

Praise for Taming the Dragons

“*Taming the Dragons* is a clear, practical, and compelling guidebook on how women can deal creatively with the dragons they face. This book provides alternatives to despair and giving up in the face of difficulties and offers hope instead.”

- Morton Kelsey

Psychology, Medicine & Christian Healing and Reaching

“A wisdom-filled book which incorporates and underscores the resources available in the Christian faith for personal healing and growth.”

- Lars I. Granberg

President Emeritus, Northwestern College

“Wilbee offers stories instead of advice, setting each reader free to choose her own heroines and role models ... Images of womanly strength remain to hearten and challenge the thoughtful.”

- Maxine Hancock

Child Sexual Abuse: A Hope for Healing

“The prescription for handling suffering or conflict in Christian circles is often a one-size-fits-all “pray about it.” Wilbee skillfully shows readers—through scores of relatable examples—that additional choices and resources are available for navigating the social, psychological, and spiritual dynamics of fear, victimization, and trauma.”

- Blake Victor Kent, PhD

Assistant Professor of Sociology, Westmont College

Associate Researcher, Harvard Medical School Center
on Genomics, Vulnerable Populations, and Health Disparities

“A highly creative approach ... Wilbee combines biblical characters as well as such familiar stories as *The Wizard of Oz* to bring the reader to understand the choices that she has in dealing with the dragons we all face. A great gift book for women facing difficult circumstances.”

- Alvera Mickelsen

Women, Authority, and the Bible

“A captivating book, loaded with important ‘stuff’ for finding a way toward wholeness and the abundant life. Wilbee’s warm but confronting insights encourage and empower women (and men) to be their own persons. A marvelous exposition of Jesus’ words to us: ‘Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.’”

- William A. Miller

Your Golden Shadow:

Discovering and Fulfilling Your Undeveloped Self

“Wilbee, a gifted writer and keen observer of life, has written a book that could not be more timely for women—as well as for men.”

- Bruce Larson

Living Beyond our Fears

“Brenda Wilbee tames dragons with wit and wisdom, vulnerability and victory.”

- James Watkins

Overcoming Fear and Worry

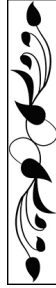
“By telling stories that illustrate six archetypes that shape our lives, Brenda Wilbee empowers women, and men, to expand their repertoire of responses to life’s many challenges.”

- Rev. Diane Astle

Ben the Dragonborn

Three stories from *Taming the Dragons* appear in Zondervan’s *Women’s Devotional Bible* #2:

- 1) “He Can’t Hurt Me Anymore” (Bible page 35, *Taming* page 47)
- 2) “Never Without Help” (Bible page 313, *Taming* page 53)
- 3) “Reflect” (Bible page 1389, *Taming* page 229)



TAMING THE DRAGONS

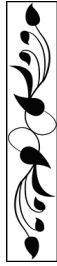
We know that we are children of God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

- 1 John 5:19 (NIV)

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Jesus

- John 16:33



TAMING THE DRAGONS

*Choices for Women
In Conflict and Pain*

Brenda Wilbee

REDEMPTION
PRESS 

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The author has recreated conversations from her memories of them. Upon request, she has changed the names of individuals who requested anonymity.

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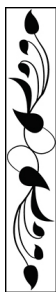


For my sister,

TRESA WILBEE

GOODFELLOW

for teaching me I can choose



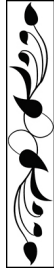
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**“I can no other answer make but thanks,
And thanks, and ever thanks...”**
- *Twelfth Night*, Act III, Scene III -

I thank first of all my sister, TRESA WILBEE GOODFELLOW, for being the first in my life to teach me I have choice. There is no greater gift.

I thank my brother-in-law BRUCE W. WIGGINS for taking me to see *The Wizard of Oz* as a young adult. I had never seen it before. More than anything, I thank him as a member of the Wizard of Oz club for his input and understanding of the film.

I thank, and am indebted to, CAROL PEARSON, author of *The Hero Within*. Her book is the foundation of mine, her ideas springboard my own.

I wish also to thank TURNER ENTERTAINMENT for free use of extensive dialogue taken from *The Wizard of Oz*. Without their support the book would not be what it is.

I thank my neighbor CHARLIE WATSON of three decades ago for many things:

- 1) the use of her VCR and video of *The Wizard of Oz*,
- 2) watching my children while I wrote,
- 3) the long walks in the evening talking over the day's work,

- 4) her marvelous collection of fairy tale books, and
- 5) her wonderful, wonderful bean soup.

I thank Rev. DIANNE ASTLE. We met when she invited me to visit one of her *Taming the Dragons* Bible Studies. From her I got the idea to create a study guide for this updated and expanded edition. *Merci, mon amie.*

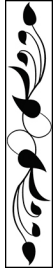
I can't forget SHIRLEY DOOP, ANNE WILBEE, and BETTY WILBEE, all now gone:

SHIRLEY: a friend who plied me with books and more books, who questioned my thesis, who gave me another perspective, and who, without doubt, was the most challenging and supportive of my friends.

ANNE WILBEE, my aunt, for having been so enthusiastic, for sitting down over tea and biscuits, for going over the Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard with me, and for always, always finding new things of God that gave me something to chew on.

BETTY GOODFELLOW WILBEE, my mother. Her skillful editing and abiding interest in this book made *Taming the Dragons* all that it was. If there are issues with the new edition, it's because she isn't here to help me. I miss you, Mum, and thank you.

Finally, I thank the many women in my life, past and present, who are living proof that dragons can be tamed.



FROM THE AUTHOR 1992

While this book can be beneficial for both men and women, women in particular, I have always kept before me the battered psyche of the religious woman who has been mistreated by those closest to her and whose church and family have not understood the trauma she endures.

As a result, I have consistently left out the variances I might otherwise have included. For instance, in the Wizard section of this book, I talk about self-deception. I posit that one of the reasons we deceive ourselves is because we must appear to be perfect or else be considered unacceptable. I don't go into reasons not germane to hurting women. I stick to those that affect women who look at the world from a pain-riddled perspective. Therefore, I have not tried to write the definitive work on response to conflict, but simply a work that will address the dominant needs and concerns of women who hurt—whether they are battered, down on their luck, disillusioned, overwhelmed by circumstances, or simply going through transition.

Historically, there's been little help for the needs of hurting women. We've instead been told to be more grateful, to buck up, to lose weight, to shout at our mothers, to stop yelling at our children, to dress in Saran Wrap, be more submissive, more aggressive, go to work, stay at home. Today, thanks to the work of Dr. Carol Gilligan, Marcia Wescott, Linda Kreger Silverman, Sharon Carnarton, and others, we know that a woman's psychological wiring is different than a man's. We hurt differently. We process and respond differently. With this book, then, I hope to offer different understanding.

I've based *Taming The Dragons* upon a book that profoundly changed my life—*The Hero Within* by Carol Pearson. In this book, Pearson named six behavior patterns we carry within ourselves,

which, when practiced, enable us to face the mighty dragons that come with life. She calls them archetypes; I call them choices. I came across the book not long after it came out in 1986. Tantalized by what she had to say yet unable to fully grasp it all, I chose to go back to school.

I studied several psychological theories: feminine, family of origin, Jungian. I studied fairy tales, too; and folklore, myth, and cultural story. I completed first my B.A. and then my M.A., and in the process I wore out Pearson's book—memorizing it, studying it, and cross-referencing it with Bible verses I'd once memorized as a kid. And thus, without hardly being aware of it, *Taming The Dragons* began with Pearson's ideas giving frame to my own.

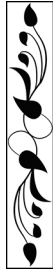
After taking a class in feminine psychology taught by Dr. Dana Jack, who'd earned her PhD under Carol Gilligan at Harvard, I was challenged by Dana to write out my ideas—for they came from a religious perspective, unique to the field. *Taming The Dragons*, at that point, became a conscious endeavor. I began by taking Pearson's foundation, her articulation of archetypes, and making them my own by naming and renaming. Her Wanderer is my Pilgrim, for example. I then brought in my own stories, as well as stories from the Bible, history, literature, and contemporary women. Finally, by embracing her conclusions, I expanded mine.

Why all this trouble if there's already such a good book on the market? Because, as a wounded Christian woman, if I had come across Pearson's book at the beginning of my confusion and pain, I would not have been able to sift through her Jungian and feminist terminology to glean her Christian truths. As it was, I had to go back to school; not all women can do that. Also, I wrote this book because I carry a deep concern for those caught in the same dilemmas I'd once been in, without choice and without hope of even God, whose Christianity can seem more brutalizing than empowering.

Taming The Dragons, then, is from a Christian perspective—my hope being that Pearson's ideas can be understood and incorporated into a religious woman's life in the midst of her pain.

May God bless and direct and bring healing in his wings.

Remember, Jesus stands at the empty tomb of our shattered hope to ask, "Woman, why do you weep?"



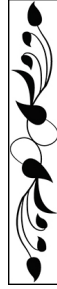
FROM THE AUTHOR 2020

When I first wrote *Taming the Dragons: Christian Women Resolving Conflict*, I was ten years into single parenting. Today I'm well past that. I have nine grandchildren and reached the age where, on all paperwork, I must tick the box "65+." Which really means I'm between 65 and dead.

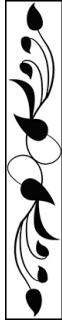
This prompts a reflective look back. And thoughtful organization of days ahead. What I see are books long out of print. One in particular. While I still get fan mail for my Seattle Sweetbriar Series, it's *Taming the Dragons* that profoundly changed women's lives. How best to use the years left to me? I've had to ask and feel compelled to republish this most meaningful and helpful of my work. Which, by the way, I've renamed *Taming the Dragons: Powerful Choices for Women in Conflict and Pain*.

I've made other changes as well. A few verb tenses to reflect the passage of time, a few more contemporary anecdotes and stories, and I conclude each chapter with "Something to Think About," a Study Guide with journaling pages.

The dragons have not gone away. In I John 5:9 we learn that the whole world is under control of the evil one. A few decades isn't going to change this; the book can still be helpful. And this I still believe, then and now, that when we begin to make choices, we begin to tame dragons—and that God can then bring into our lives the miracles we need ... to live in victory for him and Happily Ever After.



*T*AMING THE
*D*RAGONS



ONE - ONCE UPON A TIME

Once upon a time ... the raging dragon ... a hero and a damsel in distress. Remember the old fairy tales? Prince Charming and Sleeping Beauty and happily ever after? It was always that way in our bedtime stories. But what about real life? What's happened to *our* happily ever after? Daily we live under the dragon's fire: we can hardly conceive of victory.

Once upon a time a dragon stepped across our path, the hero pulled his sword. The damsel swooned. And here we are, men slaying, women submitting, all of us forever locked into fairy tale roles that have somehow been Christianized—thinking this is the only way to respond to conflict. And we wonder why we live in defeat.

We live in defeat because, typically, men have been taught to *conquer* conflict—to slay the dragon. Counterpoint, women have been taught to *submit* to conflict—to subdue by swooning before the dragon, to give in.

When both of these roles, conquering and submitting, are practiced exclusively, it puts all of us at risk and backs us into a corner. For one thing, it leaves men always on the battlefield without any R&R, and we all know that men are dying younger than women; maybe this is why. Alan Basham, former director of the counseling center at Seattle Pacific University in Seattle, Washington, adds another interesting angle. He believes that men die younger than women because they are never allowed to experience the love of damsels in distress *until they first*

relieve the distress. And so men, their use of sword and shield an art form, are dying not so much from battle wounds but from something more deadly—not being loved for who they *are*, but only for what they *do*.

Women are living longer, but in today's violent world they're often surviving as victims, helpless damsels who shy from picking up sword and shield in self-defense. As women, we're to await the hero and, in the event of a hero's absence, submit. We grow up learning to depend on rescue. *Like Rapunzel?* Failing rescue, to then commit ourselves to martyrdom and self-sacrifice. So if statistically men are dying younger than women, women statistically are surviving as victims. But if we're to defeat this destructive pattern and find victory—for *both* men and women—we need to recognize roles other than those our fairy tales have assigned.

But is that fair? Is there more to story than just hero and heroine, Warrior and Martyr? What of other characters and other choices when up against peril? Peter Rabbit fled. Thumbelina asked for help. Fairy godmothers guessed riddles and transformed rags into riches, frogs into princes. Warriors and Martyrs, yes, but there are also Pilgrims, Orphans, *and* Wizards. We have options; we have choices.

When up against conflict there is more than one way to tame the trouble. For one, we can trade shoes. If we are men, we can learn what it means to submit, to be a Martyr, to swoon in the face of conflict—as did Hansel at the wicked witch's house. Likewise, if we are women, we can learn what it means to be the fairy tale Warrior, to slay and conquer and defeat—as did Gretel to save Hansel. Both of us can try on new shoes altogether and learn a few new roles. I suggest that if Warrior and Martyr aren't working, try Pilgrim, Orphan, or Wizard. Because when we deal with dragons the same old way every single time, it doesn't always work. The dragons too often win. And it's why so many of us are not living happily ever after.



For a woman, particularly one raised in the more conservative churches, this concept of choice can be difficult. Making it even more difficult is that the male Warrior and female Martyr roles are the fundamental warp and woof of our heritage; they've been woven into our literature, our myths, and our laws, and then passed down to us. So it's quite difficult to look at Scripture and see a different story,

and this is why it's so difficult for us as religious women to see we have a choice. We can't help but look at the Bible and see reflected from its pages our own cultural misunderstandings.

We look into the pages of Scripture and almost automatically see only the fairy tale roles of Warrior and Martyr. David the Warrior. Martha the Martyr. And so when the dragon roars, men rush to slay, women to submit, all of us dying and being victimized, and we zip right past all the other possible choices. We forget that there *is* a choice. We didn't even know to look for choice.

I didn't know to look for it.

Like most women raised in the church I only knew the role of Martyr. This was it as far as God was concerned; in conflict I was to swoon, to give in. But at the age of twenty-nine I was forced to wake up to the fact that this wasn't working. Self-sacrifice was getting me just that—sacrifice of self. My doctors were concerned.

Why? I wondered, looking around at the failure of my life. Was I doing everything I could? Had I missed something important? I spent some time poring over Scripture to find out where I had gone wrong.

At first I kept finding verses that supported the role of Martyr—good old Sarah keeping mum and winding up in Pharaoh's harem, Martha washing dishes and serving tea and sweeping floors. These women kept shoving me back to square one. Fogged by cultural mandates, I saw only men slaying and women submitting and it all seemed to work out so well in the Bible—but in real life? *Was* the sacrifice of self a woman's only option?

One day, eating granola at my kitchen table, I ran into Deborah, a Hebrew prophetess and military commander. Nobody in Sunday school had ever told me about female warriors. And then I found Abigail while eating cold toast. Nobody had ever told me about her either. She disregarded her husband and before it was all done King David married her. Wow. Ignore her husband and find a new life? Suddenly I began looking at men and women in the Bible with new understanding. Every morning over breakfast, I was able to find, easily enough, all kinds of roles being played out in the lives of *dozens* of men and women all down through Jewish history as they battled the dragons before them! Here was Tamar, seducing Judah in order to assure herself of her lawful rights to a son by his house! Priscilla in Rome, teaching and discipling men. Mary Magdalene, a financier of Jesus' ministry. Suddenly, no longer stuck interpreting Scripture

from my fairy tale assigned position as Martyr, I began to grasp the concept of alternatives. In the face of conflict I could flee, I could fight back, I could play tricks, I could choose! Behold! Deborah the Warrior! Ruth the Martyr! Esther the Orphan! Hagar the Pilgrim! Abigail the Wizard! For me, a religious woman taught to blindly submit, this was liberating illumination; I rejoiced in this affirmation, this *permission* to make a different choice!

This was my beginning. I have since gone on to discover these same roles everywhere, not just in the Bible but in women today, in history, in characters from our favorite stories. They can even be found in our fairy tales—oftentimes more picturesquely than in the book of Judges. We don't know Deborah the Warrior, but we know Mrs. Jumbo. Few of us have been taught to see Ruth in the role of Martyr, but Piglet? Jumping into Kanga's pocket in lieu of Roo? We certainly aren't used to looking at Wizards in the Old Testament; this idea can seem threatening. But in fairy tales? We love and applaud our fairy godmothers.

In looking back I am not sure how any of us missed the obvious, for choice is the underlying theme in both our childhood stories and Scripture, read to us from the cradle. I'm not sure why the "Matchstick Girl" sticks in our minds or why we get stuck on Martha when Jesus himself said Mary's way was better—for all stories, "in the beginning" and "once upon a time"—teach us choice.

I'm not sure, yet for some reason, we have restricted ourselves, and in our self-imposed restriction the dragons win.

How then, do we choose and dragons lose?

Naming a thing brings power over it. God said:

Let us make man in our image ... and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.¹

He then told Adam to name every living creature.²

Naming empowered mankind to rule.

In the same way, by *naming* our choices we gain the power to choose. In my own life, once I got it through my head that I could in fact choose, and that I had at least five options—Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard—I discovered that given any crisis I

could literally sit back and decide which of the five I would use to solve my problem. Choice took the sting out of my powerlessness. Choice enabled me to move from victim to victor. Did this particular dragon, I'd ask myself, naming my options, call for Mrs. Jumbo, the fairy tale Warrior? Or Abigail, the Old Testament Wizard? Or was the battle one to martyr myself for, as did Ruth of Moab? Piglet in the Hundred Acre Wood?

Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard. Naming is one thing, understanding another. Fortunately we have the Bible to offer example and fairy tale to offer metaphor. Out of the Old Testament we have our beacons of choice: Esther, Hagar, Ruth, Deborah, and Abigail. We also have in *The Wizard of Oz* (handily enough) Dorothy, Scarecrow, Tinman, Lion, and Wizard. An odd combination, but one that serves clear purpose.

Both Esther and Dorothy are Orphans, needing and finding help through their own courage. Hagar and the Scarecrow are Pilgrims, fleeing cultural expectations in order to seek clarity of mind and identity. Ruth and the Tinman are Martyrs, sacrificing from a position of power in order to redeem. Deborah and the Lion are Warriors, drawn into the fray to protect. And Abigail and the Wizard are Wizards, taming evil by naming it for what it really is and, when they can, bringing into play creative alternatives. By following the footsteps of these Biblical heroines and by metaphorically walking the yellow brick road of Frank Baum's Oz, we can discover on a more personal level what it means to make these choices.

The following six chapters—Innocent, Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard—open with a character from the *Wizard of Oz*, each a role model for powerful choices. I quickly partner in women from the Bible so we might understand the scriptural support for such a role. And because the idea of choice can be difficult to grasp, I go on to tell short stories of women who've made these choices: Two women from history, literature, two more from the Bible, two contemporary women, two personal examples of my own life. These stories told, each chapter concludes with a second—and closer—look at what each role means. An Orphan learns to ask for help, yes. But an Orphan also learns in the process how to help herself. A Wizard names evil in another person's life, true. But a Wizard also names the evil within herself. Finally, I end each section with "Something To Think About," a Study Guide that provides more Scripture and

offers questions to ponder—accompanied by journaling pages to write down your own experiences and ideas.

My dragons have largely been those of single parenting, poor health, and poverty. Today I have other challenges. Others have problems with their marriages. Still others have conflict on the job, with their kids, with their finances. Men, too, have their troubles. Yet it seems some of us—if we're to be honest—aren't coping with crisis well. I'm convinced we live in defeat or despair or from behind plastic masks because we remain stuck responding to diverse conflict in but one prescribed way. But by *choosing* among our options—taught to us by our fairy tales and modeled for us in the Bible—we can begin to see God active in our affairs; and because we *choose* to, we can begin to put away that despair and pain and move toward redemption and new life.

This is the happily ever after our fairy tales and Jesus' promise. Once upon a time ... the raging dragon ... a hero and a damsel in distress. Wait! The hero doesn't pull his sword, the damsel doesn't swoon. Both pause and then choose—Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, or Wizard. We too can choose.

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."³ So said Jesus. We *can* live happily ever after.



NOTES

1. Genesis 1:26 (NIV).
2. Genesis 2:19, 20 (NIV).
3. John 10:10 (NIV).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Such large crowds gathered around [Jesus] that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables.

- Matthew 13:2-3 (NIV)

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

- Jesus, Luke 10:30 (NIV)

Evil surrounds us, and tales of good versus evil weave through our fairy tales *and* our Bible. From Deborah to Jezebel, we have stories to help us understand what evil is and to give us choices when facing the dragons. Jesus himself is a story teller. "Once upon a time a farmer ... Once upon a time a king ... Once upon a time a man was going down from Jerusalem ...

1. Do you have a favorite Bible story, parable, or fairy tale? Why does it appeal to you?
2. In the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37), what evil occurred? What was Jesus saying about good and evil?
3. If we turn the letters of "evil" around, we get "live." Can you name a time when something happened to you that diminished your sense of being alive? Do you recognize this as evil or does it seem a stretch? Why?
4. Do you think you deserve good in your life? Or is evil your cross to bear? Who told you that?

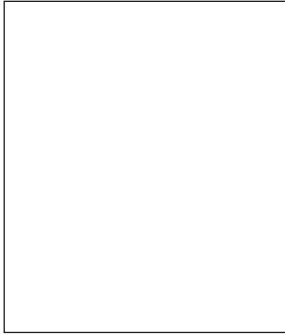
Reminder:

Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

- Matthew 13:13 (KJV)

Prayer:

In this troubled world, thank you for stories that help us grapple with good and evil—and our responsibility. Help us to really hear and really see, to take a second look and examine the evidence, and to apply Jesus' teachings that may or may not be what we've been taught or others practice. Only in this way can we truly choose good over evil with clarity and wisdom, and find redemption instead of victimization—and healing for ourselves and others.



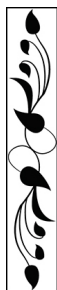
DRAW YOUR DRAGON

“Everyone wants the fairy tale, but don’t forget there are dragons in those stories.”

— R. Queen
Darkchylde

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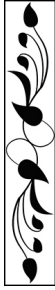
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TWO - *I*NNOCENT

“Is there really a dragon out there?”

- Eve the Innocent



*W*E DON'T LIVE IN THE
GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE
Yet We Like to Pretend We Do

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

- Genesis 2:8, 9 (NIV)

*F*airy tales teach us much about good and evil, and the loss of innocence. Little Red Riding Hood, Hansel and Gretel, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty. In the safety of story a child can come to terms with deep-seated fears of abandonment, of hunger, even of death. Pulling no punches, brutal and harsh, fairy tales bring to the surface the instinctive knowledge that we're born into a wicked world full of conflict and danger.

One of the most enduring fairy tales of our day is *The Wizard of Oz*. A reason, perhaps, for its popularity is that much of it can be compared to our fall from grace and search for restoration in a fallen world.

When Dorothy lived with Auntie Em and Uncle Henry in Kansas, she didn't know the difference between good and evil—neither did Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In the fairy tale, a tornado enters Kansas to snatch Dorothy out of her paradise. In the Bible a snake enters the idyllic garden to snatch Adam and Eve out of theirs. In both stories, everyone is plunged into a world of good and evil.

Innocence lost, we're all set upon the "yellow brick road" to seek the Wizard who can help, and Dorothy's adventures can very closely be compared to ours—and Adam and Eve's—for once fallen, we need a Savior and restoration.

But like Dorothy and Adam and Eve, we're not all that crazy about traveling the yellow brick road or facing the evil that's out there. We really only want to go home, back to Kansas, to paradise. We don't like living in a world of ruby shoes and wicked witches and hissing snakes and dragons that roar. We want only to live in innocence forever, to live again in the Garden of Eden. But we've been cast out and it's terribly scary. For many of us, we clap our hands over our ears and shut our eyes. We ignore the witch under our house. We contain our fear by pretending evil doesn't exist.

We claim the role of Innocent.

This is good and appropriate if you're a child, and not enough children experience the Garden of Eden in their lives. Sadly, they are plunged too quickly into an awareness of evil and the disastrous consequences are evident all around us. But if you're an adult and still viewing life as rosy and quite the peach, it's unhealthy. Life is *not* rosy, it is *not* a peach. And none of us can keep pretending forever without inviting all kinds of trouble—for ourselves and those around us, for we *do* live in a fallen world.

