had spent all my life getting people to know me on the inside and not my wheelchair. My close friends and my family I knew loved me no matter what but it was the thoughts of going out and meeting new people and feeling like I would have to start all over getting people to accept me and not feel sorry for me.

Also, in the months before my amputation my skin had gotten so sensitive because of the medication I was on that I developed another sore on my left hip area. What made it worse was whenever I sat up I was sitting on this spot so it made it more difficult to make it go away. The home health care nurses that were coming each day to change the dressing on my foot was also looking after this sore now and trying everything we could to make it go away. Nothing seemed to be helping. While I was in the hospital for the amputation they called in a doctor to look at this sore. He came and

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looked at it and said that it could be very serious cause it was a lot deeper on the inside then it looked on the outside. He decided that when they amputated my leg they would also go and clean out the infection in that sore.

I did great with the healing of my leg but this other sore was still a big concern for the doctor. He said that cleaning it out probably is going to help but that I would also need to stay off of the sore for awhile. Which meant I would need to stay on a certain kind of bed that would keep the pressure off, for at least 6-8 weeks. That was a hard thing to accept. Here I was just having my leg amputated and now this. I did not know how in the world I would be able to stay in the bed and not get up at all for weeks. I would once again have to be a big burden on my family. They let me come home so we set things up in the living room so I could stay in there.

A good friend had let me borrow his laptop computer so I would have something to do. We had just gotten our own first computer and I liked being able to get on it and do different things. To think I wasn't even going to be able to get to our computer did not make me very happy so I was at least able to use this laptop. Getting used to the bed was not easy. I had lots of help getting things done from my family and church friends but it still felt like I was a bother.

But God kept reminding me that this was to try to get me well so I could one day do what he had in store for me to do. I spent most of the time on the computer and found ways to be able to meet people from all over the world. At first I didn't think that was such a good thing to do cause I didn't know if I should be talking to these people I did not know. But the more I did talk to some of these people the better it got. I realized making friends on the computer made me feel good. I also felt like it was a good way to witness to people.

I am always honest with the people on the Internet that I meet. While I was stuck having to stay in the bed I made some friends from places like Australia, United Kingdom, Japan and Canada plus lots of people here in the States, it made it so much easier to deal with cause I could get on the computer and talk to them about anything. They did not care that I was in bed or that I had health problems or even that I had just recently had my leg amputated. We got to know each other from the inside.

I still have some wonderful friends from all over the world that I talk to every day and I would not trade for anything. While being in the bed they were some of my biggest supporters. Always telling me to stay positive and that I would be able to get back to my routine soon. I kept going back to the doctor and they kept saying it was

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healing but was still going to take some time. It ended up being more than 8 weeks but it looked like it was still healing.

It was getting close to Christmas and I hated the thoughts of having to spend the Holiday in bed. I had no choice, if I was going to get any better I had to do as the doctor instructed. I did realize while I was in the bed it was helping me deal with my amputation really well cause I wasn't having to go out and in the real world yet and worry about people accepting me.

I realized that I was feeling so much better health-wise since I had the amputation and that even though it wasn't the way I had wanted, God had still answered prayer. If I had not had the amputation I would have died. No question about it. I was also able to reflect on God a lot while I was in the bed and realized he must have a purpose for having me be in the bed for so long.

As I spent more time in bed, I stayed on the computer more. It was so interesting to meet people and make friends from all over the world. I found it is so easy to open up to people that only get to know you from the inside. It really did help me deal with things while I was in the bed.

It finally got to where the doctor said the sore on my hip area had gotten as small as it was going to get from the bed. It did not heal up the way we had hoped it would. He said I needed to have some test done to see if maybe the infection had gotten down to the hip bone and maybe that was why it wasn't healing. I went through numerous test and was getting so discouraged because I felt like this was another thing that was happening I didn't know if I could make it. They let me out of the bed since it wasn't helping anymore so I was at least able to go back to church.