For Dorothy, a cyclone snatched her out of innocence. For Eve, a snake hissed. For us, it can be any number of mishaps. But as with both Dorothy and Eve life has a way of eventually forcing the issue for all of us, snatching us out of Kansas into Oz, out of Eden into reality, out of innocence into knowledge, and this confrontation, whether we like it or not, forces us to acknowledge the reality of conflict and pain. It's not fun, and this is why so many of us dig in and *really* stick our heads in the sand.

Several years ago I taught freshman composition at a state university. Eighteen years old and innocent, some of my students assumed that life was easy and safe. While my job was to teach them how to write, writing involves joining the larger community of discovery. I therefore liked to challenge them beyond personal experience and bring to their attention a world where life wasn't always going to be so easy or safe. I introduced them to the modern-day witches of the west and the mythological dragons of the past, witches and dragons that surround all of our lives in some way or another.

I saw myself as their tornado. I catapulted them from innocence into a world different than their own, sometimes a world of oppression and poverty and corruption. I invited them to read such books as Frank Norris's *The Octopus* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*. We learned metaphor through Dr. Martin Luther King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." They wrote reviews involving issues of the day: homelessness, gender bias, and the growing gap between the rich and poor. They wrote compare and contrast essays that outline the difference between their lifestyles and that of Offred (Of Fred) in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. I had them do this because as students from idyllic backgrounds they'd not yet woken up to evil at large. Adults, too, can hide from this reality. Evil is something collective, somewhere "out there." Not personal. And so when it hits us upside the head and deep inside our hearts, we're left spinning like Dorothy; and in our spinning, the evil we ignored catches us off guard.

With some of my students I succeeded in pointing out the reality of evil in our world. "You know, Teach," Pat told me in my office one day not long after writing his final paper, "I'm a redneck from Aberdeen. But when you handed me Dr. Martin Luther King's letter from Birmingham's jail, I had to change my mind about a lot of things. If I learn nothing else in college, I will have learned this, things are not always the way I 'think' they are. Thanks."

With other students I failed. One day Cameron swore at me and threw onto the floor an investigative article that told of a new Underground Railroad helping women and kids escape court-ordered visits to fathers who sexually and physically abuse their children. A hard reality for many—and really hard for someone outside such a world to fathom. Today, we have a plethora of other disheartening issues, and as Innocents we're tempted to argue the statistics, question the evidence. It can't be that bad, we think. And when a classroom prods too far, we sometimes storm out, we're that desperate to remain innocent and "safe."

Reality infringing upon paradise is a brutal confrontation and it's so much easier to deny the reality. For some of my students and for some adults, the ultimate disillusionment can be crushing.

Many years ago my sister Heather was born with a congenital heart defect. My parents were able to accept the fact that evil sometimes reigns, but in doing so they ran afoul of those who pretended

it didn't. "Our child will not die!" insisted the parents of a little girl Heather spent hospital time with, blinding themselves to the fact that children die every day. They criticized my parents for not having enough faith. Heather did of course die (she had virtually no wall between the two halves of her heart), but the other family? When that little girl inevitably died her mother's faith was destroyed.

Denial of evil happens on a corporate scale as well. During the early days of the 2020 coronavirus pandemic and Covid-19 mandates of social distancing and closure of nonessential businesses and organizations, some ministers made the news by declaring God bigger than a virus. God, they claimed, would protect the faithful. They held services despite restrictions. And people died.

The fact is, the longer an Innocent persists in living inside the Garden and denying that life is tough beyond the gate, that evil abounds, that our lives can be disrupted, challenged, and even destroyed, the more painful the fall will be. The inescapable fact is, evil does abound.

The disciple John writes in I John 5:19 that "the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Dr. M. Scott Peck begins *The Road Less Traveled* with "Life is difficult."¹ Buddha taught that "life is suffering."² In Genesis, Adam and Eve met firsthand the "serpent" that brought about all this difficulty and suffering. Yet determined Innocents dig in deep, stick their heads in the sand, and systematically ignore the serpent or dragon in order to maintain a happy illusion that life is what my friend Gloria calls "yippy skippy happy." Such a position requires us to move past simple pretense to heavy-handed denial.

We, like a few of my students, lean forward at our desks, eyes wide with disbelief. "There really isn't one out of six kids going hungry." Or, "Are you *sure* a woman college graduate earns the same as a male high-school dropout?" For some of us it's not even a question. We fold our arms and lean back. We stick out our feet. "If you're homeless, it's your own fault!"

Denial.

In other words, there are no witches or dragons to the Innocent—no matter the evidence. There *cannot* be any dragons, because if there were it would mean no safety. It would mean no Eden. No Kansas. It would mean we must walk the yellow brick road and take our inner

journey to seek redemption. And to some of my freshmen students—and to scores of adults—it's frightening to consider a world where middle-class success is not guaranteed and safety a matter of course.

When my fourteen-year-old daughter returned from a school trip to NASA, she brought me a bumper sticker, "MEGASHIT HAPPENS." Her friends were appalled that she would buy such a thing for her mum, but I, perversely enough, was delighted. I liked the refreshing honesty. She did have one stipulation. I was not to put it on the car. Not that I wanted to.

There's a natural tendency to pretend that mega-poo doesn't happen. Like Dorothy and Eve and all children, we long to remain Innocent, to live forever in the Garden of Eden.

But what happens when Miss Gulch comes for Toto?



MARY

Because you have made the LORD your refuge,
 the Most High your habitation,
 no evil shall befall you,
 no scourge come near your tent.

For he gave His angels charge of you
 to guard you in all your ways.
 On their hands they will bear you up,
 lest you dash your foot against a stone.
 You will tread on the lion and the adder,
 the young lion and the serpent you will trample
 underfoot.

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him;
 I will protect him, because he knows my name.

- Psalm 91:9-14 (RSV)

"I awoke shortly after midnight, and within minutes I'd been shot in the head."

Mary was asleep in bed with her three-and-a-half-year-old son when an intruder broke into her home through a bathroom window. Her husband was working the night shift as an airplane pilot. "Because of a previous burglary attempt," she told me, "I'd been praying for the ability to quickly discern good from evil." In God's answer to prayer, she awoke one night, sensing something amiss. She called 911 only moments before the intruder forced his way through her bedroom door and shot her. She remembers feeling strangely detached and overwhelmed as she folded to the floor. "I kept talking in a soft voice, saying, 'Please go away. Please go away.'"

Mary,³ a member of University Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Washington, didn't live in the Garden of Eden and, for her, evil invaded the safety of even her own home. "I felt the struggle between good and evil," she said. "But as I lay there, watching the pool of blood grow larger and larger, I felt like God was dealing with that person, not me." The paramedics arrived and her son, awake by now,

said, “You better get a Band-Aid. My mommy has an owie on her head.” Hearing his voice, Mary wondered if she’d live to see him again. “Even so,” she said, “I felt really calm. I felt God was with me.”

Evil lurks and even strikes, yet there is a bigger truth. God is with us. In the midst of Mary’s trouble, God answered. He was there. He gave her peace. And he himself dealt with the evil raging all around. So while the Psalmist may sing “no evil shall befall you,” two stanzas down he also sings, “when he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble.” Mega poo happens.

For Mary, who’d been praying for discernment between good and evil, she woke in time to call for help before evil could strike. In the days that followed, the police, medics, and hospital staff, who seldom see victims survive a gunshot wound to the head, were astounded. A miracle unfolded before their eyes, for Mary lived.⁴

And because she lived we know God is with us, EVEN THOUGH NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



LUCY

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he also provides a way out so that you can stand up under it.

- I Corinthians 10:13 (NIV)

Sometimes we use this verse to deny the power of evil, and in doing so we let evil reign. Interpreting the word “temptation” to mean circumstances or events or crushing stress rather than what it does mean—temptation to do wrong—we blind ourselves to people whose burdens really are too heavy to bear. Erroneously assured in our minds that God will not allow too much stress to accumulate in a neighbor’s life, we sit back and allow our neighbor to suffer more than he or she can withstand.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel that sparked the Civil War by exposing the evils of slavery, Tom watched a Christian woman kill herself in despair.

Mr. Haley was the slave trader. At one spot along the Mississippi River, while taking his "gang" south to sell, he left the steamboat to bring aboard a slave woman chirruping happily to her ten-month-old baby. She told Tom she was on her way down to Louisville to be hired out to work in the same tavern as her husband. Haley interrupted; he'd bought her and was going to sell her South.

So instead of going to live with her husband, she would never see him again. At Louisville, the distraught Lucy tucked her sleeping baby into a corner and ran to the front rails of the boat in hope of catching a last glimpse of a husband she'd never again see. While her back was turned, Haley sold her baby for forty-five dollars to a man who slipped away unseen.

Harriet Beecher Stowe pounced on the Northern reader for turning a blind eye to such evil. "The trader," she wrote, "had arrived at that stage of Christian ... perfection which has been recommended by some preachers ... in which [they] completely overcome every humane weakness and prejudice. His heart was exactly where yours, sir, and mine could be brought, with proper effort and cultivation. The wild look of anguish and utter despair that the woman cast upon him might have disturbed one less practiced; but he was used to it. He had seen that same look hundreds of times. You can get used to such things, too, my friend ..."⁵

Tom tried to comfort Lucy by telling her of a caring Jesus. But, says Stowe, "the ear was deaf with anguish."

"O! what shall I do?" Lucy moaned in the black of night. "O Lord! O good Lord, do help me!" At midnight Tom awoke, felt a stir of air, then a brush past his shoulder. In the silence of the night he heard the splash. When he looked, Lucy's place on the deck was empty.

Today we have an underground network of domestic and sexual slavery. Refugees all over the world flee for their lives. We have a new working poor in the world's wealthiest country. We have sexual discrimination, gender bias, whole cities where toxic water, crime, violence, and despair are common place.

But like the Northerners of 1852, and like Haley the slave trader, we've grown so used to the face of evil "out there, down there" that the anguish no longer means anything. Evil runs rampant, and

people—even Christians like Lucy—kill themselves (or go crazy, or get sick, or live emotionally paralyzed lives) from the despair of it all. Sometimes the burden *is* too great to bear, and like the Northerners we can't rest in religious triteness because for many "the ear is deaf with anguish." We need to wake up because NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



CHRISTINE

So now, since you have been made right in God's sight by faith in His promises, we can have real peace with him because of what Jesus Christ our LORD has done for us.

For because of our faith, He has brought us into His place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to actually becoming all that God has had in mind for us to be.

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to be patient.

And patience develops strength of character in us and helps us trust God more each time we use it until finally our hope and faith are strong and steady. Then, when that happens, we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.

- Romans 5:1-5 (LB)

My cousins were almost home, pushing their bikes up the last of the hill. It was a winter evening early in the new year of 1974, and a

slight drizzle hurried them along: Patty, thirteen, Christine, eleven. Lights from the kitchen window could be seen through the trees. Nearly home.

A car driven by a young man blinded by the setting sun came suddenly gunning up over the ridge. Patty ran the half block home, screaming. Uncle Stan, the town doctor, was paged. Christine had been in an accident.

Seventeen hundred miles away and a few days later, I came home late from work. A letter from my folks was in the mailbox. "I'm sorry to be the one to break the news," my mother wrote, "but Christine was killed today while riding her bike home for supper."

I let the letter fall to the floor, my eyes automatically sliding to the wall where I'd hung a small hooked rug Christine and I had made together a few summers before. It was all I had of my sweet little cousin. "Oh, Christine," I wept, tears stinging the moment I buried my face into the dusty wool and cried into her careful work. She was dead—why? Such needless, pointless death! I was inconsolable for days.

Then came a second letter from my mother. "Uncle Stan," she wrote, "went into Christine's room after everything was over and sat down at the new little table he'd gotten her for Christmas. Her Bible was open. She'd been reading it before going off to school that morning, and she'd underlined the first five verses of Romans 5."

So now, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith in his promises, we can have real peace with him because of what Jesus Christ our LORD has done for us ...

Christine spoke from heaven. Evil receded.

... we are able to hold our heads high no matter what happens and know that all is well, for we know how dearly God loves us ...

Evil slid back further, finally to vanish in the victory of God's ultimate promise. We are not without hope, even though NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



ATHALIAH

Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

- Romans 13:1-3 (NIV)

If evil ran in the veins of wicked Queen Jezebel of Israel, it ran even deeper in her daughter Athaliah, who ascended the throne of neighboring Judah by slaughtering her own grandchildren to become Judah's only reigning queen.

Once upon a time, the story begins, Athaliah married Jehoram, the next in line for Judah's throne. Like her mother, Athaliah worshiped Baal, and by the time the king of Judah died and Athaliah's husband took the throne, Baal polluted the land. The new king's younger brothers resisted his wife's "evil" influence, determined to remain loyal to Jehovah and Judah. For their defiance, their brother, King Jehoram, had them all murdered.

He himself died eight years later, and his son Ahaziah took over—with Athaliah as queen mother. She moved into greater power than ever before, and mother and son together plotted great evil. But within a year, Ahaziah too was dead.

This left Athaliah an easy route to the throne. She moved into high gear. She set out to destroy "all the seed royal," her own blood relations and grandchildren, and for six years her reign as Judah's only queen was supreme.

Unbeknownst to her, however, a stepdaughter had rescued one of the royal babies from her bloody massacre and had been secretly raising him. When he turned seven years old, the high priest brought him out of hiding and with the help of the Levites crowned him king.

At the tumultuous cry of freedom, Queen Athaliah went to investigate. There in the Temple she'd desecrated for Baal the new king stood, surrounded by princes with their trumpets.⁶

"Treason!" screamed Athaliah.

"Slay her not in the house of the Lord," said the high priest. She was slain at the horse gate by the palace and, in a death very much like her mother's, her body was left in the path of trampling hooves.

I can't help but wonder why the apostle Paul wrote in Romans that all authority is ordained of God, and that all rulers hold no terror for those who do good, but only for those who do evil, and that to resist authority is to resist God. How can this be when the prophet Elijah dared to alternately confront and flee the evil Jezebel? When a stepdaughter dared defy Athaliah and rescue baby Joash to raise in secrecy? When Jesus himself ignored Jewish law to feed the hungry. History exposes numerous evil regimes. The Third Reich comes to mind. Where would any of us be if those before us had not pronounced evil for what it was and stood up to it? History, ancient and modern, if it tells us anything, tells us that NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



W E N D Y

If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

- John 3:17, 18 (NIV)

If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

- 1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV)

Eight-year-old Wendy sat on the couch, reading her Bible. "Uh-oh," she said.

“What’s the matter, Wendy?” her mother asked, for the girl’s face was pained.

“This verse. Poor daddy.” And she read aloud 1 Timothy 5:8. There was nothing her mother could say. Wendy’s father consistently found reason not to pay child support. It must have been weighing heavily on Wendy’s mind because, just the week before, she’d brought home one of her papers from school:

If I could ask the presidential candidate one question, I would ask: “What would you do about child abuse?” I think this is very important because some fathers don’t pay as much child support as they’re supposed to. If the fathers don’t pay they’re [sic] child support, the women don’t have much money, and if the women don’t have much money, they can’t buy much food, so they’re hungry a lot of the time!

- From Wendy, Grade 3

One day, my daughter’s friend came over to the house and I teased him about something. He stiffened, his eyes instantly frantic. I wasn’t surprised to find that Jeff’s stepfather terrorized his seventeen-year-old stepson with verbal abuse and ridicule. Too, Jeff was required to be home at all times to babysit five younger brothers and sisters while his Christian stepfather simultaneously jeered, “Why don’t you run away from home?” *We need you / we don’t need you* was the message Jeff got every day, and anyone who stopped to look could see the confusion in his eyes.

Scott Peck points out that evil is often subtle. Evil resides in the mother of three next door and the deacon in the church.⁷ “It is not their sins *per se* that characterize evil people,” he continues, “it’s the *subtlety and persistence and consistency* of their sins.”⁸ Evil can be the father who denies child support. The step-dad who ridicules.

James and Phyllis Alsdurf, authors of *Battered into Submission*, write that “one can conservatively estimate that for every 60 married women in a church, 10 suffer emotional and verbal abuse, and 2 or 3 will be physically abused by their husbands.”⁹ Esther Lee Olson and Ken Petersen in *No Place to Hide* can quote a more familiar but unbelievable study that reveals that as many as one out of every two wives in America will experience abuse by their husbands.¹⁰ Paul

Tournier, the twentieth century's most famous Christian physician, himself admits to brutal violence—in word, thought, and deed.¹¹ The *subtlety and persistence and consistency* make such things evil.

No, evil is not always Jezebel or Athaliah or a man who shoots you in the face, but a father who, when his children ask for bread, gives stones in the name of God. We may not see the evil in and around us, but, sadly, too many women and children know and understand that NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



BREND A

For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness.

- II Corinthians 11:12-15 (KJV)

I was nearly ten when my family emigrated from Canada to California to join the ministry of an independent Christian camping center located on a working sheep ranch. The woman in charge took in old men and young boys from the State for cash flow ... and to use and misuse. A wolf in sheep's clothing.

We, too, had been used. After being promised a fully furnished home if Dad pulled up roots and left Canada to develop Christian curriculum for her summer camps, we arrived to find two halves of an old ranger station that she'd requisitioned from the hills. This was our home—requiring my father to level the torn apart pieces, lay in a floor, put on a roof, dig a septic tank, add a fireplace, kitchen, bathtub, run in electricity. Our “furnishings” turned out to be the beautiful antiques of an old woman Grammy had fleeced and put on the street. My mother refused to accept the stolen property, and it didn't take long for Dad to figure out that Grammy also stole from

the government, the church, and eleven-year-old Richie. Her greed and manipulation were tools as sharp as knives, hidden behind a shiny, glittery persona of “Praise the Lord!” With growing disquiet, I began to understand that her husband and everyone else either looked the other way or embraced what she did as godly. She knew best. She was in charge.

The first time my mother tried to intervene on behalf of her victims—kids setting camp tables “incorrectly”—we’d been there a month. One word out of Mum, though, and Grammy let out a piercing wail, howling and lamenting about how misunderstood she was. Everyone came running. I gaped in disbelief. One minute, she’d been flying off the handle in a purple rage at terrified children, screaming borderline obscenities and hurling stinging accusations as she took the back of her arm to table after table, sweeping clean the plastic cups and cutlery—everything flying, bouncing, clattering to the floor, skidding and swirling. The next minute, she was a wounded, sniveling martyr we should all feel sorry for.

Mum was given a pious tongue lashing by the woman’s husband, distorting wrong into right, right into wrong. Staff were told to circle Mum and pray for her. How I longed to slip beneath their intertwined hands and rescue her. But I was too scared and stunned. No one, I noticed, gave a thought to the children, and for the first time I witnessed prayer being used as a weapon. Used to silence the compassionate.

This was Grammy in plain sight.

As summer wore on and turned into fall, I watched with growing distress the disparity between what I’d been taught was Christian and what I continued to witness *and could not reconcile*. A snake controlled my ten-year-old world. Worse, the snake claimed the name of Jesus. Even worse—others let the snake hiss and rattle and sometimes strike.

Seven months after our arrival, we were driving down the highway, me in the back seat of our old car, Betsy, with two pigs Grammy had somehow commandeered. I couldn’t help but overhear the conversation between her and my father up front.

“Just as soon as your dad starts sending us some money,” she said, talking about Grandpa, “you can start working on the cabins—”

My grandfather was rich. But even I knew he’d never, as a proud Canadian, donate a single dollar to an American enterprise, Christian

or not. I watched Dad's head swivel sideways in surprise before he looked back to the road and reminded her that he'd explained all this before ever coming down.

"I start my around-the-world trip next week," she told him tersely, eyes straight ahead, hands folded in her lap. "When I get back, you and your family will be gone."

I forgot about the pigs. *She'd only hired us for Grandpa's money? And Dad's carpentry skills?*

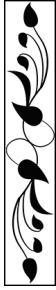
What about Christian curriculum?

My relief, however, was profound. *We could leave!* But then guilt set in. Without my mother to be kind, what would everyone do? I worried about Richie. My parents had planned to adopt him; I couldn't bear to leave him. Blind Uncle Earl. Who would play dominoes with him now? A lovely set, made of Jerusalem olive wood, with interlocking pieces and tiny brass bumps to tell him the numbers. Who would take him on walks under the eucalyptus? And Joe, a forty-year-old man with "the brain of a nine-year-old." Who would help him feed the pigs, or play house with him in the junk yard? I cried to think of Jack, the shepherd. Dad told me he was an alcoholic; to me, he was a confident. It was he who wiped my tears when I cried over the cruelty. I started having nightmares, one in particular: of taking Uncle Earl for a walk and letting him drown. He slipped. I couldn't pull him to safety.

A month later we were living in the Laurentian Mountains of French Canada, an idyllic place of calm and Christmas-card perfect. Dad ran a ski lodge for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and the snowy beauty, the quiet isolation, coupled with my happiness at being back in my own country, all stood in stark contrast to the life we'd left. My relief at having escaped was sharp, so too the terrible guilt over abandoning people I loved and missed and worried about.

I began pulling out my hair.

I was just a child and had no words, but I understood in a deep, unknowing place, that NONE OF US LIVE IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN ANYMORE.



*A*CKNOWLEDGMENT OF
EVIL INVITES BLAME
*Yet We Must Get Past Blame and
Instead Choose to Resolve*

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me something from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

- Genesis 3:8-13 (NIV)

*M*iss Gulch is on her way. Toto is doomed. Taking the role of Innocent and denying dragons will only get us so far before the music comes on, ominous and galloping. “Ooh, I hate this part!” squeals Blake, nine years old, as we watch the dragon lady ride her bicycle grimly down the dusty Kansas road. We see Uncle Henry let her in at the front gate, letting it snap shut against her bottom.

"I'm taking that dog to the sheriff," minces Miss Gulch tartly to Henry, "and make sure he's destroyed."

"Destroyed? *Toto*?" breathes out Dorothy, frantically clutching her little dog in her arms. "Oh, you can't, you mustn't! Uncle Henry, you won't let her, will you? Please, Auntie Em, *Toto* didn't mean to, he didn't know he was doing anything wrong. I'm the one who ought to be punished! I'm the one who let him go in her garden! You can send me to bed without supper!"

Loss of innocence is a painful process. Racing home with *Toto* in her arms, Dorothy was overwhelmed by the infringement of her safety. In panic and unable to deny the dragon facing her, Dorothy latched onto the first line of defense, the same one we all reach for—blame. In her case, self-blame.

Blame works two ways, like a double-edged sword: we can project it onto someone else or we can internalize it. One summer I took my children to the beach and a seven-year-old boy drowned. We all had to help look for him. The experience was traumatic, but when I went to a friend for comfort his response was a stinging blow.

"What's the matter with you? It's not like it was one of our kids! *And where was the mother?*"

It wasn't until years later I saw that my friend was merely responding out of the precarious position of the Innocent. Rather than acknowledge that dragons *do* sweep down from time to time to snatch away children (his children! my children!), he had to pretend that death could only happen to careless people who didn't watch their kids properly. My friend had to criticize the heartbroken mother for not being more watchful so he could maintain the illusion that the world was safe—for him, for me. Because he, after all, was a good father and I, after all, was a good mother.

My reaction was to internalize the blame. If only I'd understood the danger faster! I agonized, shifting the blame inward. If only I'd gone out quicker to look. If only I hadn't had my children with me. If only I'd been on the ball the tragedy would not have happened! If only ... if only ... if only. For me, too, there was no dragon—there was only an inept me. *Because it's easier to accept an inept me than to contend with a ferocious dragon that indiscriminately snatched children from a summer beach.*

I think we do this to bring a measure of control to dragons we can no longer deny. By blaming either ourselves, someone else, or even

God, there is an unspoken belief that if we would just do it “right,” we could alleviate future crisis. There really is no dragon; there is only our own foolishness, our own stupidity, our own ignorance, our own ill luck. Or, if we’re like Lucy in *Peanuts*, there is always Charlie Brown. Assigning blame, be it projected or internalized, is a stab in the dark when the dragons get too big to ignore.

When Dorothy is confronted with the dragon of Miss Gulch, she tries to maintain her safety by internalizing the blame—she says it was all her fault. Send her to bed without supper. Blame, projected or internalized, is an attempt to keep the undeniable dragons at bay—and out of our paradise and safe utopia.

But it didn’t work for Dorothy, it certainly didn’t work for Eve, and it doesn’t work for us today. If we persist, we suffer for it.

John Westfall, one of my former pastors, used to say that there are two kinds of people in life: those who are responsible and those who aren’t. M. Scott Peck says that most people who visit a psychiatrist are suffering from what is called either a “neurosis” or a “character disorder,” and while those terms sound like labels left best for *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, they’re just John’s ideas gussied up. “The neurotic,” Peck explains, “assumes too much responsibility; the person with a character disorder not enough.”¹² And when neurotics are in conflict with the world, they automatically assume the blame because they see themselves as responsible. Those with character disorders, says Peck, when they’re in conflict with the world, automatically assume that the world is at fault.¹³ Either way you cast the blame, though, the dragon wins.

Let’s suppose Dorothy blamed Miss Gulch instead of herself. Would it have changed the fact that there was a sheriff’s warrant for the seizure of Toto? No. So whether Dorothy or Miss Gulch is at fault is immaterial and hardly the question. The conflict is that *Toto is being stuffed into a basket and hauled off to his doom!* And those of us who refuse to acknowledge evil can only do what Dorothy did, helplessly stare at Auntie Em and Uncle Henry and then run crying into our bedroom.

Some of us get stuck here, in deep pain. As an Innocent, we’re not sure what hit us—but we feel some measure of safety because we at least know whose fault this is, right? A battered woman (Peck’s neurotic type, John’s responsible type) will never accuse her husband of evil. Instead she’ll agree “with society’s belief that the batterer would

change his behavior if only she could change her behavior.”¹⁴ This is her measure of safety. *He* won’t hurt me again if *I* do it right.

A batterer, however (Peck’s character disorder type, John’s irresponsible type), will always blame his victim because it *is* her fault. “The batterer feels justified in his violent behavior,” writes Lenora Walker in *The Battered Woman*, “because society says it is really the woman’s fault, not his.”¹⁵ This is his measure of safety. *I* won’t hurt her again if *she* does it right.

But in a world where countless women are being beaten by their husbands,¹⁶ we would have to say blame doesn’t stop the dragon—just as asking to be sent to bed without supper did not stop Miss Gulch from taking Toto.

Let’s leave our fairy tale behind and look to the Bible.

In Genesis we see Adam blaming Eve and Eve blaming the snake in the whole fiasco of eating forbidden fruit, and rather than interpret the passage in light of personal responsibility, we often see it as an admonishment not to project blame. But blame never works—projected or otherwise. The point of the passage is not to decry one method over another—but to move past blame and into the realm of *personal responsibility*.

What counts is that something is wrong in paradise. There is a serpent, a snake in the grass, a dragon. And because there is a problem, we have to give up assigning blame and embrace personal responsibility—which means we have to act. “Now what?” is the question to ask, not “Whose fault is this?”

It *has* to be a question of personal responsibility; there is no other way. For Dorothy, it’s a question of getting Toto back. For us it’s a question of facing our conflict and resolving it. Dragons don’t go away just because we stick our heads in the sand. They go away when we choose to give up our innocence and take responsibility for resolution—and then spread our wings to meet the dragons.

M. Scott Peck says that no problem can be solved until an individual assumes the responsibility for solving it.¹⁷ And in *The Wizard of Oz* this is exactly what Dorothy does. When Toto clambers back in through the window, she scoops him up and says, “We’ll run away! I’m not going to let anyone take you away from me!”

Without realizing it, she chooses personal responsibility and thereby leaves behind the role of Innocent. No longer does she live in the Garden of Eden, denying and blaming. Innocence lost, she has

to grow up: she knows the difference between good and evil now, and it has become her responsibility to combat the dragon, to save Toto. She responds by choosing, almost simultaneously, the roles of Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, and Warrior.

“Oh, what are we going to do?” she wails, feeling the helplessness of the Orphan. But she quickly becomes the Warrior and packs a basket. She takes off, a Pilgrim. “Can I join you in your travels?” she asks Professor Marvel when she runs into him, “to see the crown heads of Europe?” But when Professor Marvel plays on her sense of responsibility by telling her that Auntie Em is ill, she then takes on the role of Martyr and sets off for home. The only role she does not take on is that of Wizard, usually the last and most difficult role to understand.

But because she dared to face the dragon—leaving behind first denial and then blame—and because she took that first step beyond the role of Innocent into personal responsibility, she found herself caught up in a whirlwind that hastened her forward on a journey toward victory. Life, when we at last confront the dragon, will always move us speedily onward, propelling us out of Eden toward restoration and redemption.

Which is why it’s so frightening. We sense the cyclone. We see the dizzy, buffeting darkness of the unknown. Like Dorothy, we feel the terrifying surge of danger and awesome weight of responsibility for what is wrong in our lives. We drag our heels, wanting only to be safe. We’d really rather live neurotically in our Garden of Eden, full of denial and blame. But the black clouds descend.

“Auntie Em!” we scream, tornado advancing. We kick on the cellar door, wind tearing now at our skirts. “Uncle Henry! Oh, Auntie Em! Let me in! It’s me! Dorothy!”

But we’ve been cast out of Eden, and there’s no way back.

Or is there?

Carol Pearson points out in *The Hero Within* that the irony here is that we do return to Eden. “We can and do return to love and abundance,” she says, “but only as a result of taking our journeys.”¹⁸

Dorothy, once her long journey was over, did return to Kansas, and although we know Miss Gulch awaited her, we rest assured that Dorothy, in Oz, learned her own strength. She acquired the inner knowledge that while she’s no longer Innocent, she’s everything else. She’s Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, even Wizard. She learned how to confront evil and come out on top.

The same is true for us. It's not until we embrace the unknown and assume responsibility for the evil we meet instead of looking for someone (including ourselves) to blame, not until we go to Oz and take our own journey, will we ever discover our inner power, God's strength, and be able to walk with grace in our fallen world.

Scary. But we cannot pretend to live in the Garden of Eden anymore. Toto has come through the window and it is up to us to save him.



NOTES

1. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 1.
2. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 1.
3. Last name deleted by request.
4. Adapted from Eva S. Nixon, "Mary Counts Miracles in Her Night of Terror," *UPC Times*, vol. 9, no. 4 July 1989: 1, 6.
5. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852). Chapter 12.
6. 2 Chronicles 23:13 (NIV).
7. M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 47.
8. Peck, *People of the Lie*, 69 [emphasis mine].
9. James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered into Submission*, quoted in "Battered into Submission," *Christianity Today*, 16 June 1989, 24.
10. Esther Lee Olson and Ken Petersen, *No Place To Hide* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 9.
11. Alsdurf, *Christianity Today*, 25.
12. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 35.
13. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 35.
14. Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 33.
15. Walker, *The Battered Woman*, 15.
16. Olson and Petersen, *No Place To Hide*, 9.
17. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 3.
18. Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within*, (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 26.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

– 1 John 5:19 (NIV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

– John 10:10

East of Eden, we experience moral and natural evil. In Oz, the morally evil Miss Gulch yanked Dorothy out of Kansas. The natural evil of a tornado lands her in Oz. None of us get through life without experiencing one or the other—or both. Evil is the thief, in whatever form, that robs us of living the full life Jesus came to give.

1. Are you uncomfortable with the word evil? Do you know why?
2. If you choose to remain Innocent, is it because no evil has yet befallen you?
3. What about others who suffer? Is the suffering their fault?
4. What do you gain by remaining Innocent?
5. If evil *has* crossed your path, how old were you when it happened?
6. Name a natural evil or disaster that befell you.
7. Have you regained a sense of safety? Or are there residual effects?
8. Have you ever experienced moral evil; someone out to hurt you?
9. What current conflict is blowing you out of your own Kansas into a “not-a-fairy-tale” Oz? Job loss? Divorce? Chronic illness?
10. Do you have a metaphorical witch under your house?
11. What do you need to find physical and emotional safety?

Reminder:

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

– Jesus. John 16:33 (NIV)

Prayer:

Help us move beyond our denial of evil to a keener awareness of its reality in natural disasters and in the shadows of people who seek to undermine and harm. Help us to accept your gifts of choice, and please give us the fortitude to seek restoration for ourselves and others in this fallen world. Amen.



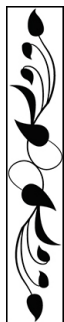
DRAW YOUR DRAGON

“People who deny the existence of dragons are often eaten by dragons. From within.”

— Ursula K. Le Guin
*The Wave in the Mind: Talks
and Essays on the Writer,
the Reader and the
Imagination*

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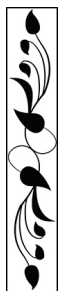
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THREE - *O*RPHAN

“Someone please rescue me from this dragon!”

- Ruth the Orphan



D RAGONS OVERWHELM

But There Is Always A Hero To Help

Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew ... named Mordecai ... who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon ... Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother.

- Esther 2:5-7 (NIV)

*I*t's up to us to save Toto, but how? How do we move from Innocence and denial of dragons to confronting the beasts and resolving the conflict? It's tough because crisis moves us directly from Innocent to Orphan, immobilizing us. Not a fun place to be.

We thought we had only Miss Gulch to contend with, but now there's a dead witch under our house, and another witch is wanting to know who killed her, and there's a good witch too! *A good witch?* And the wicked witch says we killed her sister. But we didn't mean to kill anyone!

"I'll get you, my pretty," the wicked Witch of the West screams in our face, "*and* your little dog too!" If Toto was in danger before, he really is now—*and so are we*.

Crisis wakes us up to the fact that none of us live in the Garden of Eden anymore, but it also shatters our innocence and leaves us disillusioned, abandoned, and often painfully confused and in need of help. Death. Divorce. Unemployment. Failing health. Wayward children. No, this is not paradise where we live, but a fallen world, and we see the dragons clearly enough now. But where is the hero?

"Oh, I'd give anything to be out of Oz," says Dorothy. "But how?"

The Orphan is consumed by fear and insecurity. Overwhelmed by dragons we once denied, we distrust our capabilities and are easily convinced we can't make it on our own. "Someone please rescue me. I don't know how to take care of myself!" we say. Most of the time, we don't.

"Brenda," my sister used to ask right after my divorce, "what can I do?"

"I don't know, *just please help me!*"

Dorothy asks the good witch Glinda, "Will you help me? *Can you help me?*"

Way back in 473 B.C., Queen Esther of Persia asked the same thing. Her husband's right-hand man Haman had hatched a plot of Jewish genocide, catapulting her into her own terrifying Oz. "But Mordecai," she said to her cousin who'd come to the palace gate, asking that she intercede with the king, "all the king's servants and the people of the king's province know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law! All alike are to be put to death, except the one to whom the king holds out the golden scepter that he may live! And I," she pleaded, when Mordecai insisted she entreat the king to save the Jews, "have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days!"¹ *How, Mordecai, am I going to do this?*

Innocent to Orphan, we spiral from denial to the need for rescue and our bedtime fairy tales teach us this well enough. "Oh, Grandmother, what big teeth you have ... " The wolf leaps. Teeth snap. Crisis tears at our throat and we are consumed.

So much for confronting dragons.



Therapist Tresa Goodfellow says the Orphan's number-one task is to learn self-reliance, for then the tough business of confrontation can begin. "The Orphan's primary task is to learn she isn't as helpless as she may feel. "Dorothy," Goodfellow explains, "could have returned to Kansas at any time. *You've always had the power to go back to Kansas*—that's what the good witch Glinda told Dorothy. So Dorothy was never without power; she just didn't *know* she could take care of herself. The journey was to *teach* her."²

M. Scott Peck would agree. "Problems," he writes, "call forth our courage and our wisdom."³ This is what our inner journey and

the yellow brick road is all about: discovering courage and thereby learning we're capable.

The good witch Glinda, however, didn't tell this to Dorothy at the beginning of her journey; there is no use telling Orphans to snap to and be self-reliant when they don't think they can. Orphans first need the promise of a hero, of hope. Orphans need to know, says Carol Pearson in *The Hero Within*, "that they will be cared for."⁴ That way they can break past their fear long enough to get moving again.

Which is exactly what the good witch Glinda gives Dorothy at the onset of her journey—no lectures, just hope of rescue. She gives Dorothy the promise of a wizard who might help her get back to Kansas.

"He lives in the Emerald City," she said, "and that's a long journey from here. Did you bring your broomstick with you?"

No, she didn't.

Hope doesn't mean rescue will be easy or that it'll be handed to us on a silver platter or with the wave of a magic wand. We're not always given a broomstick to speed us on our way. Dorothy would have to walk. We are, however, given what we need.

"Never," says the good witch, "let those ruby slippers off your feet for a moment, or you will be at the mercy of the wicked Witch of the West." Dorothy looks down at her feet in surprise.

In the ancient world, shoes symbolized liberty.⁵ Fairy tales make use of magical shoes. In *The Wizard of Oz*, the ruby shoes give Dorothy a measure of safety in the midst of chaos so she can seek the hero she was promised.

"How do I start for the Emerald City?" she asks, ruby shoes on her feet.

"All you do is follow the yellow brick road."

"But, what happens if—"

Here's the rub. Hope is one thing, trust another. Dorothy hesitates. In the midst of crisis who *do* we trust? It's a good question because the Orphan is often traumatized precisely *because* she trusted the wrong advice. Who's right? Who's wrong? *Is* there such a thing as a good witch? And whatever happened to those easy days when everything was so black and white? So confusing.

"Follow the yellow brick road," the good witch encourages and, before Dorothy can decide, the good witch disappears, leaving her the freedom to choose. Herein lies a rule of thumb. Bad witches

demand. Good witches leave the choice up to us. Dragons insist, hovering to make sure we comply, but God always allows us the freedom to decide.

Dorothy has to decide. She can go back to her house and wait for rescue that might never come. She can stay with the Munchkins and hope for the best, living for years in fear of the wicked Witch of the West. Or she can strike out alone, trusting the good witch, the ruby shoes, and the yellow brick road to take her to the Wizard—and home again. Granted, the choices aren't terrific. Each carries risk; witches and dragons lurk. M. Scott Peck reminds us that “frequently our choices lie between the lesser of two evils, but it is still within our power,” he says, “to make these choices.”⁶ For the Orphan, there has to be this fundamental choice—to trust and move forward or give up in helplessness and retreat. If we do the latter, fairy godmothers can't help us and God himself has to stand aside and wait. Do we want redemption in this fallen world?

Dorothy puts the toe of her ruby shoe to the start of the yellow brick road. “Just follow the yellow brick road,” she whispers, her mind made up.

Queen Esther in Persia had the same choice to make. Give up and retreat? Or trust Mordecai and move forward? The good witch gave Dorothy the promise of a wizard. Mordecai encouraged Esther by asking, “Who knows, Esther, whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

Perhaps God had a bigger plan that would accommodate her peril. For Esther this was hope enough.

“All right,” she said. “Go, and gather all the Jews in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days and nights. I and my maids will do the same, and when this is done, I will go to the king though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”⁷

“It was not an easy step for Esther to take,” says Goodfellow, “for it involved a tremendous leap of faith. But then, it's the same leap of faith we all have to make. And it's this leap—and the fact that we do survive—that begins to teach us self-reliance.”

So simple, so hard.

Esther had the prayers of her people to see her through. Dorothy had her ruby shoes. What do we have to assure us there is hope for rescue? “Faith comes from what is heard,” writes the apostle Paul,

“and what is heard comes by the preaching of Christ.”⁸ We have the Word of God.

But it’s our choice whether or not we listen.

“Just follow the yellow brick road,” Dorothy chants. “Just follow the yellow brick road.” But she’s going in circles. The Munchkins rush in with support.

“Just follow the yellow brick road,” sing-songs the mayor, bowing from the waist.

“Just follow the yellow brick road,” says another, stepping out of the way.

The circle unwinds, the munchkins rush to see her to the border of Munchkinland. They all break into a skip and a song. “We’re off to see the Wizard, the wonderful Wizard of Oz. We’re off, we’re off, we’re off, we’re off ...” The note hangs, Dorothy does a two-step, and we, if we want, can open our Bibles and set off on our own journey too. We, too, have a wizard, a hero, to seek.

The Orphan asks, “Where is the hero?”

The answer lies both within *and* beyond, and once we choose to make that leap of faith we’ll find it. Somewhere, somehow. And this is how the Orphan confronts an overwhelming dragon—blind trust in a hero she doesn’t yet see.



GLORIA

O you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, “What shall we eat?” or “what shall we drink?” or “what shall we wear?” For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- Matthew 6:30-34 (NIV)

In the mid-eighties, Gloria Chisholm’s five kids were young when the landlord sold their house. Who in their right mind, we wondered at the time, would rent her another one? With five kids? She worked as an editor for a religious publishing house, which meant little income. As far as the rest of us were concerned, she was doomed, God or no God.

She looked for weeks. No apartments big enough. The houses? The owners would see her coming, brood in tow, and before they could get to the front door the owners would be out the back.

D-day was around the corner, and we were all getting a bit worried. Finally we hit upon a plan. After her kids had had a hard day at play and looked the part, Gloria was going to borrow a neighbor’s dog and then pile the whole kit and caboodle into the van and take them down to the busiest corner of Lynnwood, WA, during rush-hour traffic. They’d walk up and down the curb, big signs bobbing about their necks, knobby knees peeking out below, borrowed dog chained to the fire hydrant.

HELP!

MOTHER OF FIVE NEEDS HOME BY TOMORROW NIGHT!
BAG LADY WITH KIDS NEEDS HOUSE!

I was going to call up Nick Walker of Seattle’s four o’clock news on KIRO TV. This was going to be a “human interest” feature that would attract the interest of even Ronald Reagan.

We were all set to go. Saturday she had to be out. Friday afternoon and we were going to wake up the town. But then Gloria got a phone call. Turned out, a house just a mile away was up for rent. Same price, more room, and the kids could go to the same school.

“Ah, darn,” Gloria cheerfully grumbled. “Isn’t it awful how God takes care of everything so nicely? Now we can’t have all that fun!”

We had fun anyway, moving her into the five-bedroom house complete with two kitchens and a den, because now we knew for sure that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



BREND A

Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. He said to them, I see that your father’s attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I’ve worked for your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me.

- Genesis 31:4-7 (NIV)

As a single mother I related to Jacob and his feelings of being cheated. In the first three years, my child support changed thirty-eight times. I lived in constant economic upheaval. There are other ways to be cheated, too. We can be cheated out of recognition, time, honor, even love. In the business world we can be cheated when someone takes credit for something we did. Gossip robs us of our reputation. A busy boss may fail to be appreciative. Employees fudge on their time slips. Beyond the workplace there are even more ways to be cheated. Everyone has horror stories of car mechanics, attorneys, and politicians. And yet God did not allow Laban to harm Jacob.

I remember one early spring day going out to my mailbox to look for a very late child support check. I was upset and even angry.

Laban, it seemed, held all the cards. But when I opened my box, instead of a needed check, I found a copy of my very first book. I remember looking at the cover, the sun warm on my cheek and reflecting off the glossy print; I saw my own name in big, bold type along the bottom. *He can't hurt me anymore.* The thought came out of nowhere and I stood stunned by the force of it. When I went back to the house, the thought tumbled around and around inside my head. He can't hurt me anymore. *He can't hurt me anymore.*

I plugged in the teakettle, realizing for the first time just how great, how dreadfully deep, how black and immense my fear as a single mother really was. I'd been living in the shadow of starvation and homelessness, worried too about medical expenses, and my children's welfare, fear always driving me to work harder, save more, juggle, skimp, go without. But as I stood waiting for the water to boil, the only thought racing through my mind was, "He can't hurt me anymore," racing and racing and picking up speed until goose bumps stood up on my arms and I sat down at the kitchen table and cried in relief.

Unlike Jacob, I didn't have a Rachel to talk to, or even a Leah. But I had God. "If he wants to cheat, that's his business," God whispered gently in the warmth of that early spring afternoon while bees hummed at the window sill and the scent of new growth from the garden outside mingled with the dust motes, "but, Brenda, I will never let him harm you."

There is relief in knowing that while God does allow others to cheat us and make life wretchedly difficult, he will never allow them to truly hurt us. Gossip, lack of understanding, unnecessary car parts, empty promises—we can feel abandoned and orphaned, unheard from and insignificant in the great big world. But God whispers, the teakettle whistles, and we know we are safe, because NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



SOJOURNER TRUTH

Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry unto me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword ...

- Exodus 22:22-24 (NIV)

Sojourner Truth was born a slave in 1797 in Hurley, New York. It was against the law to sell a slave South, yet when a former master, John Dumont, sold Sojourner's five-year-old son Peter to a Dr. Gedney (who in turn sold him to his brother Solomon), it didn't stop Solomon Gedney from selling the little boy to his sister's husband, an Alabama planter. Outraged and grief-stricken, Sojourner Truth confronted Solomon Gedney's wife. When she got no satisfaction from her, she appealed to Mrs. Gedney's mother-in-law, mother of the man who'd illegally sold her son.

"Ugh!" said Mrs. Gedney the matron. "A fine fuss to make about a little nigger! Why, haven't you as many of them as you can see to and take care of? Making such a hullabaloo about the neighborhood, and all for a paltry nigger!"

"I knew I'd have him again," said Sojourner Truth. "I was sure God would help me to get him. Why, I felt so tall within—I felt as if the power of a nation was with me."⁹ And she did have him with her again. Relying on God and her own rugged, daring determination, in 1828 she, a single, black slave woman, took a white man, Solomon Gedney, to court for selling her son South—and won.

But when she got Peter back, he was covered head to foot with the scars of brutal beatings. Peter, trying to ease his mother's fury, whispered, "This is nothing, Mammy. If you would see Phillis, I guess you'd scare. She had a little baby, and Fowler cut her till the milk as well as blood ran down her body. You would scare to see Phillis, Mammy." Sojourner Truth, unable to stop the rage, cursed Mr. Fowler and his wife and called upon God in the courtroom to "render unto them double!"

A few months later Sojourner Truth learned that the Alabama plantation owner, Mr. Fowler, had brutally murdered his wife, daughter of the same Mrs. Gedney who'd earlier mocked Sojourner's anguish over the loss of her little son. Remembering that she'd asked God to render unto her enemies double, Sojourner Truth cried, "Oh, my God! That's too much—I did not mean so much, God!"

Sometimes when we think God does not see our despair, we can remember Sojourner Truth and know he does—and maybe we can even feel grateful he doesn't always lash out in his rage just to prove that NONE OF US ARE WITHOUT HELP.



MARY

For your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

- Matthew 6:8 (NIV)

Mary Prince was a West Indies slave in the first half of the nineteenth century. Her baptism in August 1817 by Rev. ____ of the English church was the extent of Mary's Christian teaching. Orphaned by sale at the age of twelve, she was shipped off to a life of loneliness and brutal abuse, passed as chattel from one despot to the next. Her autobiography leaves the reader weak with horror.

When one of her "kinder" masters, Mr. Wood, purchased her, she soon fell so ill with rheumatism she was forced to hobble about with a stick. Then she came down with "Saint Anthony's fire" in her leg. "No one cared much to come near me," she writes, "and I was ill for a long, long time; for several months I could not lift the limb. I had to lie in a little old outhouse that was swarming with bugs and other vermin, which tormented me greatly; but I had no other place to lie in ... The person who lived in the next yard (a Mrs. Greene), could not bear to hear my cries and groans. She was kind, and used to send an old slave woman to help me, who sometimes brought me

a little soap. When the doctor found I was so ill, he said I must be put into a bath of hot water. The old slave got the bark of some bush that was good for the pains, which she boiled in the hot water, and every night she came and put me into the bath, and did what she could for me; I don't know what I should have done, or what would have become of me, had it not been for her ... My mistress did not care to take any trouble about me; and if the Lord had not put it into the hearts of the neighbors to be kind to me, I must, I really think, have lain and died."¹⁰

At the time, Mary Prince didn't know to ask God for help. She didn't even know who God was. Yet God answered the prayers she could not speak. One day she was asked to go to a Methodist prayer meeting at the Winthrops' plantation. "I went," she writes, "and they were the first prayers I ever understood ... I felt sorry for my sins also. I cried the whole night, but I was too much ashamed to speak. I prayed God to forgive me. This meeting had a great impression upon my mind, and led my spirit to the Moravian church; so that when I got back to town, I went and prayed to have my name down in the Missionaries' book; and I followed the church earnestly every opportunity."

In time, Mr. and Mrs. Wood took a trip to England and once again God intervened without Mary knowing to ask. After being ordered for the fourth time into the streets (to bring her to her senses, claimed the Woods), she found a Moravian church. The church took her in, gave her a place to stay, nursed her tenderly back to health, gave her a means of earning a living, and took her case all the way to Parliament.