Church had always been an important part of my life so I was glad to be able to go back and get people to pray for me. I always felt safe at church and felt like that no matter what I was going through, it was going to be okay. I let the church know what was going on and that I was going to be having a lot of testing to try to find the source of why I wasn't healing. I had numerous tests and they all showed that the infection was in the hip bone and it looked pretty bad.

They sent me to the infectious disease doctor and he pretty much said I needed surgery but it was very risky and it may not even help. He said he wanted to try everything he could before we would seriously think about surgery. So we tried many different things to get this sore to go away. Nothing was working.

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I was so down cause I would go up to get prayed for almost every service at church and it seemed like God just was not hearing my prayers. After awhile, there was some conflicting test and according to a couple of the tests it looked like the infection was there but now it wasn't. We thought we had a miracle. The doctor said he could not explain it, but I could...God had answered my prayer.

We continued to dress the sore thinking okay since there is no infection there now, it will start healing up. Well, it didn't we went at least 3 more months and things still did not look good. My doctor said that he had done all that he could do and he knew the surgery was probably my only chance of trying to make this any better. But he said there was no doctor in my town that would want to do this surgery. The surgery is very major and complicated. He said he was going to be leaving his practice here in town and moving away so I would need to be seeing a new doctor anyway. He referred me to a doctor at Duke University Medical Center in North Carolina.

I got an appointment there and this doctor looked at all my previous x-rays and said I would definitely have to have surgery to try to correct this but that the surgery was very involved and would be a hard process to go through with trying to get healed up. This was on a Friday and he said I needed to go home and talk it over with my family and make a decision whether or not I wanted to go through this.

I came home and got everybody I knew to start praying that I would make the right decision. He also said if I was going to have this surgery I would have to see another doctor about having a colostomy done first to keep germs away from my sore once they do the major surgery. This was such a big decision that I knew God was going to have to send me a sign to let me know what to do. I prayed all weekend that I would just get some kind of sign.

Well, I got what I needed and it was in an email from a family member. When I read that email I knew I had to give this surgery a chance. I did not live through 28 years of things to make it this far and give up. I was not raised to be a quitter.

We called the doctor on Monday and told him we were going to go ahead with everything. I went to see this other doctor about having the colostomy done and he said it would not be a problem and that I should do fine. He said I should be in the hospital about a week to ten days and then I could come home and get my strength back up and talk about having the other surgery done.

I was really scared the day I went to the hospital to have the colostomy done. I don't know why cause I knew God was going to see me through this. I had lots of

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support there with me while I was waiting to go back to get ready for surgery. Mom kept reading me scriptures and that really helped. When I got back there I told them I was nervous and they said I would be fine.

I remember them giving me something to help me relax then the strangest thing happened:. I remember looking above my head and instead of the anesthetist sitting there it looked like my dad that had died when I was 13 years old was sitting there, then I drifted on to sleep. When I woke up I got the feeling my dad had been there in that operating room the whole time. My dad was my Guardian Angel.

I went into a regular room and they told me that I did fine and that the surgery did not take near as long as they thought it would. One doctor came in my room and said that I did not look like somebody that had just had surgery. All I could think was, it was definitely prayer. Things went really smooth and I did not have any complications. Four days after the surgery they let me go home, which was a miracle in itself because he had said it would be at least a week. I was feeling fine and everything was working good so he did not see any reason to have to keep me. I came home with lots of stitches in my stomach and when I moved around I was a little sore, but it was so good to be home. I was actually feeling really good.

Having the colostomy has ended up being a blessing in disguise cause it has helped me out in so many ways be able to take care of some things by myself and make me more independent. I give God all the praise for bringing me through everything in my life cause I know without him I would not be here today.

No, my story is not over and I have a major surgery coming up and I am sure many more things in the future to have to go through but I have learned through all of this in my life that if I stay under His Wings I will make it through anything that comes my way with God's help.