After a lifetime of horror and crippling abuse, Mary Prince, without knowing even to ask, was set free. "Thus," she concludes, "I had great cause to bless God in my affliction." Sometimes we don't have to ask. God already answers, letting us know that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



CHARLOTTE

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

- John 1:1 (NIV)

“You know why they’re fattening you up, don’t you?”

“No,” said the pig in E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*.

“Well, I don’t like to spread bad news,” said the sheep, who knew such things, “but they’re fattening you up because they’re going to kill you, that’s why.”¹¹

Do you remember the story? Lurvey, Zuckerman, and John Arable are going to murder poor Wilbur and turn him into smoked bacon and ham. Poor Wilbur. He cries and squeals, “Stop! ... I don’t want to die! Save me, somebody! ... I don’t want to die ... I want to stay alive, right here in my comfortable manure pile with all my friends.” An Orphan, Wilbur asked for help. And out crawled Charlotte the spider to save the day.

For us, there also comes a time in our own barnyard lives when we realize we’re going to die. And oh how suddenly the manure pile of our lives becomes precious and we squeal in fright as we run in frenzied circles of panic. Oh, please, someone save us!

In *Charlotte’s Web*, the glossy spider Charlotte saved Wilbur by writing words in her web over Wilbur’s pen: SOME PIG. TERRIFIC. At the fair, Charlotte spun HUMBLE. Exhausted and spent, she crawled into a corner and died.

The people were so impressed by this “miracle” pig, that Wilbur was set apart as something special, undeserving of his fate and thereby saved from being butchered.

In our world, salvation comes to us through the Word. In the beginning was the *Word*, the *Word* was with God, and the *Word* was God. The *Word* came to us in living flesh to make us “miracle” people: RIGHTEOUS, REDEEMED, JUSTIFIED. Set apart as something special and undeserving of our fate, we are saved. Like

Charlotte, Jesus too died, exhausted and spent, that we might live. Even in the face of death, then, we have hope of a hero—and know that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



H A N N A H

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah ... He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship ... at Shiloh ... Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. And because the LORD had closed her womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Elkanah her husband would say to her, “Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don’t you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?”

- 1 Samuel 1:1-8 (NIV)

The yearly journey to Shiloh was a trying one for Hannah. Though she was her husband’s favorite wife, she had no child, and this was the most dreaded fear of every woman in a culture where sons determined a woman’s worth. Furthermore, to be without a male child virtually guaranteed her a pauper’s widowhood; to be without any child was seen as God’s curse. And so to Hannah, journeying year after year to Shiloh, her unanswered prayers year after year must have stood a mockery more despairing than the cruel taunts of the

unloved wife, Peninnah, with her whole passel of offspring. One year her emotional anguish was so great Hannah wept and couldn't eat.

"Why are you weeping?" her husband (I think foolishly, but probably more helplessly) asked. "Am I not better to you than ten sons?"

Not really. Elkanah was an old man, unable to provide any economic security for Hannah in a culture that would reduce her to beggary after his death. The Bible doesn't tell us what she said. It only tells us what she did. She rose and went into the tabernacle to pray.

Hannah is the third woman in biblical history to grieve so bitterly over her inability to conceive. We can only begin to appreciate the seriousness of the problem and the depth of such pain when we see Sarah giving her handmaid to her husband and when we see Rachel crying to Jacob in torment, "Give me children, or else I die!" Very few of us have known desperation so deep we'd invite another woman to share our husband's bed or feel as though we would surely die. Yet this was the very real pain of Hannah.

"O Lord of hosts," she prayed, spread out before the altar of God, "if thou wilt look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life." Hannah embraced the role of Orphan—and asked for help.

It comes as no surprise, then, to read two verses down, that in time Hannah conceived and bore a son and that she called his name Samuel. "I have asked him of the Lord," she said, and because of Samuel's birth, Hannah learned and Israel learned—and even we learn—that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



ELIZA

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep water.

He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.
They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the LORD was my support.
He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me.
- Psalm 18:16-19 (NIV)

The most traveled route in the Underground Railroad was that of the Ohio-Kentucky line,¹² where slaves escaped across the Ohio River to freedom. When Mr. Shelby in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold his slave Tom to pay off a debt, he also sold Eliza's little boy Harry.

Eliza was a mulatto woman, her four-year-old son a quadroon with silky black curls, a winsome way, and a knack for dance, mime, and song; and who unfortunately attracted the attention of Mr. Haley, the slave trader. That night, secreted in a closet, Eliza overheard the dreadful news as it was passed from Mr. Shelby to Mrs. Shelby. With trembling hands, Eliza packed a few things into a handkerchief, tied it to her waist, wrote a note to her mistress, gently woke her son, then glided into the dark of night, her only hope "in God."

She got as far as the Ohio River. "It was early spring," Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote, "and the river was swollen and turbulent; great cakes of floating ice were swinging heavily to and fro in the turbid waters ... The narrow channel which swept round the bend was full of ice, piled one cake over another ..." It didn't take Eliza long to see that no ferries were running, but the innkeeper reported a man would be taking "some truck this evening, if he dares to; he'll be in here to supper tonight, so you'd better set down and wait."

She put Harry to sleep but guarded the window. Forty-five minutes later Mr. Haley rode by and Eliza, plucking Henry from his slumber, was out the back door before Haley could even reach the front. He caught sight of her just as she disappeared down the bank.

"In that dizzy moment," Stowe writes, "her feet to her scarce seemed to touch the ground, and a moment brought her to the water's edge. Right on behind they came; and, nerved with strength such as God gives only to the desperate, with one wild cry and flying leap, she vaulted sheer over the turbid current by the shore, on to the raft of ice beyond. It was a desperate leap—impossible to anything but madness and despair ...

“The huge green fragment of ice on which she alighted pitched and creaked as her weight came on it ... With wild cries and desperate energy she leaped to another and still another cake; stumbling—slipping—springing upwards again! Her shoes were gone—her stockings cut from her feet—while blood marked every step; but she saw nothing, felt nothing, till dimly, as in a dream, she saw the Ohio side, and a man helping her up the bank.”

It was Eliza’s trust in God and love for her son that gave her the needed grit to vault a river chockablock with spring ice. And lest anyone think Eliza a figment of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s imagination, Stowe tells us otherwise. The mulatto woman who crossed the Ohio with her son in the throes of a spring thaw was a well-known fact. Stowe merely gave an unknown woman a name, reminding us again that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.¹³



L I S S A

“So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

- Luke 11:9, 10 (NIV)

When a friend introduced me to Lissa Halls Johnson, author of *Just Like Ice Cream* and many other books, she said, “You two are going to like each other. You’re both cut from the same cloth.”

Lissa and I agreed. We were both short. Both thin. Both single. We both had three children and lousy health and both worked as legal secretaries after our divorces. We both wrote books. And we both had absolute *nightmares* with our cars.

I don’t know what it is about single parenting and car troubles, but the two go together. I once had a camper van. It started misbehaving the very day I got it and never let up. I never knew when I

got in if I'd have to call AAA. Once I took it to California and was towed three times before I ever got there and spent hundreds of dollars on a new starter and new wiring after an electrical fire, *and* a new clutch. I've been stranded on godforsaken mountain roads and busy intersections. Clipping sixty down the freeway one day the engine blew. Parts and pieces ricocheted. Of course, I had no money to buy a new car, and I could hardly afford a new \$1200 engine plus the \$800 labor fee for this cute cracker box of nothing but trouble. My only recourse was to rebuild the engine myself—me, a woman who'd once put antifreeze in the oil hole of her Oldsmobile only to discover the oil hole was really the antifreeze hole—the only time in my life utter ignorance ever paid off. Anyway, three months after rebuilding my engine, dual carburetors and all, some nineteen-year-old kid without insurance plowed right into the back end of me, threw my van into a pickup, rolled it upside down in a ditch, and totaled it—and me just about.

My mechanic found me another car, a Duster. It was worse. It wasn't even cute to make up for its sins. A year later I sold it for half of what I paid for it and counted myself blessed. My mechanic, feeling guilty, sold me his own car. A new radiator now and then and a sticky choke. But hey, who's complaining? It started up when I climbed in.

So it was no surprise when I got a phone call from Lissa not long after her divorce. A car that had once been minding its P's and Q's had decided to be obnoxious. "Don't tell me," I said. "Universal joint is shot? Pistons eating head gaskets for lunch? Leaky radiator? Broken water pump? Oil taking up shooting practice? Tires need balancing? Rotating? Gone bald? Blow out?"

"You're getting warm."

"Lug nuts snapped and you lost your wheels?"

"Broken axle."

It was all downhill from there. To make a long story short, her father finally had had enough and loaned her the money to buy a used car. But like my van, it was a cure worse than the disease. She was *pouring* money into that thing.

"So where's God?" Lissa asked one night when all she could afford for brake shoes were beer cans. "We could be giving all this money to the poor, you know."

She called me up another day, and I sat down quickly. Someone had sent her in the mail and—yes, folks, it’s one of those money-in-the-mail stories—ten thousand dollars to go buy herself a brand new car.

So for me God provided patience, a lean belt (and a fan belt or two or three), and finally, about time, a car that (knock on wood, cross your fingers, and say your prayers) got me where I needed to go.

Lissa? Some people are just lucky.

She brags about her check in the mail. But I brag about rebuilding my engine. And while it may look like she got the better deal, I get more mileage. People can get bored with money-in-the-mail stories; they’re a dime a dozen. I think mine is more interesting.

But it goes to show that while some of us get oranges and others lemons, NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



BATHSHEBA

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her: The man said, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?” Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her ... Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

-2 Samuel 11:2-5 (NIV)

The night was hot when Bathsheba went up to bathe on the top of her home in Jerusalem. She didn’t know King David’s new palace on the eastern ridge afforded a view of her rooftop, nor that he, unable to sleep that night, had gone up to his own roof to get some air. She

only knew that a message arrived the next day—the king summoning her to his palace.

I try to imagine her thoughts as she dressed for the strange, unexplained honor. Or how her thoughts must have turned when King David informed her she was to comply with his lust. It had to have been a difficult time, a betrayal of trust and honor. And what were her thoughts when she found she was pregnant? By the king? Her husband out of town, serving in the king's army?

The law was clear. Adulterers were to be stoned. Bathsheba, like so many of us, found herself stuck between a rock and a hard place through no fault of her own. What was she to do? Like most Orphans, her first choice to seek help was not specific. She simply sent a note, "*I am pregnant.*" She was helpless; but David was the king.

For most of us, this is all we can do when first knocked off our feet by tragedy and crisis, and that's okay. When we get back on our feet, we'll learn to be more specific. Which is exactly what happened with Bathsheba.

Years later we see her as but one of his eight wives. We also see her as a woman who's learned how to be an Orphan; learning her own strength and, in the absence of power, to trust. A difficult task, considering where she started.

King David was old and dying. Adonijah, a son by another wife, was plotting to take over. If he succeeded (and it looked like he would, for he had the endorsement of the king's military captain), this would put Bathsheba's life in danger—again. And so she went into the king's bedchamber, this time with a *specific* request—trusting the man David had become.

"My lord," she began, "you swore by the Lord God unto me, your wife, that assuredly Solomon our son would reign and that he would sit upon the throne."¹⁴ Did David nod, head against the pillow? "But Adonijah reigns. And you, my lord the king, don't know of this. Even now he has slain oxen and cattle and sheep and has called all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest, Joab the captain of the host, but he has not called Solomon."

At this point David must have tried to sit up, perhaps he called for more pillows. *Solomon's life, Bathsheba's ...* What were his thoughts?

"You are king," she said, pressing her point, "and all the eyes of Israel are upon you, waiting to see what you will do. Who *shall*

sit upon the throne? If you say nothing and Adonijah comes to reign, when my lord is laid to rest with his fathers, then I and my son Solomon will be counted as offenders and perish.”

“Bathsheba.” Did he hold out his hand, remembering again all he’d put her through.

Slowly she bowed over his hand, confident in her trust. No longer the helpless Orphan, *take care of me*, Bathsheba had moved into self-reliance, *do this for me*.

And David did.

“Even as I swore unto you,” he said, repentant of past wrong, “by the Lord God who has redeemed my soul from all my distress, assuredly Solomon your son shall reign after me and he shall sit upon the throne in my stead. This day I will see it done.”

All the world has benefited by Bathsheba’s strength, given to her in a time of helplessness, for Solomon became the wisest king to ever rule. Today we still read his songs to find beauty, comfort, and wisdom, and to be reminded all over again that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



B R E N D A

In my distress I called to the LORD;

I cried to my God for help.

From his temple he heard my voice;

my cry came before him, into his ears.

- Psalm 18:6 (NLT)

In October of my senior year in high school, my parents sent me to Arizona to live with family friends for health reasons. An Orphan for all intents and purposes, I found myself at the mercy of a doctor under whose care my mother consigned me. My first visit, he ordered me to take off the gown I’d been given—and while my

mother waited anxiously for an hour, glancing at the clock and asking the receptionist what was taking long—this Christian doctor used my body for himself, finally masturbating and abruptly leaving. I slipped from the table and fell, my knees unable to bear my weight. I all but crawled to the chair where my clothes waited and was trying to pull on my underpants when he returned.

“Take them off,” he told me. “I didn’t tell you to put them back on.”

I have no words to name the further molestation that followed. My unknowing mother, after arranging monthly checkups for me, returned to far-away Iowa.

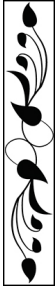
By February I was in a state. A diary entry reads: “God, I can’t stand it anymore. Please send me a friend. I don’t care if it’s a boy or a girl, I need someone! *Anyone!*”

Three days later, I wrote WAYNE!

I met him that same weekend at a youth group retreat. We both carried heavy secrets, and I suppose we bonded on an unconscious level for we never spoke of our struggles. We seemed to understand that our lives were different from our friends. We became an item, though we never dated. I was too bewildered; he had his own issues. But he made me laugh.

He took me fun places, he offered adventure. We went scorpion hunting in the evenings for Dr. Stahnke at ASU, collecting a quarter for each one; sometimes we went after the rattlesnakes, they brought in even more money. And every day after school we walked the mile home in Arizona’s blazing heat heedless, caught up in the exchange of ideas on everything from literature to politics to theology to youth group activities. We didn’t talk about friends like most teenagers do. We talked ideas. He was smarter than me, a novelty. I couldn’t get enough of what was in his head, and we forged a deep friendship. And so when it came time for my monthly “checkup” at the doctor, I got through it by picturing my loving friend in the waiting room. I knew Wayne would have me laughing before we got outside—a joke on his lips, some new adventure to look forward to. The zoo perhaps, maybe a movie.

And though my despair remained chronic the months I lived as an Orphan in Arizona, it was not constant. I learned at seventeen that NONE OF US ARE EVER WITHOUT HELP.



CHOOSING THE ORPHAN ROLE

Discovering Self-Reliance

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the Inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

Then the king asked, "What is it, Queen Esther? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be given you."

"If it please the king," replied Esther, "let the king, together with Haman, come today to a banquet I have prepared for him."

"Bring Haman at once," the king said, "so that we may do as Esther asks."

So the king and Haman went to the banquet Esther had prepared. As they were drinking wine, the king again asked Esther, "Now what is your petition?"

- Esther 5:1-6 (NIV)

Just follow the yellow brick road ...
Dorothy, the Orphan, no sooner gets started on the yellow brick road than she comes to an intersection. She looks around.

Which way to the Emerald City and home? Cornfields stretch as far as eye can see. No good witch, no hero on the horizon. Now what? Which way is she supposed to go?

“Pardon me, that way is a very nice way.”

She turns all around.

“It’s pleasant down that way too.”

“That’s funny,” she says, holding onto Toto and noticing for the first time a Scarecrow dangling from a pole near the intersection. “Wasn’t he pointing the other way?” she asks her little dog.

“Of course, people do go both ways,” and the Scarecrow crosses both his arms, fingers pointing in opposite directions.

There is always help. We’re never abandoned. There is, however, an element of choice. The Scarecrow did not tell Dorothy which direction to take. He listed her options, then let her decide. The Orphan’s role is not so much about helplessness as it is about choice, of trusting God *and ourselves*, so that we may set our teeth to confront the dragons we encounter.



It’s a little hard, though, to make choices and to trust when you feel more like Piglet in *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Piglet is an Orphan, dependent upon Christopher Robin for safety and help. Yet Piglet is a brave little piglet; he has absolute trust in his pals. It’s his trust that enables him to do things he normally thinks quite beyond him.

All this because Kanga appears in the forest one day with baby Roo in her pocket. The crew don’t like her. They’re afraid of her, actually; of anyone who “pockets” their children. They declare it best she go back from whence she came. When she doesn’t, Rabbit comes up with a plan. They’ll hide Roo from Kanga, then only let Kanga know where he is *if* she promises to leave the forest, never to return.

Piglet, of course, is afraid to tangle with Kanga. Kangas are Dangerous and he is so very small. But Rabbit says it’s *because* he’s so very small that he will be so very helpful.

Like all Orphans, Piglet immediately forgets his fright in the face of being helpful, for this is what spurs the Orphan on, helping someone else. “Orphans learn,” says Carol Pearson, “that there can be some safety and love in the world after they learn to give and to care for others.”¹⁵

Isn't this what our fairy tales teach? Hansel sprinkles bread-crumbs—to save Gretel. Gretel tricks the wicked witch—to save Hansel. Jack climbs the beanstalk—to save his mother from starvation. Even Dorothy, after “proper introductions” to the Scarecrow, forgets all about herself in concern for him. He is stuck with a pole up his back, and she tries to get him down. “Oh dear, I don't quite see how I can ...”

It's so easy to feel the Orphan again. It's one thing to trust and even want to be helpful, but we can't get the Scarecrow down. Helpless, overwhelmed, the task seems too big after all.

But there is, remember, always help. “Of course I'm not bright about doing things,” says the Scarecrow, “but if you'll just bend the nail down in the back, maybe I'll *slip* off and come—oh, yes!” and down he tumbles.

The same goes for Piglet when he finally hears *how* he is to be helpful. Who can blame him? The task seems a bit big, and risky. Rabbit has decided Pooh will distract Kanga. Rabbit will then snatch Roo and run. And Piglet, just the very size of Roo, will pop inside Kanga's pocket! All of a sudden, Piglet forgets about being helpful! He's an Orphan again, helpless, overwhelmed, noble intentions paling in light of his fear! Because what will happen when Kanga discovers Piglet *is not Roo*?

The Scarecrow, remember, helped Dorothy. “If you'll just bend the nail down a bit ...” And so now Rabbit helps Piglet. He's not in this alone; his buddies will be right there with him. And so off they all go, Piglet, Pooh, and Rabbit, to look for Kanga.

All very well, I suppose, for children's stories and fairy tales. But what of real Orphans? Trust and being helpful only get us so far. Dragons and crises are not so easily humored. Our own helplessness is not always so easily overcome. How do we confront dragons and get away with it, *fait accompli*?

Barbara Carlson, former counseling coordinator of the Women-care Shelter in Bellingham, Washington, says that a battered woman will attempt a break from her abuse an average of seven times before making a final break. When crisis first interrupts our lives and dumps us outside of Eden, we're often so traumatized all we can do is whimper. It's a difficult task to sort out what we *can* do from what it feels we *can't*. Only time can foster the self confidence needed to make the necessary choices whenever we run up against the dragons.

It helps, I think, to approach the dragon in little steps, proceeding *very carefully*.

In the Bible we can see what Queen Esther did in 883 B.C.

The Jews were to be slaughtered on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month in the twelfth year of King Xerxes' reign by order of Haman, the king's right-hand man. And Queen Esther, the king's queen, was the only one who could plead the cause of her people. It was risky, yes; she had been in disfavor for some thirty days. Yet when the king held out his golden scepter she did not immediately fall to her knees and beg for mercy. She approached this dragon one step at a time, *asking only for what she felt capable of obtaining*.

"If it please the king," she said, drawing herself up tall and smiling well, "let the king and Haman come this day to a dinner I have prepared for the king." She held little power or confidence, but this she could do, she could ask the king to dinner.

That night the king, curious now that his stomach was full, asked, "What is your petition? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

Esther held back. She was a beautiful woman; the king, she saw, was intrigued. *But did she have the confidence to make her request?* Another baby step. "If I have found favor in the sight of the king," she said, "and if it please the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the dinner which I will prepare for them, and tomorrow I will do as the king has said."

The next night she prayerfully applied her toilet, and again served her dinner.

"What is your petition, Queen Esther?" said the King, reclining with a glass of wine and a smile upon his face. "It shall be granted to you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled."

They spoke with their eyes. *Tell me*, the husband said. *Dare I?* the wife asked. Haman shifted. The mood in the room had swung in the exchange.

"Let my life be given me at my petition," said Esther, waiting for the effect in her husband's eyes. When she got the assurance she needed, she added, "and my people at my request."

A flurry of spilled wine. Haman turned white.

"We are sold," she went on, knowing the shift in power, "I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be slaughtered." A pin

could be heard if dropped. She told everything Haman had schemed. “If we had been sold merely as slaves, I would have held my peace. Our affliction would not be compared with the loss to the king.” She did not take her eyes from the king’s.

This is the way Orphans resolve conflict. One step at a time, gaining confidence as we go. Because we know there is a hero, we can accept our powerlessness and not be overwhelmed. We needn’t panic, whine, or manipulate our environment and everyone in it in the hopes that someone will take pity and come rushing in to save the day. Instead we *trust* in God. We make choices based on helping others. And *then* we proceed, one *risky* step at a time—discovering our own power along the way as others respond and validate who we are. We then *ask* for help from a position of *our* power, not *circumstantial* powerlessness. Trust, help, risk, ask. Haman was hung and the Jews were spared.

One evening, about five o’clock on a Friday night, my sons holered that the basement was full of water. I turned off the computer and took a peek. Water all right. Two inches of it. Everywhere.

My immediate reaction was that of helpless Orphan. Holy cow, I thought, absolutely overwhelmed. *What was I going to do?* Washer and dryer sat in a lake, along with the laundry basket, the boys’ dresser, their beds, toy boxes, bikes, scooters, car tires, old boxes and Christmas decorations, suitcases, lawn mower, last summer’s fan, and an old stereo and speakers. Baseball cards floated by. I couldn’t think. I was Dorothy standing in the middle of the intersection. Then slowly my choices came to me, as if some Scarecrow in my mind was pointing them all out.

“You can call your landlord,” said the Scarecrow, pointing his arm one direction. “Or you can call the fire department,” pointing the other way. “Or,” he said, crossing his arms, “you can try handling it yourself.”

What? just me and a tin bucket? Are you crazy? I chose not to handle it myself. I picked up the phone, and even as I punched in 911, I was pulling on my boots. An Orphan so long, the process was playing itself out unconsciously in my mind. Trust, help, risk, ask. “Do you ever,” I asked the fireman who answered the phone, “pump water out of people’s basements?”

Then I called the landlord. “I have the fire department,” I told him, pleased I could offer more than just a panicked “HELP!” on a

Friday night, “coming over to pump the basement. But you might want to take a look at this, or I’ll be needing a rowboat to do my laundry and kiss my boys goodnight.”

They all arrived in due time, three firemen in galoshes and helmets, Frank with a sump pump. One look around, though, and I could see there was nothing else I could do but get in the way.

“Hey, I can’t stand it,” I told them all, water sloshing around my ankles. “I’ll be over at my neighbor’s if you need me, okay?” And over I went and had a nice cup of tea, glorying in my power as an Orphan. I’d never felt better about being so helpless.

When up against the dragon, the Orphan becomes a role we choose, not one we fall into.



So there they are, Dorothy and the Scarecrow at the intersection. Which way does Dorothy go? Rewind.

The Scarecrow has asked, “Won’t you take me with you?” He wants to see the Wizard. Maybe the Wizard will give him a brain.

Dorothy’s agreed. “We’re off to see the Wizard,” they sing. But off in which direction?

Surprisingly, neither of the directions Scarecrow had earlier pointed out. Her initial Orphan panic subdued and spurred on by being helpful, Dorothy discovers she can accomplish. She’d gotten the Scarecrow off his pole, and this surge of self-reliance sees her on her own way, not right or left—but straight ahead. She’s no longer choosing the role of Orphan but that of Pilgrim. She is thinking for herself instead of asking for help. And now we’re ready for another phase of the inner journey down the yellow brick road toward the hero and redemption we seek.

We’re ready to begin thinking for ourselves.



NOTES

1. Esther 4:11 (RSV).
2. Personal conversation.
3. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 16.
4. Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 33.

5. J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York; Philosophical Library, 1962), 296.
6. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 43.
7. Esther 4:16 (paraphrased).
8. Romans 10:17 (RSV).
9. Virginia Oniz, *Sojourner Truth: A Self Made Woman* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1974).
10. Mary Prince, "The History of Mary Prince" in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narrations* (New York: New American Library, 1987), 187-215.
11. E. B. White, *Charlotte's Web* (New York: Harper & Row), 1952, 49- 51.
12. Charles L Blockson, *The Underground Railroad* (New York: Berkeley, 1989), 73.
13. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin, or Life Among The Lowly* (Boston: John P. Jewett, 1852), 107-108, 117-118, 618.
14. 1 Kings 1:17 (paraphrased).
15. Pearson, *The Hero Within*, 37.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

- John 14:18 (NIV)

The helpless put their trust in you. You defend the orphans.

- Psalm 10:14 (NLB)

There are no atheists in foxholes, and Orphans, like soldiers under fire, can find themselves calling on God when crisis overwhelms. He seems to be the “go-to” guy whenever we’re in trouble. And, like soldiers in the heat of battle, we depend on those around us. If we’re afraid—a buddy’s high five; if we’re injured—the paramedics. It’s all about asking.

1. Name your first memory as an Orphan, feeling abandoned and helpless in a crisis. What were your primary emotions?
2. Did you ask for help? If so, whom? Why him or her?
3. Was it difficult to ask? Why? Why not? And what do you think this says about you?
4. Have you ever needed to help someone else? What’s that story?
5. Did feeling “useful” embolden you?
6. In the process of being helped or by helping, did you gain a new sense of confidence and self-reliance? If yes, in what way?
7. Explore your process as you moved from feeling overwhelmed to being strong enough to help someone else.
8. How has being an Orphan given you pause to rethink your capabilities?
9. What new capabilities do you have you didn’t before?
10. Perhaps difficulties can make us grateful. What do you think?

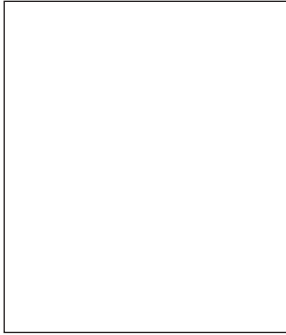
A reminder:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

- II Timothy 1:7 (NKJV)

Prayer:

When we feel abandoned in a dangerous world, helpless and not sure which way to turn, thank you for hearing our cry and sending help. Show us how to leave our fear behind and dare instead to embrace the power and love and sound mind you give us, so we might learn self-reliance, become useful, and get ready to start thinking for ourselves. Amen.



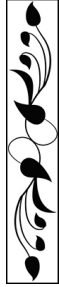
DRAW YOUR DRAGON

"You haven't been bit till a dragon does it."

— Tamora Pierce
Emperor Mage

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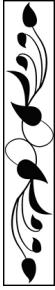
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FOUR *P*ILGRIM

"I am going to run from this dragon!"

- Hagar the Pilgrim



*T*HINKING FOR OURSELVES *Fleeing Expectation to Quest Identity*

Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her. The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. And he said, “Hagar, maid of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.”

... So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her.

“Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?”

- Genesis 16:6-8, 13 (RSV)

*I*f the Orphan tames the dragon by seeking rescue and learning self-reliance, then the Pilgrim tames the dragon by escaping discomfort—and learning to think for herself.

When Dorothy first asked the Scarecrow at the intersection of the yellow brick road how he was doing, he’d responded honestly. “Oh, I’m not feeling at *all* well. You see, it’s very tedious being stuck up here all day long with a pole up your back.”

This is what the Pilgrim does. She admits discomfort.

Ironically, the Scarecrow is being held captive in a garden of sorts, where everything *should be just fine*. It isn’t. His job is to scare away the crows, but there they are, sitting on his shoulder, cawing in his ear. He can’t figure it out, and the longer he hangs there, the more ineffective he becomes, until finally he begins to chafe at the contradictions of his life and is ready to admit *things are not the way they are supposed to be*. A lot of us are like this. We’re doing

what we should, yet nothing is getting done. We're just hanging out, dangling from poles erected by our culture, our church, our parents, friends, husbands, children, bosses. Who are *we*? Stuffed with everyone else's expectations, we don't know anymore. We may never have known. "But this," we're told, "is as good as it gets." So we settle in, and our garden becomes our cage.

We can spend a lot of time being a Scarecrow, pole up our back and not feeling at all well, listening to the voices all around that tell us to stay put, do our job, make no waves, hang tight. My personal favorite, bloom where you are planted. Really? A primrose in the desert? Like that's going to happen. Ears open, we listen; eyes shut, we blind ourselves to the crows flying in from miles around just to eat in our field and laugh in our face, and we watch the gentle primrose die in beastly heat. Still, we hang, alienated from ourselves. And, like the Scarecrow, ineffective.

We get this way because somewhere along the line we've chosen not to think for ourselves, if ever we did. But crisis wakes us up. Scarecrows do *not* scare crows. *Caw, caw!* Crows and contradiction fly in our faces.

Wives, do not leave your husbands. *He's beating me to death!* Pray for one another that you may be healed. *My baby died!* Bring up a child in the way he should go, and when he is older—*Fred ran away!* When he is older—*He died! Thirteen years old!*

CAW!

What's really happening here? What are we doing? What do we believe? Crows and contradiction clamor, and if ever we're going to resolve our conflict, our beliefs at odds with reality, we *have* to start thinking again. We can't afford to let dragons win while we chafe in confusion. Down we tumble from our poles, stumbling and tripping, getting back up and falling back down, wobbly on our feet—with a decision to make.

First we must admit our discomfort. And then ask why we're staying put, living in contradiction, our lives defined by someone else. Is it time to start thinking for ourselves? Is it time to flee our captivity?



"Brenda, when you get finished with those transcriptions I want you to call the court reporter and set up a time for that deposition next week. Then call the courthouse to find out what calendar I'm on for

the Smith case, and do only side two of the tape, and be sure to make three copies, one for ... ”

A long time ago, I sat staring at the stack of legal files beside my IBM Selectric typewriter, hearing my boss’s voice going on and on, and thinking bleakly, almost helplessly, *What am I doing here?*

“Oh, and Brenda!” he hollered from his window-walled office across the hallway to my tiny cubicle. “When Mr. Kelly comes in, two coffees!”

I was a writer, not a legal secretary, but I had allowed the divorce court to assign me a role that contradicted who I was. I was told to get a “real” job, and so like the Scarecrow I was living out someone else’s expectations, unhappy. Exhausted, in and out of the hospital with stress-related illnesses, my three-year-old son spending his daycare hours huddled beneath a table behind a wall of silence, I felt trapped, pole up my back, by what someone had told me was the responsible thing to do. And because I’d quit thinking for myself, the dragons were winning.

The Pilgrim is one who dares to think and, if need be, flee. When conflict reaches a point where it no longer provides room for personal growth or the development of who God created us to be, the Pilgrim chooses to retreat and redirect. In John Bunyon’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, Christian fled the City of Destruction for “Life! life! everlasting life!” Odysseus in the *Odyssey* fled the nymph Calypsos for Penelope. We flee jobs that don’t satisfy, relationships that solidify into abuse, and ideologies that no longer hold up.

“There is no problem too big, too horrendous, too overwhelming, or too impossible you can’t run away from.” So says my friend Laura Kalpakian. She’s right. Peter Rabbit ran for his life. What else is there to do when Mr. McGregor is chasing you through onions and radishes, brandishing a hoe? This is not the time for “working it through.” Sometimes we forget that when up against the dragon we can run. We can get out of Dodge.

It’s not an easy choice. Flight is not readily endorsed by our culture. The Martyr looks upon it as selfish, the Warrior as weak. The Orphan sees it as dangerous. Even we feel guilty for abandoning our conflict. It smacks of irresponsibility. Yet the role of Pilgrim is not so much a choice for flight and escape *as it is a choice for quest and redirection.*

“Do you think if I went with you,” the Scarecrow sighs, “this Wizard would give me some brains?”

It's abandoning who we've been told we are (stupid, in the Scarecrow's case) so we can explore who we really are. It's setting aside what other people think in order to discover what *we* think. As Tim Hansel talks about in *You Gotta Keep Dancing*, it's turning our theology into biography¹—and there's nothing like contradiction in our life to propel us on our way.

John Calvin writes at the beginning of his *Institutes*: "Our wisdom ... consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and ourselves."² God we know, but ourselves? Most of us lack this necessary wisdom. We are not without help, however.

There's an inner voice in all of us (independent of heads stuffed full of straw!) that begins to whisper whenever we live in contradiction with who we are. "Brenda," the inner voice whispered each time I slid another piece of paper into the typewriter carriage, "you can do so much more than type interrogatories. You can write *books*!"

Having never published one, it seemed a bit lofty. All around me friends and foe alike agreed. "Pipe dream," they said, and I dutifully banged out THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE COUNTY OF KING.

Bruce Larson in *Ask Me to Dance* wrote in rebuttal, however. "Our hunger," he wrote, "to be bigger than we are could be just delusions of grandeur or it could be the very voice of God inside calling us to a larger inheritance, to a bigger stake in reality, to a truer sense of our identity as the sons and daughters of God."³

Which begs the question all Scarecrows have to ask. When is discontent God's signal for better things or when is it simply the easy way out?

Teresa Goodfellow suggests that whenever we find ourselves up against discontent and contradiction, we try asking, "What person do I think God wants me to be and how best can I be that person?" It's a good question to ask, for it gets us thinking again. *What person do I think God wants me to be and how best can I be that person?* "What person do I (not someone else) think God (not someone else) wants *me* (not someone else) to be and how best can I (not someone else) be that person?" I couldn't be that person typing interrogatories. The Scarecrow couldn't be that person in a cornfield with a pole up his back. And even naughty old Peter Rabbit couldn't be that person—made into pie.

The Pilgrim's role, then, is a choice to think for herself, a choice which requires some form of flight and quest. It's pulling back from

all the *shoulds* so we can discover our own goals. It's setting aside other people's expectations, opinions, ideas, mandates, and judgments in order to analyze ours. Finally, it's daring to act on our own truth. Perhaps Mr. McGregor is wrong. We don't make good rabbit pie. Perhaps we're not Scarecrows after all, and that's why all the crows are cawing in our ears. Have you ever thought about that?



Whenever I get uneasy about the choice of flight and quest in the midst of conflict as a valid option, I open my Bible to Genesis 16 and 21. Hagar, a handmaid of Sarai and pregnant with Abram's child, was a bit like the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz*. She had to flee the role she'd been assigned—something had gone wrong. Sarai abused her.

At first God sent Hagar back to her mistress when she first fled, and if we stop here in the story we might well conclude that God endorses and seals the definitions others place upon us and condemns us to their abuse. But he did not send her back as a handmaid—and this is the difference. He sent her back knowing who she *really* was. She was mother of Ishmael, mother of multitudes, *a woman who had seen God—and lived*.

For a time it seems Sarai and Abram were content to allow Hagar her real identity. But fourteen years later, when Isaac was born to Sarai, the abuse began in earnest. Sarai says it was because Hagar laughed at Isaac, yet did not Isaac's name mean "Laughter"? I think the bigger truth is that Sarai simply could not tolerate the real Hagar anymore. The *real* Hagar was a perceived threat, and so she instructed Abram to "cast out this slave woman and her son."

This time God did not send Hagar back. There was no point. When conflict is so solidified we cannot *be who we are*, it's time to flee for good and embrace that which God calls us to be.

"Hagar?" God called. "What troubles you?"

He invites us all, in the loneliness and fear of our flight, to pour out our fears to him, our confusion, our anger and rage, our sense of betrayal, our helplessness, our loss of self. When at last we're finished, eyes red-rimmed and swollen, our bodies worn out by despair, he says to us, as he did to Hagar, "Fear not, for I have heard."

Hagar opened her eyes and saw water, God's provision for her pilgrimage, her flight and quest. He does the same for us. He sees us and gives us life.

Even so, it's a scary, risky time. In *The Wizard of Oz* Dorothy is smart enough to warn the Scarecrow of the danger.

"Do you think," he's asked her, "if I went with you this Wizard would give me some brains?"

"Maybe you better not," Dorothy tells him. "I've got a witch mad at me and you might get into trouble."

The Pilgrim's journey is a dangerous venture. Few appreciate those who march to the beat of a different drum, and we can find ourselves misunderstood and often punished.

The Scarecrow, though, had the determination it takes. "Witch? Humph. I'm not afraid of anything. Oh, dear ... except a lighted match ... But I'd face a whole boxful of them for the chance of getting some brains!"

To think for ourselves requires courage. We have to face the empty desert like Hagar and the boxful of matches like the Scarecrow. Yet the Pilgrim marches on, runs if she must, in search of who God made her to be—scary and perilous though the journey may be.

"Won't you take me with you?" the Scarecrow asks again.

Dorothy agrees—because even if the Wizard couldn't give the Scarecrow some brains, he would be no worse off than before.

"Yes," says the Scarecrow, "that's true."

Quest has its own value.

But this is only a fairy tale. Unlike the Scarecrow, *we* have a guarantee. We have the echo of God's whisper to Hagar, "Do not fear, I have heard." God stands ready with water to ease our thirst, and to grant meaning to our lives the minute we dare the Pilgrim's inner journey of flight and quest.



CHRISTIAN

And Pharaoh said, Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.

And they said, The God of the Hebrews hath met with us: let us go, we pray thee, three days' journey into the desert, and sacrifice unto the LORD our God; lest he fall upon us with pestilence, or with the sword.

And the king of Egypt said unto them, Wherefore do ye, Moses and Aaron, let the people from their works? get you unto your burdens. And Pharaoh said, Behold, the people of the land now are many, and ye make them rest from their burdens. And Pharaoh commanded the same day the taskmasters of the people, and their officers, saying, Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick, as heretofore: Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And the tale of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, ye shall lay upon them; ye shall not diminish ought thereof; for they be idle; therefore they cry, saying, Let us go and sacrifice to our God. Let there be more work laid upon the men, that they may labor therein; and let them not regard vain words.

- Exodus 5:1-11 (KJV)

A distraught man clothed in rags stood with a burden on his back and book in hand, reading and weeping, "What shall I do?" At home he couldn't hide his grief and burden, and to his wife and children he cried, "[I am] undone by reason of a burden that lieth hard upon me; moreover, I am certainly informed that this our city will be burned with fire from heaven; in which ... myself, with thee, my wife, and you, my sweet babes, shall miserably come to ruin, except ... some way of escape can be found whereby we may be delivered."⁴

Something was wrong in the City of Destruction, and Christian of the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress* had no idea what it was. All he

knew was the burden on his back after reading of condemnation and judgment.

Evangelist met him in the fields where he paced the earth. "Why not willing to die," he asked, "since this life is attended with so many evils?"

"Because I fear that this burden that is upon my back will sink me lower than the grave, and I shall fall into hell."

"If this be thy condition, why standest thou still?"

"Because I know not whither to go."

Evangelist unrolled a parchment.

Reading it, Christian asked, "Flee from the wrath to come? But whither must I fly?"

"Do you see yonder ... gate; at which, when thou knockest, it shall be told thee what thou shalt do."

Christian began to run, but his wife and children, seeing him, entreated him to return. He put his fingers in his ears, shutting out their cries, and ran on weeping, "Life! life! eternal life!" The neighbors came out. Some mocked, others threatened, still others begged him to return. Two even pursued to hold him back by force.

Whenever we flee, turning our backs on what we've been taught and are expected to do, we can expect opposition. People will entreat, mock, and threaten. We've upset the balance of their lives. A few will get nasty, pursuing and holding us back by force—just as Pliable and Obstinate did with Christian, and as Pharaoh of Egypt did with the Hebrews of so long ago. But neither Christian nor Moses let anyone stop them.

"You dwell," Christian told his friends and family, "in the City of Destruction. Be content, good neighbors, and go along with me."

"What!" retorted Obstinate. "And leave our friends and comforts behind us?"

"Yes, because that which you forsake is not worthy to be compared with a little of that I am seeking to enjoy."

"What are the things you seek, since you leave all the world to find them?"

"I seek an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

Pliable and Obstinate did not go with him and neither did his wife. Christian went alone, as all Pilgrims must do. Yet in the end he

gained the City of Resurrection, for clarity and reward is always ours when we finally dare the Pilgrim's journey of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



RIZPAH

During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. Now Saul had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, “Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine.”

Abner was very angry because of what Ish-bosheth said and he answered, “Am I a dog’s head—on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David’s throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba ... ”

Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, “Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.”

- 2 Samuel 3:6-12 (NIV)

When Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth accused his father’s commanding general and regent of sleeping with his father’s concubine Rizpah, an enraged Abner defected to the House of David—heralding the beginning of the end for the House of Saul.

Within months, David held the throne of both Judah and Israel, but all was not well. Famine plagued the land and in a political maneuver framed as a defense of Jehovah, King David hung seven of

Saul's sons, two being Rizpah's. Once a concubine who wore queenly gowns, she donned garments of sackcloth to mourn her boys—and to grieve the barrenness of a land that had brought about the tragedy.

The seven men were not buried but left to hang from the gallows to decompose and finally to slip from the nooses to splatter over hot rock below. Rizpah's name has been passed down not only as a woman who knew tragedy, but as a woman who endured stoically in the midst of unparalleled aloneness. For five months she kept watch over her sons' bodies so no further dishonor could be done and, as some commentators interpret the spreading of her sackcloth over the ground, to honor a pledge with God that she would watch over them until he relented and sent the rains.⁵

Edith Deen writes in *All the Women of the Bible* that through heat of day and chill of night, Rizpah "remained near those sun scorched, weird blackened, dishonored bodies, watching closely to save them from further harm. Now standing, now sitting, now half dead with sleepiness, and then quivering with daring effort, she drove away the dogs and vultures that would have devoured her dead."⁶

Alone on her weary rock, Rizpah kept the vigil as days passed into weeks, weeks into months. Passersby must have paused to watch, some to pity, some perhaps to mock. Others may have thought her mad. I should think she might have gone a wee mad as she watched the swarms of flies and hornets eat the draining eye sockets of sons she once nursed. But she did not turn back, achingly alone on her Pilgrim's journey.

Sometimes the task of the Pilgrim is brutally lonely, exacting every ounce of stamina and fortitude we can command. Yet, like Rizpah, there's an end; quest realized. David heard of Rizpah's vigilance and sent word for the remains to be buried in the family grave at Zelah, along with the bones of Saul and Jonathan, recovered from Jabesh-gilead, where they'd been interred.

I can imagine Rizpah lurking in the background, sackcloth ragged and filthy with dust, eyes lined, face worn, bowing her head even as the first drops of rain splattered the earth. I see her picking up speed as she pads down the hill to a home she's not entered in five months, lifting the latch to slip inside just as the torrential downpour begins, the dreadful drought at long last broken. Such is the power of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



ELIZABETH

Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Then the righteous will answer him, “LORD, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or ill in prison and go to visit you?”

The King will reply, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.”

- Matthew 25:34-40 (NIV)

No other woman in American history captures the heart of the Pilgrim more fully than Elizabeth Cady Stanton, daughter of a judge, wife of a politician, and a leader of the women’s suffrage movement. From her pen came the immortal words of the Declaration of Sentiments, read at the Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention, July 1848.

We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness ...⁷

To our ears today there’s nothing blasphemous about this statement, but in 1848 the words scandalized a populace that systematically

denied women the right to vote, the right to own property, the right to their children, the right to keep their earnings, the right to testify against their husbands in a court of law, the right to occupations other than teaching, domestics, or writing, the right to equal pay for equal work, and the right to higher education. While single women could hold property, they had to pay taxes without the right to vote, the very issue—taxation without representation—that, as Lois W. Banner points out in *Women's America*, triggered the Revolutionary War.⁸ To Elizabeth, these and other grievances contradicted the religious philosophy into which she'd been born, and it took a Pilgrim's journey before she could stand before the nation to confront the glaring contradiction.

The journey was difficult and lonely, precipitated not so much by theological or political ideology, however, but by the crying of her first baby.

The standard of the early 1840s called for babies to be wrapped in swaddling clothes 24/7, closed windows to keep out evil substances, continuous feeding to prevent colic and rickets, and herbal concoctions liberally dosed with laudanum. Baby Daniel, however, cried continuously under this regime and Elizabeth “wept, prayed, and philosophized by turns.”⁹ Finally, defying her husband, parents, doctor, and friends, she threw out the swaddling clothes, opened the windows, tossed out the medications, fed Danny at regular intervals—and he stopped crying.

“I learned,” said Elizabeth, “a lesson in self-reliance.”

In short, she started to think for herself and set a pattern she would never break.

Today we look at her and applaud, but back then no one clapped. For eight long years, while birthing and raising seven children in quick succession, she immersed herself in the study of theology, law, and history in order to untangle the prevailing and illogical notion that women were spiritually and legally inferior to men. Her spiritual quest took her to the Quakers, who had no theological difficulties with the equality of women. Together she and Lucretia Mott, a renowned Quaker preacher, organized the first women's rights convention, basing their arguments for equality on Scripture.

It was to be a local affair, for neither of them had solidified in their minds how public they were willing to go with this controversial issue. When the convention turned into an audience of over three

hundred, including forty men, they lost all confidence and corralled Lucretia's husband into chairing the meeting.

The second day brought a change. It was a day devoted to reading Elizabeth's "Declaration of Sentiments," and her voice, empowered by the authority of her own hard-searched convictions, electrified the nation.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having its direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let the facts be submitted to a candid world.¹⁰

The "facts" were picked up by telegraph and for the first time newspapers around the country seriously addressed the topic. The women's suffrage movement was born, and Elizabeth, a housewife who'd dared think for herself, was propelled into the limelight. A lot of ups and downs, but her ideas were finally acknowledged in 1919 by passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton had found her footing and stride. Flight from a swaddled, crying baby to the quest for political freedom for those who, in 1848, were the "least of brethren," Elizabeth Cady Stanton had taken her stand—and was not going to back down. She had a higher call, as do we all in the face of contradiction—that of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



MARY (NOT MARTHA)

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the LORD's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to

him and asked, “LORD, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.”

“Martha, Martha,” the LORD answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

- Luke 10:38-42 (NIV)

My favorite woman in the New Testament has always been Mary of Bethany. I hate to cook. Actually, the only household chore I enjoy is hanging out the laundry. Everything else is a necessary evil. So I was thrilled and joyed-over when my kids got old enough to help vacuum, dust, scrub, and wash—Martha I am not.

Funny, you know Mary’s there, but cultural mandate is so strong you can spend years feeling guilty over *not* being Martha. I can still feel guilty about the dust balls under the couch and behind the bed, particularly when my mother would come over. And I suppose, if Christ were to drop by, I could get into a dither every bit as bad as poor Martha. Yet Christ teaches us a better way—Mary’s.

Mary and Martha were sisters of Lazarus, and it appears they all lived in Martha’s comfortable home in Bethany, along the Jericho Road. It was a pleasant walk from there to the Mount of Olives and the Temple in Jerusalem, and Jesus, walking back and forth, often stopped to enjoy his friends’ hospitality—and no doubt Martha’s good cooking.

The weather was warm and balmy one afternoon when Jesus came by with his disciples. Mary left the oppressive heat of the kitchen to sit at his feet. He was always so interesting, his ideas thought-provoking, even dangerous. He never hesitated to contradict the religious and political ideologies surrounding them. Martha, however, flour and sweat itching her neck, bread in the oven, wine not chilled, was not amused by this flight from responsibility. She knew better than to confront Mary, though. Mary was always off in a cloud, never doing what she was supposed to. So she spoke to Jesus.

“Jesus,” she said, “don’t you care that Mary’s left me to do all this serving by myself? Tell her to come help me.”

“Martha, Martha.”

I can just hear his voice, tender, compassionate, maybe irritated. “You’ve gotten yourself in such a flap, and for what? Do we need all these cheese squares and crackers? Look at Mary. She’s listening to me, she’s thinking. We’re having a conversation here.” And then comes the line endorsing a Pilgrim’s flight and quest. “She has chosen the better way, Martha, *and I won’t take that from her.*”

Mary dared to flee the roles of womanhood long enough to quest after Christ, and we see her again at Christ’s feet just six days before Passover. The growing threats of the Pharisees had depressed the gathered crowd and she came up softly behind Christ to pour a costly perfume over his feet and to wipe his feet with her hair.

It was the custom of the day to bathe and anoint with fragrance a visitor’s feet, for the roads were hot and dusty. Martha, knowing the sadness of her master, no doubt joined Mary in this expression of love, perhaps handing him a goblet of cold water drawn fresh from the well. Judas Iscariot, however, interrupted the tenderness.

“Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor?” he asked, taking the precious bottle to inspect. “This!” he cried, I’m sure with good intent, “is worth a year’s wages!”

Jesus must have looked Judas straight in the eye before uttering what has to be a lonely statement. “Leave her alone. Against the day of my burying she has kept this.”¹¹

Did he lay his hand upon Mary’s head while Judas, chastened and without further word, handed back the precious perfume—worth three times what he’d get from the Pharisees for betraying his Lord?

I like to think of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane a week later, his disciples asleep, alone, yet comforted by memory of Mary—a woman who dared her journey of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



BREND A

A woman who had suffered from severe bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and touched the edge

of his cloak. She said to herself, "If only I touch his cloak, I will get well." Jesus turned around and saw her, and said, "Courage, my daughter! Your faith has made you well." At that very moment the woman became well.

- Matthew 9:20-22 (NIV)

"I'll be back in half an hour!" I hollered to my three kids, six, eight, and eleven. Seven o'clock, and the pretty May evening was perfect for my two-mile jog along Lake Whatcom of Bellingham, WA.

I was coming back when I felt my lungs tighten. No problem. I took a whiff of my inhaler and kept running. Another puff. Things started to ring. My tongue swelled. Nose, throat, my eyes. I fought for breath and slowed to a walk, eyes puffing shut, heartbeat erratic. Pain ripped into my abdomen, cramps nearly took me to my knees. I stumbled, breathing tight, getting worse. Inhaler useless.

This wasn't asthma. Something worse. I banged on the door of a stranger's house. "911," I blurted, then sank to a bench. By now breathing was desperate, the cramps severe. Pain and lack of oxygen grayed everything out, my face so swollen I couldn't recognize myself by touch.

I heard the ambulance wailing down the hill, the commotion of men gathering around. I could see nothing now. I could only hear frantic voices amidst the wild ringing in my ears.

"Looks like asthma," said someone.

"No." I pointed to my abdomen. "More than that," I whispered, sucking for air, praying they would quit talking and get an IV into me. "Epinephrine," I whispered, begging.

They finally found a vein. I felt the blessed sting, then the cold, IV fluid. And then I was being hustled, sitting up, into the ambulance.

I've been rushed to the emergency room for asthma so often I know by heart the medications needed and the doses. I'd even "died" from asthma. August 1969. Seventeen years old. But I'd come back, and again I was being hustled into emergency. My breathing had eased just enough to chase back the edge. But I couldn't make the ER doctor understand that something else—something terrible—was happening. The cramps and erratic heartbeat were all consuming and getting worse.

"It's a lack of oxygen," he said. He had no idea what he was talking about. He knew it and I knew it.

“No,” I insisted. “I don’t swell with asthma. I don’t *hurt*. Call my doctor in Seattle. He’ll know what to do.”

ER guy instead ordered a chest X-ray.

“NO!” Real panic exploded.

“We always do an X-ray. Procedure.”

This was not procedure and, again, we both knew it. And I was going to die. But I had a choice. I could acquiesce and die in some other part of the hospital or I could flee convention and maybe have a shot at staying alive.

“You’re fired,” I gasped, choking on my ragged breathing and taking the offered hand of a fireman who, for whatever reason, had stayed with me. “If you don’t get me another doctor, he is my witness,” I gasped. I could barely determine *anyone* in my shadows. I hung fast to the man’s arm, praying frantically. “He’s going to kill me,” I told him.

“I think you better get another doctor,” said the fireman.

One look and the new doctor exploded. “ANAPHYLACTIC SHOCK!”

I didn’t know what that was, but everything went into high gear. Fast. An EKG. An injection to calm my heartbeat. Now something to relax what turned out to be my uterus cramping—a common experience for women. My doctor in Seattle was called. Finally, when at last I stabilized, the fireman slipped out and the doctor who saved me pulled up a chair.

“You got grit. You were dying, anyone else would have folded. But you’re lucky, too,” he told me, “that the cramps went to your uterus, not your heart—or you would have died before even getting to the hospital.” I started to thank him. He interrupted. “You saved your own life. You’ve got nobody to thank but yourself.”

It was two o’clock in the morning when I let myself in through the back door. The house was quiet. A neighbor had put my children to bed. How close had their mother come to going out for a jog and never coming home? I pulled off my bloodied yellow tights and my sweat-soaked shirt and tossed my inhaler into the drawer. I was alive—that’s what counted. I ran a cool rag over my face. I was only alive, though, because I’d had the courage to defy a doctor and go ahead on my own, trusting in God (and a fireman) to see me through.

I slid into bed, almost too weary and weak to pull up the covers. I soon fell asleep though, for I’d learned, like the woman Christ healed

by the touch of his robe, that God is with us whenever we have to make the Pilgrim's scary journey of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



JANIE

O LORD, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue
you know it completely, O LORD.
- Psalm 139:1-4 (NIV)

The Pilgrim seeks to find that which God knows, and in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Hurston Neale, Janie set out to do just that. The story opens at the end of her quest. She's walking back into town on a hot Georgia night, her long hair tied into a ponytail and swinging down her back. The old ladies are on their porches. Why's she wearing them overalls? Where's the blue satin dress? What happened to Tea Cake, that "lad" she run off with? Must have took all her money. Serves her right. Should have stayed in her class, she should.

Janie's quest had begun years before when at sixteen years old she felt answers seeking her out. She had only questions. What was love? Bees buzzed in her grandmother's blossoming pear trees. Will pears, she wondered, ever bloom for me? Will bees ever buzz? Two marriages and the bees didn't sing. Nearly forty years old and she was a "rut in the road," "beaten down by the wheels."¹² She got from Jody Starks only what money could buy and she wondered if maybe Jody Starks was nothing, for all his talk and prestige as a store owner. But then, she decided, she'd have to lie and say he was, or life would be nothing but a house and a store.

But then Jody died and Tea Cake pranced and Janie's world was turned upside down. Tea Cake loved her. Tea Cake teased her. Tea Cake played with her and planted with her and laughed with her and talked to her. But Tea Cake was only thirty, Janie nearly forty, and it wasn't fitting. But Janie heard the bees singing, and she bought a blue satin dress and married him anyway.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is a poignant story of Janie's pilgrimage into answers for questions she'd had all her life, discovering in the process her own power to love and be loved—possible only because Tea Cake allowed her to be herself, to think her own thoughts, to make her own choices, to do what she wanted to do. “Ah wuz fumblin’ round,” she told him, “and God opened de door.”

Tea Cake died after they'd been together for only two years, but Janie came home to the store knowing who she was in God's eyes—and with answers on love.

Love wasn't a grindstone, she'd discovered, doing the same thing everywhere and with everyone it touched. She spoke to Phoeby, an old friend who'd come by with some mulatto rice to kill the “hongries.” Phoeby would take the news back to the other ladies on their porches where they waited, wanting to hear of Janie's defeat. But Janie, pilgrimage complete, had not been defeated by flight and quest. She now knew what God knew.

Love, she told Phoeby, was more like the sea, moving, taking its shape from the shore it meets, and different with every shore. And, she said, rice easing the hongries and Phoeby's companionship reaching out to her beyond the front porches, “You got tuh go there tuh know there ... Nobody else can't tell yuh and show yuh. Two things everybody's got tuh do fuh theyselves. They got tuh go tuh God, and they got tuh find out about livin' fuh theyselves.”

If any of us are to hear the bees and find who we are in God's eyes, we have to take our journeys of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



L A U R A

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

- Matthew 7:6 (NIV)

One rainy day a very spoiled little girl from Plum Creek came to visit Laura Ingalls, author of the *Little House on the Prairie* series. After tearing the paper dolls in half, naughty Anna snatched Laura's rag doll and tugged on the shoe-button eyes, pulled on the braids, and even banged the doll's face on the floor. Horrified, Laura could do nothing. Anna was "company" and Charlotte, after all, was only a doll. When it was time to go home, Anna threw a temper tantrum and insisted on taking Charlotte, and Laura was forced to "make the company happy" and give up the doll.

"For shame, Laura," said Ma. "A great big girl like you sulking about a rag doll. Stop it, this minute. You don't want that doll, you hardly ever played with it. You must not be so selfish."¹³

She didn't want her doll? Of course she wanted her doll! But if she wanted her doll, Ma said that meant she was selfish. She didn't *want* to be selfish! So did that mean she *didn't* want her doll?

Growing up is hard. Which is why many of us stop thinking for ourselves. Rather than view ourselves as selfish, or any other label placed on us, we deny who we are and what we want. We *don't* want Charlotte. Do we?

A few weeks later Laura found Charlotte drowned and frozen in a puddle: her doll had been thrown away and forgotten. Seeing her beloved Charlotte drowned and frozen caught Laura in crisis of contradiction. To complicate everything, Charlotte wasn't even her doll anymore. To rescue her was tantamount to stealing. By the laws of Ma and Pa she was to walk away. But how could she? How could she walk away and leave Charlotte?

Contradiction comes to us even as children—and we have to choose. Are we going to start thinking for ourselves and be true to

what we want—even at the risk of being called selfish? Stupid? Careless? Incapable? Clumsy? Shy? Unruly? Stoic? Boring? Undeserving? Fat? Skinny? Ungrateful? Rebellious? The list goes on. Or are we going to hold fast to these assigned identities and leave Charlotte behind?

Laura chose to be true to herself. She snatched up her doll, hid it under her shawl and, frightened, ran panting home. “It’s Charlotte,” she told her mother. “I-I stole her. I don’t care Ma, I don’t care if I did!”¹⁴

Laura was fortunate. She lived with parents who weren’t afraid of their mistakes. Ma sat Laura up on her knee, soothed back her hair, and invited Laura to tell her all about it—and they decided it had been a terrible experience for Charlotte, but that Laura had rescued her and now Ma would make her as good as new.

Some of us aren’t so lucky. We live with those who maintain rigid positions, who deny us the right to make choices and to seek what we need and want. But it is still our choice. We can chose to rescue Charlotte and get back what is ours. A replica of Laura’s doll sits on my bookshelf, reminding me that I can, if need be, choose the Pilgrim’s path of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



JOY

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,
that each one may receive what is due him for the things
done while in the body, whether good or bad.

- 2 Corinthians 5:10 (NIV)

My cousin, Joy Johnson, was head nurse on her floor at Vancouver General, a job everyone wanted. She’d made it up through bed care and into top level management. Her hours were eight to five, she got great vacations, and received a top-dollar salary—not something easily accomplished for someone only thirty-six years old.

But then divorce rocked the boat.

"I was forced to really think about what I was doing," she said outside of a beach home she shares with her parents in Tsawwassen, B.C., Canada. "I was driving an hour each way into Vancouver, never saw the kids. Worse, I was taking the dreadful worries from the job home with me. Suddenly, the glamorous job wasn't so glamorous anymore."

She was offered work at the new, local hospital—but not in administration. "It was bed care," she said. "Hard work, changing shifts, lower pay, a drop in prestige. Everything I'd worked so hard for would no longer be mine. I almost didn't take it. But then I had to ask, 'What is my primary responsibility in life?' I looked at my two kids and knew the answer."

The choice was difficult. People don't back down career ladders, they climb them, and friends couldn't understand. But Joy kept thinking about Judgment Day and Christ asking, "What did you do with the responsibilities I gave you? What about Ryan and Krista?"

"It's really hard," she said, "when you think so differently from everyone else. I finally had to listen to myself and not worry about what anyone else thought. Life, for me right now, is making sure my kids get the attention and care they need. And so I took the plunge—and took the job just up the road." She laughed. "All my nursing points, I don't think, are going to impress God—not when all is said and done!"

Flight and quest. Fleeing the ideals of society in order to carve out your own. My cousin is right; it's not an easy thing to do, and you sometimes wonder if you've done the right thing. "But you know," said Joy, gazing for a long time over the water and the distant peak of Mt. Baker in Washington State where I lived. "It has turned out so well. I used to think regular hours were an advantage, but I'm not sure why I ever thought that. I can go to parent/teacher conferences now. I can see the kids' school plays or go watch Ryan's baseball games. I just trade shifts with someone else. I couldn't do that working eight to five!

"No," she said, "sometimes the world doesn't see it the same way you do. But the way I look at it, God has given me Ryan and Krista, and there *is* a Judgment Day—and I want to stand proud of my accomplishments, in what counts."

I think she will, for when we seek only to answer to him, he always honors our Pilgrim's path of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



DANIELLE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.

- Proverbs 3:5, 6 (NIV)

Success stories abound. All the world loves a winner, but what happens when we fail in our attempted flight and quest?

Danielle¹⁵ studied opera for seven years, singing nationally and climbing her way to the top while holding down a full-time job as manager of a large clothing store in southern California. At thirty years of age she succumbed to the still small voice that urged her to seek broader possibilities with her music. She quit her job and headed for Germany, where she hoped to gain the required European experience to “make it big.”

“I quit my job,” she said, “because I asked myself the question, ‘When I’m old, will I have lived the life I wanted to live? Will I be satisfied?’ But when I got to Germany, I found I didn’t like it. It rained all the time. It was depressing. I was competing against the same people I’d competed against before. I missed the States. And I found out that to be in opera you have to eat and talk singing. I like to eat and talk singing, but I also like other things.”

So she came home. There are some who might criticize her quest, her leap into such a risky venture as opera, where only a handful of people ever make it to the top. She might be written up as having failed. After all, she didn’t make it.

But Bruce Larson would not call her a failure. “A healthy person is someone who can choose risk and danger,” he says in *There’s a Lot More to Health Than Not Being Sick*.¹⁶ He reminds us of the world-renowned Flying Wallendas aerial troupe. They were most famous for their human pyramid, balancing on a high wire with no net. Two men, standing on a thin wire, held a pole that, before it was over, held ten other people. One day it all came down in a small

Midwestern town. Two were killed, two others maimed for life. A few days later, though, the Wallendas were back on the wire. When asked by reporters later why, Papa Wallenda responded without a moment's hesitation. "To be on the wire is life. All else is waiting."

Danielle went home to southern California and got back up on the wire. She kept singing and managing clothing shops, and over the last several years has creatively combined her dual talents, picking up where she left off and moving forward in both directions with an astonishing degree of success. She's sung opera in Washington, D.C., Philadelphia, Chicago, New York—all over the country. And her other business? She now owns a small chain of her own clothing stores.

"By faith," says Bruce Larson, "we can try to determine what God is up to with us, and fling our lives with reckless abandon into the causes we think He has for us."¹⁷ We can fling, because when we listen to God's call, we cannot fail. Like Danielle, we learn more of who we are, pick up where we left off, and carry on. God uses our "failure" to bring about the bigger and better in our lives, and this is the wonderful truth of daring a Pilgrim's journey of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



BRENDA

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him. He also shall be my salvation ...

- Job 13:15-16 (KJV)

My wedding night wasn't like yours. After "slam-bam," not even a "thank-you-ma'am," the man I married drew a line down the middle of the sheets with his finger. "See that line? Don't ever cross it, not even your little toe, unless I want you." He rolled over and went to sleep.

Ten years later, one of my specialists told me I was going to die if I stayed married. I believed him. Still ... the Bible was pretty clear about divorce and certainly my church drove home the point.

“You don’t understand,” I told Dr. Vesselago, “My religion forbids divorce.”

He thought a moment. “I think I see,” he finally said. “You can’t divorce because it’s sin. You can’t kill your husband because that’s sin. You certainly can’t kill yourself because that too is sin. You have but one option. Let nature take its course and then no one, not even God, can blame you.”

“Though he slay me,” I quoted from the book of Job, “yet will I trust in him.”

“Your children? *What then?*”

This got my attention. I went to see Dr. DuBois.

“I don’t give you a year,” he told me flat out.

My children were one, three, and six years old. Yes, what about *them*? I had something new to think about.

I got curious about Job. Why would the most victimized man in the Old Testament say, “though he slay me, yet I will trust in him”? I opened my Bible and got a shock. He was okay because he knew he could defend his ways to God’s face—and be delivered.

It’s almost impossible for a victim to flee her abuser. It takes several attempts before it sticks because a tornado of ugly, mean voices gather, driving her back. Her defense is weak; she’s not used to thinking for herself and can’t articulate. Yet if she throws herself on the mercy of God, he listens to her pain and submits his “Facts and Findings.” To me, he said, “You weren’t born to die at the hands of a man who calls himself a Christian. I gave you gifts and purpose. I gave you children, too, and you cannot abandon them.”

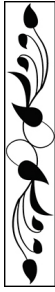
And then, one day, we bolt.

For me it was like jumping off the 36th floor of a burning building, my likelihood of survival grim. My church threw me out, my friends abandoned me. The courts and statistics had me by the throat, choking me in the poverty of single parenting and all its attendant woes. And I was ill. But I began to write and found purpose and direction and meaning for my life. Everything I wrote sold and within a year my first book came out. By this time, I was going to another church, and a bunch of us went out to celebrate at a restaurant in Seattle’s Shilshole Bay. We exited to a glorious blue sky and call of gulls.

Like Job who’d suffered so much, God had repaid all that I’d lost, restoring my life with an abundance I could not have imagined. I whirled and waved my hand over the expanse of heaven and sea

and said to a magazine editor I wrote for (in town on business and along for the ride), “I’m sooo happy, Jerry!”

And I was. I was thirty-one years old and seeing the power and potential of taking the Pilgrim’s path of FLIGHT AND QUEST.



DISCOVERING OURSELVES

*The Bad and the Ugly,
But Don't Forget the Good.*

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Test me and know
my anxious thoughts! See if there is any offensive way in
me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

- Psalm 139:23, 24 (NIV)

*W*e're off to see the Wizard," the Scarecrow and Dorothy sing, ready to launch upon their Pilgrim's quest to see "the wonderful Wizard of Oz." The Scarecrow can't stay on his feet, though. Dorothy picks him up and sets him on his way. Down he falls again, up again she scoops him, until at last, tripping and slipping, he tumbles his way down the yellow brick road.

When we first begin the Pilgrim's quest, we trip. Not used to standing our own two feet, not used to thinking or acting on our own behalf, we aren't always sure about our decisions, nor do we always make those decisions gracefully. Like the Scarecrow, we wobble, we fall flat on our face. We even, as did the Scarecrow down the road, get a bit angry—sometimes explosively so. I did.

Carol Pearson points out in *The Hero Within* that Pilgrims have usually "gone along with someone else, over their own wishes, too long, so that their resentment is deep by the time they act in their own interest. The result is that they choose themselves in the midst of a veritable explosion of rage."¹⁸ Let's go back to *The Wizard of Oz* and look at the Scarecrow, who, up until now we've thought to be really rather nice. He and Dorothy have come to an apple orchard. Dorothy picks up an apple, but a tree gets mad at her—and so does the Scarecrow, at the tree.

“Come along, Dorothy,” he says, all wobbly on his feet and glaring furiously at the crabby apple tree, “you don’t want any of *those* apples!”

“Are you hinting my apples aren’t what they ought to be?” says the tree, offended.

“Oh no!” the Scarecrow says, na-na-na-na-na in his voice. “It’s just that she doesn’t like eating little green worms!”

Anger scares those of us made of “sugar and spice and everything nice” right back up the Scarecrow post. Anger frightens us, particularly our own. We’d really rather forget our quest than risk such rage. I know I do. I get into a lot of trouble when I mouth off.

Yet, didn’t Christ get angry? Once he cursed a fig tree for not bearing fruit. Often he addressed church leaders with stinging rebuke. He took a whip to their profiteering tables, their bird cages and cow stalls, creating panic on the Temple steps. Yet the Bible tells us he was without sin.

Anger is part of the human experience. Furthermore, it’s a signal—one worth listening to—says Dr. Harriet Goldhor Lerner in *The Dance of Anger*. “Our anger,” she writes, “may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated, that our needs or wants are not being adequately met, or simply that something is not right.”¹⁹

Dorothy was hungry. Why shouldn’t she have an apple? Yet if the Scarecrow had denied his anger (“You’re right, she keeps forgetting she’s not in Kansas, we’ll just mosey on, anything you say, Sir!”), Dorothy would have gone hungry. Likewise, whenever any of us deny our anger (because we don’t like it or are afraid of it), we miss an opportunity to correct what’s wrong. Is some right being violated? Is anyone being hurt? Am *I* being hurt? Is a need going unmet? It becomes the Pilgrim’s task to figure this out and do something about it. Which is exactly what the Scarecrow did.

“I’ll show you how to get apples,” he hisses to Dorothy, thumbing his nose at the tree. “Na-na-na-na-na!” he mocked, and in came the apples, bouncing and rolling all over the yellow brick road and into the woods beyond.

A few weeks after my husband and I separated, he let himself into the house and silently departed with the TV, stereo, silver, bank records, and I don’t know what all. It wasn’t the things he took, it was that he took them in silence, without speaking even to his children, who stood confused and hurt ... and leaving me trembling with rage.

“Go to hell!” I screamed into the night.

Yeah, that bad.

“Mummy,” my six-year-old daughter said, starting to cry a few minutes later when I tucked her into bed, “you were so angry.”

I’d scared myself silly. Yet anger is a signal. King David wrote in the Psalms: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”²⁰

The temptation is to name anger as the wicked within us. This is the most obvious. Yet David wasn’t speaking of anger. He couldn’t have been; there is plenty of record documenting God’s wrath. Nor was he talking about our fumbling efforts to control our anger. God himself repented of his. Rather, David was speaking of something more subtle, and more serious. He was inviting God to search beyond the anger (and confusion and doubt and fear and all the other emotions we run into when we first start listening to ourselves) to see past the immediate and obvious into the deeper issues.

That night I burned the midnight oil. Search me, O God, and know my heart. *Why had I gotten so enraged?*

When we ask, we sometimes discover the bad and the ugly. In *Pinocchio*, the little “wooden head” looked into the mirror and saw a “jackass.” I looked into a similar mirror. An idiot! From the very beginning I’d allowed my husband to treat me like I didn’t matter. I had, as Dr. James Dobson put it in *Love Must Be Tough*—too long allowed my marriage partner “to crawl all over the ‘line of respect.’”²¹ I’d allowed the man to render me a ghost of myself; and the sad reality is that if you let people do this to you, you’ve got no one to blame but yourself. Yes, a real horse’s patoot.

I’d have to snap out of it.

But we also discover good, and that night I did. My husband had taken my children’s only form of entertainment. Hours they spent, listening to their Walt Disney records, and he was stepping on their toes. If I was slow in drawing the line of respect when it came to myself, I was not, I realized, slow when it came to my kids. In the morning, I called their father and explained why they needed their record player. That same week he brought over a little one that suited their needs, and I, like the Scarecrow, learned something important. By not letting my anger immobilize me with guilt, *I could get the apples!*

I wouldn't have known this, however, had I not heeded the "signal" Dr. Lerner spoke of, and had instead spent the entire night beating myself over the head with the almighty guilt stick. As it was, Dr. Lerner's probing questions and God's nonjudgmental searching brought the deeper issues to light and in what was left of the night I was able to figure out how I was going to begin living my life as if it mattered and was worthy of consideration—and figure a way to meet the unmet needs of my children.

Not that anger gives us license to be childish and thumb our noses whenever we don't get our own way, or to be vulgar and fly off at the mouth in a manner that scares everyone around us, including ourselves. But if we can accept anger into our lives as a signal that something is wrong—we can actually do something about it.

In William Gibson's play *The Miracle Worker*, Annie Sullivan is warned before going to work with Helen Keller that the deaf and mute child was "prone to temper tantrums."

"It only means," Annie promptly responded, "there is something inside trying to get out."

Helen's need for connection wasn't being met. Anger is a signal that the real us is trying to get out, that we're trying get our needs met.

Rome was not built in a day. Neither are we. We do not, as Carol Pearson points out, learn our lessons all at once.²² Do you remember the bumper sticker? With the disordered alphabet? PBP, GINFWMY. Please Be Patient, God Is Not Finished With Me Yet. We have to be patient when we trip over rage, and all the other emotions we stumble on, because—by listening to our feelings and honoring them—we start to move forward. The Scarecrow, with his head stuffed full of straw, couldn't scare crows—but when he got mad he could think! He could get the apples. Which was significant, considering he wasn't supposed to have any brains.

What of Hagar, of the Old Testament? Son dying in the desert, their water gone, she sat down and wept. Openly and unabashedly she admitted to emotions that ran the gamut, generally condemned as sin: uncertainty, fear, anxiety, loneliness, anger, lack of trust. What an honest, refreshing thing to do! She wept! She allowed the feelings to wash over her and she bawled her eyes out!

And look what happened. Because she wept, because she dared to listen and honor her emotions, as negative as they were, God met

her again and again reaffirmed who she was. She was the mother of a nation: one who has seen God—and lived.

Our Pilgrim's journey is one of flight, and quest. We flee the expectations others place on us in order to quest our own identity. Wobbly on our feet and not used to thinking for ourselves, we fumble and fall and at times slam right up against a wall of rage and fear and doubt and loneliness and anxiety and numerous other emotions that beset human beings engaged in the act of thinking. But these emotions, if we look, help us see more clearly who we are, which is what the role of Pilgrim is all about.

And once we know who we are, we're ready for the next step of our inner journey: Martyrdom.

"A Tinman!" exclaims Dorothy, apples in Oz all but forgotten in new discovery. The Tinman in the bush mumbles, his mouth rusted shut. Both Dorothy and the Scarecrow rush to hear what he is saying. He wants the oil can. They waste no time, oiling first his mouth, squirting here, squirting there, now the knee, the foot.

"Well, you're perfect now," announces Dorothy.

No. The Tinman has no heart, he says.

Poor Tinman. He thought he could be sort of human if only he had a heart. He breaks into song, dancing with a clinkety-clank-clank, a bang and toot-toot!

Dorothy whispers to the Scarecrow, the Scarecrow smiles. The Tinman trips. He staggers to the side of the yellow brick road. Dorothy sits beside him and sidles in close.

"We were just wondering if you couldn't come with us," she asks and the Scarecrow nods, "to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard of Oz for a heart?"

Flight and quest. The Pilgrim comes full circle. After fleeing everyone else's expectations, we come back into the community with purpose both for ourselves and others. Ready to meet the Tinman so that we might learn the task of what it means to be a Martyr, to give of our self to help someone else.



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22. Pearson, *The Hero Within*, 63.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I am not inferior to you. But I desire to speak to the Almighty and to argue my case with God.

- Job 13:2-3 (NIV)

Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.

- Isaiah 43:1 (KJV)

I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, Who leads you by the way you should go.

- Isaiah 48:17 (KJV)

The Pilgrim's path of Flight and Quest can be long and uncertain, but when we choose to flee what isn't working in quest for new direction and effective living, we can trust him to lead in the way we should go.

1. Name a pole up your back that makes you uncomfortable? Why do you endure?
2. Did you plead your case before God? Do you want to?
3. If so, what was it like? What happened?
4. Perhaps you're too afraid to approach the throne of God. Why? Do you fear the loss of your community? Someone's good opinion?
5. Try this: imagine the opportunities God has for you. Do you dare dream he is this good?
6. Perhaps you're already on the Pilgrim's path. What did you escape?
7. How is your new life different?
8. What things have you learned about yourself, and God?
9. Finally, has he had an opportunity to bring profit from all that you've lost? If so, are you grateful for everything you suffered?

A reminder:

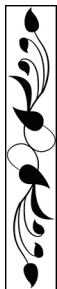
The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it

- 1 Thessalonians 5:24 (NIV)

Prayer:

Thank you setting us free from the poles up our back and giving us a new way to go. Teach us to find profit from loss and move forward on our yellow brick roads, stumbling, making mistakes, but always learning more of who we are with each turn in the trail, so that we can be the person you truly made us to be. Amen.

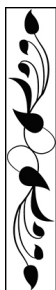
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FIVE *M*ARTYR

"I can subdue this dragon through sacrifice!"

- Ruth the Martyr



CHOOSING TO SACRIFICE

From A Position of Power

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates me from you.” When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

- Ruth 1:16-18 (NIV)

The wicked Witch of the West explodes from her sulfur ball atop the roof of a cabin alongside the yellow brick road. We all gasp. Beside me my youngest son Blake cowers, hiding his face from the hatred that twists the features of a witch who personifies all our worst fears.

“Stay away from Dorothy!” the wicked witch screeches, her long and bony finger jabbing the air. She threatens to make a mattress out of the Scarecrow and turn the Tinman into a beehive if they don’t mind their own business, and to prove herself perfectly capable she throws a fireball at the Scarecrow’s feet. Up he jumps, yelping and dancing, flames leaping high, and we gasp again. But then the Tinman falls over the fire and douses the flames with his hat. Without thinking twice the Tinman saves the Scarecrow’s life at risk to his own. We all draw a long sigh of relief and Blake sits up straight.

There is redemption in suffering and sacrifice. The Tinman—the Martyr in *The Wizard Oz*—instinctively knows this, as do we all. Even

the early fertility religions understood the mysterious relationship between sacrifice and redemption. Ishtar (Innana), the earliest recorded spiritual deity, sacrificed her shepherd son/lover Damuzi each year so the crops might flourish. In Medieval Scotland on May 1st, the piece of Beltane Cake singed with soot singled out who would be sacrificed for the guarantee of summer's harvest. In various religions down through time, some form of redemptive, sacrificial suffering has been critical. In Christianity, God himself is our sacrifice.

However, too often women are squeezed into the sacrificial role to the exclusion of other options. When we don't understand choice in the face of conflict, martyrdom becomes a standard response. As a result we often wind up like poor Cinderella of the fairy tales, a servant in our own home, on the job, or even down at the PTA.

There is a somber tone to the music when the story opens in Walt Disney's movie adaptation of *Cinderella*. Silhouetted against the opaque sky is a turreted mansion fallen into disrepair. The camera rolls in and we hear the demands on Cinderella. Cinderella! Cinderella! CINDERELLA!

Sadly, we often do the ironing, mending, and laundry in the hope that our suffering might ultimately bring us the love and redemption we seek. We don't understand that *sacrifice and suffering don't always bring redemption*—which is why the dragons often triumph and stepmothers reign.

An employee gives up supper hours and weekends and wonders why the boss doesn't reward her. Mothers sacrifice time and self and wonder why children show no respect. Wives deny their own interests and identity and wonder why husbands don't appreciate or love them. When there is no balance of self and sacrifice, the more we give the less we receive—and sadly there's often serious abuse. The harsh reality is that some people like to watch a martyr cut herself into pieces. They actually derive pleasure from it.

The large cupboard, clean it! The silver, polish it! The draperies and rugs, shake them! Dinner by five!



Jesus reminds us this is not what the role of Martyr is all about. Martyrdom, he modeled for us, is a choice—something we and Cinderella have forgotten ... or never knew. Notice how he *chooses* a different response to each set of conflicts. When he saw the large

crowd, “his heart was filled with pity for them, and he healed their sick.”¹ Yet after healing a man of a crippled hand and the Pharisees made plans to kill Jesus, he heard of it and “went away from that place.”² When four thousand gathered and there was nothing to eat, he fed them so they would not “faint as they go.”³ But when he fed five thousand and they were ready to make him king, by force if necessary, he “went off again to the hills by himself.”⁴ When he was tired and the people brought their babies, the disciples scolded. Christ, though, said, “Let the children come to me!”⁵ But when the teachers of the law asked for a miracle, he said, “No!”⁶ Ultimately he did sacrifice his life, but on his terms. “*I lay down my life,*” he told his disciples, “that *I may take it again*. No one takes it from me, but *I lay it down of my own accord*. *I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.*”⁷ There is no forced martyrdom here; it’s a choice. There is no wicked stepmother calling the shots.

For those of us ordered to clean the hearth it’s not so easy to say, “I want to go to the ball.” We’re not used to standing up for ourselves. But if we can plug our ears long enough to all the demands (Cinderella! *Cinderella!* CINDERELLA!) and open our eyes to Christ, the confusion clears.

Two conditions seemed to have guided Jesus whenever he was up against the Martyr’s choice. One, would the sacrifice forward his mission and enable him to complete the purpose for which he had been sent? Two, would his sacrifice bring redemption for someone around him? If not, not even the authority of the church with all its reason and tradition could force him to submit. Martyrdom, he taught, is a *choice to redeem*, and it’s based on who we are and *what we are meant to do with our lives*—not mandate or guilt.

In one of the Cinderella versions I grew up with, when the duke calls around with the glass slipper she lost at the ball (and bringing news that the prince will marry its owner), both her stepsisters try to cram their feet in. Both go to great lengths. One chops off her toes, the other her heels. When the duke spots Cinderella—attired in her patchwork, soot on her face—her wicked stepmother steps in.

“No, she’s just a servant.”

Cinderella, however, pulls up the footstool and pulls off her sock.

One, *Is our suffering compatible with what God has called us to do with our lives?*

Two, *Does our suffering bring redemption to those around us?*

Cinderella finally figured out that sacrifice without choice is not redemptive but victimizing. It's lucky for us she did. If she hadn't, she'd still be cleaning out the cinders—and we wouldn't know that choice is what ultimately brings about the redemption we seek.



The story of Ruth in the Old Testament is the Bible's own fairy tale, and it provides us with a spiritual model of what it means to be a Martyr. Once upon a time, as the story goes, in about the year 1100 B.C., there was famine in the kingdom and Elimelech and his wife took their two handsome sons to sojourn in the nearby land of Moab. There they ate, drank, and were merry, and in time the two sons took unto themselves two beautiful Moabite brides. For a while all was well, until one day tragedy struck. Elimelech died, so did the sons. Only the three widows were left: the mother-in-law, Naomi, and the sisters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Ruth and Orpah could return to their fathers and find protection, but what of Naomi? Where was she to go?

Her only option was a return to her people, but because the daughters-in-law were so fond of her, they chose to go along. A few days into the journey Naomi began to think better of it and begged her daughters-in-law to return. What future did they have? They were better off in Moab, where they might remarry, have children, and find happiness.

Ruth and Orpah cried. Naomi got stern. "No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone forth against me!"

Finally Orpah, a bright and sensible girl, tearfully saw the sense of what Naomi was saying. In this new kingdom, who would marry her? In Moab she had a home, and time was not so far gone she could not remarry. She kissed her mother-in-law goodbye and hastened to retrace her steps.

Ruth, on the other hand, clung to her mother-in-law. The road wasn't safe for an old woman, there could be robbers on the way. And once in the kingdom, could an old woman glean the fields?

"See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods," said Naomi, pushing Ruth away as only an old woman can do. "Return after your sister-in-law."

"Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you!" cried Ruth. "For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I

will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you.”

When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined, she said nothing more, and they made their way to the kingdom. There they met Boaz—

Here I interrupt because here is redemptive sacrifice. Ruth’s martyrdom was not exacted but voluntarily given, and the choice to suffer was motivated by a desire to ease a very real burden and not merely to cater to the whim of another. Furthermore, Ruth’s decision was one of power. It was not as if she were destitute, with no place else to go. Her home was in Moab. But because she chose martyrdom, redemption was found. She and Boaz met, fell in love, married, and lived happily ever after.

Pearson reminds us in *The Hero Within*, that genuine sacrifice is “transformative and not maiming.”⁸ It’s respective of both giver and receiver.¹⁰ Not that we all wind up marrying Boaz or Prince Charming, or even that our efforts are materially rewarded. But once we start to give honestly, out of a sense of who we are and what God has called us to be instead of guilt and someone else’s demands, we find redemption at hand and the dragons backing down.

This cannot happen, though, if we give only because we’ve been commanded to, or because we feel guilty if we don’t, or because we’ve been told this is what we were created to do. We can’t hope to redeem and save from such a position of powerless servitude. We can only perpetrate dysfunction and abuse, and we find no healing or growth or hope. We lose more of who we are and we drift further afield from what God intended us to be. But! If Martyrdom is a choice based from a position of power and clear identity—in order to redeem and save—we discover very quickly that we can’t out give. We regain what we sacrifice in twice and thrice the measure. Christ said, “For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it,”¹⁰ and it’s the martyr, not the victim, who discovers this to be true.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Tinman certainly discovers this to be true. Right after he puts out the fire and everyone has caught their breath, he declares to Dorothy, “I’ll see you reach the Wizard, whether I get a heart or not.” He doesn’t care what he might gain, he only wants to give, and while he may not have thought he had a heart he seems instinctively to know that to give his heart, his life, is to gain

it. And is this not what happened? By taking Dorothy to the Wizard, he receives all that he asks for—and more.

Yet it was his choice to give of himself, or not to give. It was his choice because he knew who he was—or rather, who he was not. “Beehive! Baha! Let her try to make a beehive out of me!”

Martyrdom is not an automatic response based on powerlessness and victimization, for that is Cinderella at the hearth. Rather, it’s a choice for redemptive sacrifice, based on a position of power. It’s Cinderella going to the ball. It’s Ruth, going with her mother-in-law to a new land. And it’s the Tinman taking Dorothy to find the wonderful Wizard of Oz.

It’s the Martyr who comes at last to know her power.



B R E N D A

Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

- 2 Corinthians 9:7 (RSV)

My panda bear begged me not to give him up, but in the back of my mind my Sunday school teacher's voice quietly argued, "We never give away what we don't need anymore, for then it's not sacrificial. We only give God our very best and that which we love the most." I could feel hot tears burn behind my eyes. I was six years old and the fire department was collecting old toys for poor children that Christmas of 1958.

I could hear my mother down the hall, hurrying my sisters along. Linda and Tresa seemed to have no problem bundling up comic books, coloring books, plastic baby bottles, a few dolly dresses, cutouts, and storybooks. Their unperturbed chatter only made my agony more private.

"Are you sure you want to take your bear?" my mother asked, standing at the door, my jacket in her hand. My mother was a woman who got upset when people gave missionaries old tea bags. I could hardly retreat.

We drove to the city hall. Firemen directed mothers and fathers to drop the toys in big buckets or put things on a large table. My feet stopped and my younger sister bumped into me, plowing me down.

"Go ahead, lay it right there. My, what a nice little bear," a man said. I laid Panda on top of a rusty truck. Panda was grayish white and navy blue. My heart hurt when I looked at his navy blue eye. But then a lady with an orange hat dumped a stack of boys' toys on top of Panda and my mother was dragging me back down to the car. Panda? Panda! PANDA BEAR! But I didn't cry, and trees zipped past the window, carrying me far away from the bear I loved.

For years I didn't cry for Panda. I couldn't. To cry would mean I was selfish, unwilling to give away my best.

Ten years later, for something to do during the long lonely nights we lived in Iowa, I pieced together a doll from my mother's scrap bag in the back of the closet under the stairs. McCall (for so she was called, since I created her from a pattern I'd found in a McCall's magazine) was made of unbleached muslin. Her hair, soft brown yarn, was looped all curly and cute and stitched by hand onto her head. Shoe buttons polished with Vaseline were her eyes.

I embroidered eyebrows, a tiny little mouth, and a wee little nose. Her wardrobe rivaled Queen Elizabeth's. I sewed a tartan winter coat with little pockets and a matching hat with a bright red pompom and matching red ribbons to tie beneath her chin. I made flannel nighties, pretty dresses with lace, undershirts that snapped on, a diaper, jumper, overalls, a T-shirt, and even a pair of denim jeans. I knit sweaters, more dresses, pantaloons, booties and mittens, and a scarf to match the coat. I patch-worked a blanket and made a receiving blanket, and by spring she'd become my child; and my family, as was our summer custom during those years, headed for Boundary Bay and my grandfather's beach house just outside of Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

I took McCall with me, and while I don't remember exactly when I took it into my head to give her away, by the time we'd reached the little cabin I knew I would. But to whom, I wondered, was I going to give her?

As a child I'd grown up hearing stories about the Joneses, the Pattersons, and Slaneys—missionaries my folks supported—and that summer the Pattersons, missionaries from Japan, were on furlough. They arrived at the Bay and I took one look at the little girl, the youngest of five, and pulled out the gift I'd spent an entire winter making.

"Are you sure you want to give away your doll?" my mother asked. This time I did not hear my Sunday school teacher's voice or envision old tea bags. I saw only the little girl, my own heart, and nodded yes.

What was the difference between Panda and McCall? So often when we read II Corinthians 9:7, we interpret it under the lamp of guilt. We see it as a command, and because we don't want to be

“disobedient,” we slap a cheery smile on our face, give away our hearts, and then wonder why we hurt so badly inside.

But is this verse a command? *Each one must do as he has made up his mind.* This doesn’t sound much like an order to me, more like choice.

At six years old I was compelled by an overactive sense of obligation, not choice. At sixteen, I was propelled by a compelling sense of choice, not obligation—and this is the difference. Unfortunately, a lot of us never get past being six years old and the crippling burden of guilt. There comes a time, however, when we have to grow up. It is our choice, and no matter how hard we try to be cheerful, unless the decision comes from our own minds (and hearts), it will tear us apart every single time.

I do mourn Panda now—and the little girl I was when misled by my well-intentioned Sunday School teacher. But McCall? There is no room for regret WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



M A R Y

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

- John 15:12, 13 (RSV)

Fleeing religious persecution in England, the Puritans came to the American colonies to seek freedom. Yet they themselves did horrible evil against the Quakers. In a text gathering dust in a Boston archive, we come to words too shy to speak the full truth:

William Brend, though the oldest of the band of [Quaker] missionaries, was called to pass through the most cruel sufferings that were meted out in Boston to any prisoner. The tale is too awful to tell in detail,

but the inhumanity can be judged from the fact that one incident in his round of torture consisted of one hundred and seventeen blows on his bare back with a tarred rope. He was found dying— “his body having turned cold” and “his flesh having rotted ... ” John Norton, however, was still stout in his remorseless attitude, saying of William Brend: “He endeavored to beat the gospel ordinances black and blue, and it was but just to beat him black and blue.”¹¹

Things deteriorated quickly in Boston. Quakers were fined in excess of £1,000, their ears cut off, their children sold. Holes bored through their tongues, imprisoned without food or heat, chained to logs, laid neck and heels in irons, “H” for Heretic branded into their hands. Appeals to England denied, houses and land seized. In 1658, the clergy of Massachusetts executed a law that stated:

And the said person, being convicted to be of the sect of the Quakers, shall be sentenced to banishment, upon pain of death.¹²

The test wasn’t long in coming. In August of 1659 a Quaker minister by the name of Mary Dyer went to Boston to request a repeal. She was apprehended, tried, and *banished upon pain of death*. But the day she was released a colleague was apprehended and imprisoned. Mary Dyer turned around and went back. This time, William Robinson and Marmaduke Stephenson joined her.

All three were brought before the General Court on October 19, 1659, and asked by the governor why they had come. To request the repeal of the unrighteous law, Mary stated again, “in obedience to the call of the Lord.” With that “affrontive” reply, Governor Endicott chose to back his edict. “Hearken, you shall be led back to the place from whence you came and from thence to the place of execution,” he thundered, “to be hanged on the gallows till you are dead!”

“The will of the Lord be done,” said Mary Dyer quietly.

“Take her away, Marshall!” screamed Endicott.

“Yea, joyfully,” said Mary, “shall I go.”¹³

October 27, 1659, they were marched to the gallows. Mary between William and Marmaduke. They all held hands. “Are you not

ashamed,” an official accosted Mary, “to walk thus between two young men?”

“No, this is to me the hour of the greatest joy I ever had in this world.”¹⁴

The men were hung first, then Mary took her place, arms bound, now legs, now the handkerchief laid over her face, and finally now the noose about her neck. Suddenly, “Reprieve!”

The Court had never intended to hang her. The governor of nearby Connecticut had pleaded on his knees before the Boston magistrates not to hang the Quakers. They let him have Mary, with this order written into the records:

It is ordered that the said Mary Dyer shall have liberty for forty-eight hours to depart out of this Jurisdiction, after which time, being found therein, she is to be forthwith executed. And it is further ordered that she shall be carried to the place of execution and there to stand upon the gallows with a rope about her neck until the Rest be executed; and then to return to the prison and remain as aforesaid.¹⁵

But Mary Dyer refused to accept her life—so long as the law of death against her people remained. She returned for a third time in May to appear before the next General Court.

“Are you the same Mary Dyer that was here before?” Governor Endicott asked.

“I am the same.”

“You will own yourself a Quaker, will you not?”

“I own myself to be reproachfully so called.”

“This is no more than what thou saidst before. But now, it is to be executed.”

“I came in obedience to the will of God at your last General Court, desiring you to repeal your unrighteous laws of banishment on pain of death; and that same is my word now, and earnest request, although I told you that if you refused to repeal them, the Lord would send others of His servants to witness against them.”¹⁶

One more time marched to the gallows, one more time arms bound, now feet, now noose about her neck “We will not hang you,” said the authorities, “if you will promise to go home, back to

Rhode Island.” I wonder what her thoughts might have been. No one knows, but we do know what she said.

“Nay, I cannot. In obedience to the will of the Lord God I came and in His will I abide faithful to death.”

Mary Dyer died that day in Boston, May 21, 1660. A minister of the Gospel, she chose to sacrifice herself that others might live. That day the governor and clergymen rejoiced, but the people who had witnessed the brutality did not. A petition was sent to England. Because of Mary Dyer, who committed herself thrice to die that others might live, religious persecution was immediately and henceforth stopped. By edict of King Charles.

Today a bronze statue of Mary Dyer stands on Boston’s capitol grounds, within sight of the Commons where she was hung, a larger than life reminder that there is always redemption in sacrifice—WHEN THE CHOICE, ONCE, TWICE, THRICE, TO GIVE IS OURS.



R A H A B

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

- Hebrews 11:31 (NIV)

“Get your mistress! Now.”

A loud, authoritative voice shot up the narrow passage from the main room of the inn below. Upstairs, Rahab glanced at the two strange men seated at her table, then quickly out the window at soldiers’ horses impatiently pawing the dusty earth down below, almost lost in the dim light of waning day. “Who are you,” she asked in alarm, “that the king’s men come to my door? *You’re spies! You’re Israelites!*” she cried in sudden comprehension, panic in her eyes. She’d heard about these people, whose God went before them.

The two men sprang to their feet, hidden knives drawn.

“No!” she protested. “Up to the roof! Quick!”

She hid them under stalks of drying flax and then with a hammering heart descended the narrow stairs.

"Yes?" she asked, curtsying quickly before the soldiers. "I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. I was bathing. The evening, it is so hot ..."

"Bring the men out," ordered the largest of the soldiers, a man she recognized, a man who played no games with his enemies.

"There are always men here," said Rahab, unwilling yet to make her choice. Should she risk her life? It wasn't too late. A nod of her head, and the hiding men were dead. But then, what of her family? Surely they would perish, every one of them, if the Israelites were to attack. "Men come and men go," she said, smiling sweetly.

"The foreigners were seen entering your inn this morning."

"Wearing wool cloaks?" she queried, allowing a puzzled frown to come to her pretty face and glancing at the captain, tilting her head in the unspoken language of seduction. "The men who spoke with a lilt in their voices?"

"The same," the captain grunted, thawing.

She tried a sorry smile. "They left at dusk. Yes, they wanted to know when the city gates were closed. Perhaps if you hurry," she said, smiling brightly now, "you can catch up with them?" And she set her chin to challenge.

She watched from the rooftop the slow swing of the gates as they opened out to the desert, spilling the king's fleet of horses and men into the night. Torchlights cast shadows across a moonless terrain.

"It's safe," she whispered to the strangers she'd hidden, her heart only now slowing to a steady beat within her breast. "You can come out."

We know the rest of the story. Because a prostitute had faith in a God who'd parted the Red Sea and brought legendary victories to an untried army, she'd risked her life so that her family might be spared.

"Please swear to me by the Lord," she told the spies even as they brushed off flax and scratched itchy skin, "that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you."¹⁷

"The city shall be accursed," declared Joshua, leader of the Israelite army, upon hearing of her bravery and choice. "Only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent."¹⁸

Rahab reminds all woman that martyrdom saves WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



HARRIET

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- Romans 5:6-8 (NIV)

“Hattie,” wrote Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sister-in-law from Boston in 1850, “if I could use a pen as you can, I would write something that will make this whole nation feel what an accursed thing slavery is.”¹⁹

Harriet read the letter in the sun room of her home, and then glancing at her children busy with books and other occupations, she started to tell them of the atrocities that were occurring under the new Fugitive Slave Act. Suddenly she jumped to her feet impassioned and, clutching the letter in her hand, she said, “I will write something. I will—if I live.”

But she didn’t know what to write. For months she fretted. Her husband left after Christmas for Cincinnati for three months. “You’ll think of it,” he said, but two more months passed and nothing. One Sunday in late February she was in church. Wind and snow swept the window panes, the preacher’s voice droned on and on, and suddenly—a vision! An old black man, beaten and tortured by two other black men, urged on by a cruel slave master. The dying man was to confess, but to what? Never mind, thought Harriet. She would figure it out. For now she was caught by the man’s strength. Though whips tore at his back, pulling out great chunks of flesh, he refused to cry out, to give in, and when he neared his end, he looked up, and with great pity and love in his face he forgave. The vision was of a black Christ, dying for the sins of humanity. Martyrdom. What greater story could there be? Harriet wondered, gathering her skirts and checking her watch. When the last hymn was sung, she tied on her bonnet, gathered her children, and hurried home.

All afternoon she wrote, using every scrap of writing paper she had and then making do with the brown paper that had wrapped the

groceries. The storm still howled, and still she wrote. Not until dinner was she done, pouring onto paper what has since become the famous martyr scene of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The scene completed, she arose, fixed a light supper, and gathered the children round to hear.

The children were in tears. "Oh, Ma! Slavery is the most cruel thing in the world!" the littlest child sobbed, and Harriet folded the manuscript, knowing she had her story at last.

But in the morning she felt differently. Too harsh, too brutal. She put it away in a bedside bureau. When Calvin came home in March, he came out of the bedroom where he'd been rummaging about for some papers. His face was streaked in tears. He held out his wife's manuscript.

"Hattie, dear," he said, "this is your story. You must begin at once. Start at the beginning and work your way up to this. If you can do it, you'll have written the greatest story ever told."

Uncle Tom's Cabin did become the greatest story ever told in American literature. Politically, the book sparked the wrath of the North. Abraham Lincoln, when meeting her, said, "So here's the little lady who started the big war," and it was he who credited her and "Uncle Tom" for swaying England to the side of the North in the Civil War. All around the world great leaders sought her out, and gifts from countries far and wide came in. In the literary world, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Charles Dickens, Heinrich Heine, Henry James, George Sand, John Greenleaf Whittier, Thomas Macaulay, and Leo Tolstoy paid homage, declaring her work a mark of literary genius. In just four months Mrs. Stowe made ten thousand dollars, more money than her husband could make in ten years. She went on to make hundreds of thousands of dollars, grossing more money than had ever been made on a novel. The book was translated into forty languages and sold millions of copies all over the world. At one point nineteen companies performed the play on stage, sometimes as many as three shows a day, and it was the longest running play in American theater, running uninterrupted for eighty-one years.

For a time, though, the literary world forgot all about Harriet Beecher Stowe and her Uncle Tom. The writing was considered too "predictably religious" and heralded as sentimental drivel. But in recent years she's been rediscovered and is now recognized as one of the country's most gifted folklorists. Why?

Because Uncle Tom chose, like Christ, to die so that others might live. What was he being beaten for? What did Harriet "figure out"?

He was to confess the whereabouts of two escaped slave women, but he wouldn't do it. His master would have them torn to shreds. The story has come back into its own because martyrdom, as brutal and ugly and "predictably religious" as it is, always holds power WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



JANE

Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—
For your love is more delightful than wine.

- Song of Solomon 1:2 (NIV)

When Jane Eyre discovered on her wedding day that her groom was already married, and married to an insane woman at that, she fled Thornfield Hall. A distraught parting to be sure, and she nearly wavered. "Think of his misery," she cried unto herself. "Think of his danger—look at his state when left alone; remember his headlong nature; consider the recklessness following on despair—soothe him, save him, love him, tell him you love him and will be his."²⁰ But how could she choose to sacrifice herself, when once she was "an ardent, expectant woman—almost a bride," but was now a "cold, solitary girl again"? The choice to redeem and save must come from a strong sense of Self, and this Jane Eyre no longer possessed.

We all know the story. Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre wandered the countryside for several days. St. John found her, his sisters nursed her back to health, and in her time with them came to discover more of her identity. She was their cousin for one thing. She was also a teacher. She was even rich, for she'd inherited unknown wealth. And a year after her flight from Thornfield she was also the object of St. John's designs. In June he proposed. Not because he loved her, but because she would make a "suitable helpmeet" on the mission fields of India. She immediately objected on the grounds that she had no vocation for it. "I have," said he, "an answer for you—hear it." He

went on to say how he'd studied her for ten months and how he'd found that she could "perform well, punctually, uprightly," and that he'd found in her the "complement of the qualities I seek." Namely, she was "docile, diligent, disinterested, faithful, constant and courageous; very gentle, and very heroic." Furthermore, it was God's will she do this. Her refusal could be nothing but a deliberate choice to deny God. In short, St. John tried to coerce from her a choice for martyrdom so that his own needs might be met with no consideration for her own.

Bronte subtly points out several ironies here. First of all, St. John for all his truth and perfection did not love Jane, whereas Rochester, for all his deceit and homeliness, did. Second, the loveless marriage to a missionary was something society would approve of, whereas a loving marriage to Rochester was not. Third, while both men tried desperately to beg her hand in marriage, St. John tried to do it by "telling" her how things were going to be, Rochester asked. Fourth, St. John "told" Jane who she was, Rochester admitted he didn't know. And finally, when all was said and done, St. John did not allow Jane the choice to martyr herself. Rochester did.

And Jane, thinking of St. John's proposal, realized, "No: such a martyrdom would be monstrous." God did not give her life to just throw it away, as surely she would if she married a man who could value her no more than a soldier might a good gun.

But martyrdom to Rochester? Suddenly these ironies, standing back to back, prompted her to return to Thornfield, and Rochester. She was a different person, she knew more of herself, she was no longer cold and solitary. Perhaps ... well, she was just going to have to find out whether she would be of greater use remaining in England or leaving it.

We know the ending.

"Jane, will you marry me?"

"Yes, sir."

"A poor blind man, whom you will have to lead about by the hand?"

"Yes, sir."

"A crippled man, twenty years older than you, whom you will have to wait on?"

"Yes, sir."

"Truly, Jane?"

“Mr. Rochester, if ever I did a good deed in my life—if ever I thought a good thought—if ever I prayed a sincere and blameless prayer—if ever I wished a righteous wish—I am rewarded now. To be your wife is, for me, to be as happy as I can be on earth.”

“Because you delight in sacrifice?”

“Sacrifice! What do I sacrifice? Famine for food, expectation for content. To be privileged to put my arms round what I value—to press my lips to what I love—to repose on what I trust: is that to make a sacrifice? If so, then certainly I delight in sacrifice.”

Through Jane, one of the most loved women in all of English literature, certainly one of the most well-known, we learn there is nothing but delight in sacrifice—WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



LINDA

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.

Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”

- Mark 12:41-44 (NIV)

At the time of divorce a woman’s standard of living decreases by 73 percent while a man’s increases by 42 percent.²¹ Can you imagine losing almost 75 percent of your current income overnight? What would you do? You’d lose your home, your health, your peace of mind. Worse, and this is probably what cripples a single mother

most, she loses her ability to give. So busy trying to keep food on the table, she has no money or time to spare.

When she turns to the Bible for comfort, it seems only to mock a pain that won't go away. What can she give? Even the poor widow in the book of Mark had more than she. The widow at least had two copper coins to rub together.

Linda Whipple of Los Angeles was no different than any of the other twelve million single mothers in America.²² Divorced and left with two children, one and three years old, she was caught in financial ruin. No money for rent, for food, for clothing. What could she give? "What I missed most," she says, "was not being able to give anything. I would look around ... and nothing. What is there when you literally don't have two pennies to rub together?"

But Linda Whipple found something she could give—her blood. "It was my first attempt to give back," she says, and you can still hear the pain in her voice as she talks of those days. "I'm grateful to the Red Cross. They gave me an opportunity to give, to have a ministry."

For a long time this widow's mite was all Linda could give, until Fullerton Evangelical Free Church in Fullerton, CA, gave her a place of leadership under Gary Richmond, the country's only single-parent pastor in 1985, where she served as coordinator of the church's "Ounce of Prevention" program. If the Bible were being written today, I suspect her name would be in its pages, for Linda Whipple reminds us all that no matter how poor we may be, we need not feel victimized. Martyrdom, the widow's mite or a pint of blood are gifts beyond measure WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



JUNE

There was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the LORD to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect

in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

I met June Masters Bacher years ago at the Christian Booksellers Association. I recognized her from the pictures on her books and went over to say hello. She and I were Harvest House Publisher's historical novelists. We became instant friends, because that's just the way June is. Bob Hawkins Sr. of Harvest House awarded her with a leather-bound volume of a book that had just sold its millionth copy. I was impressed, particularly in light of what she'd just told me.

June lived in chronic pain so debilitating she had to lay flat on her back, getting up only fifteen minutes of every hour to write. Most of us would quit, turn on the soap operas by remote control, and feel sorry for ourselves. Not June.

"I prayed for healing, a release from the iron claws of this pain," she told me, bolstered for the rough and tumble and autograph parties with pain-killing drugs. "But that has failed to come—maybe sometime, but he has healed me in other ways. He gives me the strength to carry on and has blessed me with success, a miracle under the circumstances."

Strength to carry on. Giving and sharing and encouraging, June did carry on, not from a position of weakness at all but from incredible strength. I latched onto her, I think, because she provided a role model I needed in my own life.

When I had to go in for painful tests without anesthetic, I wrote to June, confident she'd been through it and could help. She could, and did. "We must be good girls," she told me, "and do all that the doctors tell us. The Lord is with us." And then she added, "And maybe with them!"

At the first of a new year, she wrote another letter typical of God's sustaining strength amidst trying weakness. "By the way," she wrote, "I took a terrible tumble and really did myself in." She'd skinned the left side of her face so badly that grafting had nearly been required; damaged her not-so-good spine so that it felt broken in about seven places; and sprained her left wrist. "With arthritis in

my right thumb,” she wrote, “how to write? Would you believe that very day I completed my next book?”

I believed it.

The beat goes on, as she says, and there is no point in wearying everyone with aches and pains. “We must,” she says, “contribute to a world that hurts in other ways. Although,” she adds, “I feel I do so little to brighten this world. Perhaps out there somewhere someone has been helped?”

Does she need to ask?

The world is always helped when we give and share and encourage from a position of strength, particularly when it’s strength born of God in the midst of weakness WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



CHRISTY

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

- Matthew 10:39 (NIV)

In the novel *Christy* by Catherine Marshall, the Quaker missionary Miss Henderson asks nineteen year-old Christy Huddleston why she has come to the mission in the back hills of Tennessee. Has she gotten carried away with Dr. Ferrand’s emotional appeal?

Christy admits that most girls her age can easily be carried away, but she’s had four months to back out and hasn’t. She wants to teach school, to make her life count, to work with children, but it all sounds so lame when she says it. Why *is* she here?

Christy Huddleston threw herself into the tasks at hand, sacrificing both energy and time—and her finer “sensibilities.” Daily she pushed her nose into perfumed handkerchiefs so she could teach dirty children their sums. Daily she listened to the endless prattle of Ruby Mae. Daily she visited the sick, encouraged the discouraged. Daily she brought pleasure and delight to as many as she could find.

But what did it all mean? Why was she doing all this? Dr. MacNeil scorned her inability to name it.

“What does it mean to *you*?” he wanted to know when she could only talk of Miss Henderson’s beliefs. What was her own working philosophy of life? he insisted. The more she tried to explain, the more muddled she got and finally, exasperated more with herself than with him, she exploded in fury and ran from the room.

But she carried on. Before long she was called upon to wash and dress a baby killed by a loving yet superstitious mother. Within weeks she had to confront a man who’d just as soon shoot her dead for having yanked his insolent son up by the hair. In the full bloom of spring she wept over the death of her friend, Fairchild, taken by the “Shadow.” Giving, and more giving. And then the typhoid epidemic hit and David, the young minister at the mission, urged her to leave.

Run away? Think of nothing or no one but her own skin? Why, she couldn’t leave! She loved being here! What would she do without Opal’s faith? Little Burl Allen’s love? Zady’s hope? Suddenly she knew why she was here and what life meant.

“You see, David,” she said, finally understanding herself, “it’s just that when I volunteered to come to the mountains, I thought it was from really lofty motives—because I loved people and wanted to help them. But now I know that wasn’t the reason at all. I came for me.”²³

Jesus said that whoever finds their life will lose it, but that whoever loses their life will find it. And as Christy Huddleston in the backwoods country of Tennessee discovered, we do find meaning and significance when we give. Sometimes for ourselves, WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



MOTHER MARY

“Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to call him the name Jesus ...”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

- Luke 1:30-34 (NIV)

Was Mary drawing water at the well in Nazareth when the stranger approached? Or was she washing butter, packing it into earthen vessels? What was she doing when a man she'd never seen before said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

“Excuse me?”

I wonder, did the bucket fall from her hand, warm water splash across her hot and dusty feet? Did she drop her bowl? Did it break? Did she hasten to gather the precious butter coated now in dust and dirt? Kneeling, scooping, heart beating fast?

Artists for hundreds of years have attempted to draw the expression on Mary's face when told the news of her virgin pregnancy, a face sweet with angelic repose and acceptance. Yet the Bible tells us Mary was troubled. Her eyes must have darted, her fingers trembled. Her mind must have been a tumbler of thoughts and it must have been with great effort that she gathered her wits. “Excuse me, sir,” she must have politely said. “But there is work I must do.”

“Do not be afraid, Mary.”

He knew her name?

Did her heart slow? Did she take a second look? Did she see the angel before her or only a man?

“You have found favor with God,” the stranger told her. “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High.”

Her hand involuntarily went to her abdomen. Does he talk of the *Messiah*?

“The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“But how will this be?” She blushed suddenly at the sound of her own voice and put her hands to her face. “Since I am a virgin?”

“The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God.”

But this is impossible!

“Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age.”

This too is impossible!

“She who is barren is in her sixth month. Nothing is impossible with God.”

He could read her mind, and the thoughts tumbled about as Mary picked up her bucket or bowl and busied herself, drawing new water, resetting the butter. A child? Me? Elizabeth? But how? Who? Not the Messiah—surely the man jests! *But was he a man?* He stood as if waiting for a response.

No, I don’t think Mary’s face was one of sweet repose and calm acceptance. There could only have been fright. She had to have thought of Joseph, her betrothed. What would he say? He would divorce her. She could even be stoned. Did she gasp? Put a hand to her throat? Her father, her own father! What would her dear father think? *But how could this be?* It can’t!

If it was water she’d drawn, did the man walk alongside her down the narrow streets toward her mother’s home, carelessly bumping into children who darted too fast before them? If it was butter she’d been washing, did he take the pat from her hand and find a new bowl? Did he help pick up the broken shards?

How long did it take Mary to make her choice, a choice to martyr herself to the will of God, for surely this man must be an angel? How long did it take before she turned, eyes still troubled with things she couldn’t understand, but mind made up, to say to the stranger—angel, “I am the Lord’s servant.”

We have no way of knowing. But we know it was her choice. She willingly sacrificed her reputation, her marriage, her very life to something she could not fully comprehend. “May it be to me as you have said,” she said, giving the angel her consent.

It wasn’t until Elizabeth, six months pregnant, confirmed the truth of the stranger’s words that Mary’s fear vanished and the peace of the artist’s pictures found its place in her heart. Only when Elizabeth said, “Blessed are you among women,” did Mary lose her troubled thoughts. Listen! Can you hear her joy when she sings?

My soul glorifies the LORD

And my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

For he has been mindful

Of the humble state of his servant.
 From now on all generations will call me blessed
 for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
 holy is his name.

The artist says there is sweet repose and calm acceptance when martyrdom is thrust into our laps, but this is not so. For a time we may be troubled, as was Mary, but in the end, as we begin to understand, we will find our peace, as did Mary WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



BREND A

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying,
 “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.”

- Matthew 18:1-6 (KJV)

After my divorce many years ago, I had to sell my two-story Seattle home and rent a smaller house in Bellevue across the lake, unfortunately in the “seedy” section of this upper middle-class city. My children went to school dressed in hand-me-downs donated to a

local church while their friends wore brand new outfits, looking like they'd just stepped out of a Nordstrom catalog. I promised myself that when my oldest moved up to middle school—when clothes begin to mark a child's social acceptability—I'd move her and her younger brothers to a more economically diverse community. Which meant looking north to a smaller town ninety miles away.

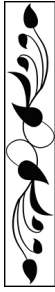
It also meant moving out of the writing community I enjoyed, where I had exposure to networking, teaching, serving on the board for the Pacific NW Writer's Association, and meeting new people who could further my career. I'd lose my professional edge.

I'd lose, too, my church; important for two reasons. One, they took me in when the church I was attending at the time of my divorce threw me out. Two, they gave me a ministry in the divorce recovery program. More importantly, instead of tithing, which I couldn't afford (my tithe check bounced!), my minister suggested I instead tithe my time and write for the church paper. Clearly, to move elsewhere would be a hit to my professional and spiritual life.

The choice was mine. I wanted to stay, but my children would suffer. Looking to my own interests was not an option. Jesus put it rather bluntly, better a millstone tied around my neck and tossed into the sea.

Heather, Phillip, and Blake thrived in the smaller, blue-collar college town, a more middle-class community. They made friends and went to church around the corner where they enjoyed an active youth ministry. I'd been warned about teenage years, especially for single-parent kids. But I never experienced a moment of distress. They were content and busy. And grew into wonderful adults, happy in their marriages, successful in their careers, and able to give their children secure childhoods. While it might have seemed at first that I gave up a lot, how does one quantify the satisfaction a mother finds in watching her children grow into the people God created them to be?

In the end, this was my gain as well as theirs. Such is the power of suffering WHEN THE CHOICE TO GIVE IS OURS.



*L*OVING OURSELVES *The Forgotten Commandment*

... love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

- Leviticus 19:18 (NIV)

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus replied: “‘Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

- Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV)

*W*hen Dorothy asked the Tinman if he wanted to go to the Emerald City to ask the Wizard of Oz for a heart, he responded differently than one might expect.

“Well ... ” he said, his voice full of doubt, “suppose the Wizard wouldn’t give me one when we got there?”

The Tinman’s response is significant because he’s like many of us in the church today. We are women full of self-doubt and who feel unworthy of love, and if we are to believe James and Phyllis Alsdurf, authors of *Battered Into Submission*, there are, conservatively speaking, 22 percent of us in this boat, one out of every five. Women, who, like the Tinman, find it hard to believe (for we’ve been told in so many subtle and not so subtle ways) that what we need is not ours—just for the asking. We don’t deserve it.²⁴ Sad to say, too many of us sitting in the pews every Sunday morning feel this way. So we resort to “singing for our supper” in hopes of getting what we need.

We wash and cook and stand in grocery lines and go to meetings and pick up the dry cleaning and teach our Sunday school classes and blow dry our hair and run two miles and go on a diet and, and, and ... all in the hope we'll be rewarded and given a measure of consideration. Unlike the king who counts out his money while his maid hangs up his clothes, and unlike Old King Cole who can just call for his pipe and call for his bowl, we scurry about, jockeying for what we need.

I'll scratch your back. I'll turn the other cheek. I'll go the second mile. I'll give the coat off my back. We give and give and give, and give again, until suddenly we're no longer giving of ourselves anymore, but bargaining for the security and love that ought to be ours in the first place. Our martyrdom dissolves into nothing more than manipulation to ensure that our own needs are met—not someone else's. We are not Martyrs at all, we are Pseudo Martyrs.

The tragic part is that we don't actively know we're unloved; but we do suspect it. Which is why all the busy behavior. We Pseudo Martyr, desperate to keep from facing the bitter truth. We might not be loved.

One way to tell is to quit performing, to quit giving and sacrificing, and see what happens. It sounds threatening, doesn't it? But my husband ... But my boss ... But my daughter ... But my church ... But the ladies' group. Why are we so afraid to stop? Why are *you* afraid? Do you, like I once did, feel unloved? Is this why you give away so very much?

Eeyore in *Winnie-The-Pooh* felt unloved when everyone forgot his birthday; who wouldn't? So he did what we all do. He manipulated the conversation around to his birthday to see if he could get the assurance he needed that Pooh and Piglet cared. When they at last dutifully asked why he was so sad, he said he wasn't. It was his birthday, after all, the happiest day of the year.

Whenever we feel unloved we wind up like Eeyore, the Pseudo Martyr; and instead of generating redemption, which is what being a true Martyr is all about, we generate guilt. Poor Pooh and poor Piglet, feeling terribly guilty, had to scamper off quick as a wink, Pooh one way, Piglet another, to get poor Eeyore a present at once.

Eeyore? Needy, feeling unloved, he—and we—are not in a very good position to offer genuine sacrifice, are we? We are too concerned

about our own unmet needs, and it's not that this is right or wrong (for our needs *must* be met), it is our reality.

The answer, though, is not to buckle down and give even more of ourselves, which is what I tried to do for many years—and which I still catch myself doing. I still tend to turn myself inside out, trying to get people to “remember my birthday.” But the answer is not to turn ourselves inside out and sad like Eeyore, but to start loving ourselves.

Not an easy task for a lot of us. In the first place, it flies in the face of all we've been taught. Remember the old J-O-Y slogan from primary days at Sunday school: Jesus first, Others next, Yourself last? J-O-Y? Scott Peck in *The Road Less Traveled* refutes this theory as impossible, and we need to listen. “We are incapable,” he says, “of loving another unless we love ourselves.”²⁵ Jesus agrees. “Love your neighbor as yourself,” he says, but we keep interpreting it to mean *instead of*.

In the second place, if the truth be known, loving one self feels to the Pseudo Martyr like cutting off all chance of being loved. *No one will love me*, we think, *if I love and take care of myself*. We've been taught for too long that self care is selfish. So fear stops us. What will happen if I decide to go to school? Take the job? Shoot for the promotion? Spend time on myself? Spend *money* on myself? If I take care of myself—or *think of myself in any way and don't sacrifice everything for everyone in my life*—no one will ever even *like* me anymore!

Maybe so. This may be a sacrifice we have to make—sacrifice our need to be loved. I had to. As long as we need to be loved, it's difficult to receive it. “If being loved is your goal,” says Peck, banging me and you and Eeyore over the head with the truth, “you will fail to achieve it.” He goes on to say, “The only way to be assured of being loved is to be a person worthy of love,”²⁶ and we're right back to loving ourselves first and attaching to ourselves a measure of worth.

“But!” we say, terrified of birthdays going by unnoticed. But! Look at what happened to Eeyore—not over his birthday, but over something else. Something a little more serious.

Eeyore didn't have a house. He lived in a field. And one winter it got pretty cold, snow flying around, and no one thought to build him a house! They had gray fluff blown into their heads by mistake,

he told Christopher Robin. But in *this* story, Eeyore took a different tack. He built himself a house.

What it comes down to is that Eeyore decided not to manipulate his friends into meeting his needs (like he did at his birthday), and to instead accept the fact that maybe they didn't care if he froze to death. Maybe he wasn't loved. So he chose to build his own house—even though self care felt lonely and selfish.

Years ago it was a little cold in my field too, only I was not nearly so capable as even poor Eeyore. Unloved and feeling as though I might "freeze to death," I was fortunate enough to have a doctor—no gray fluff in his ears—who was concerned.

I was having to go in for a series of weekly experimental IV injections and he started giving me the task, each week, of finding something I could do just for myself. Progress was slow. I found it difficult to put the Y before the O, and J-Y-O kept clanging in my head like warped cymbals. Finally he took to writing prescriptions, sending me not to the pharmacy but the shopping mall. He eased me into it. First a bottle of nail polish. When I got so I could do that without feeling too terribly selfish, he increased the "dose." Gradually, he taught me to love myself enough to take care of my own needs and a miracle occurred. People started loving me. And poor Eeyore? Once he took it into his head to do something nice for himself—like build a house when he needed one—he found himself loved as well. No sooner had he gotten the job done, and gone to tell Christopher Robin, when Pooh and Piglet, sitting on a gate in the snow, got to thinking about poor Eeyore, about how he had no house of his own, about the snowy, cold field, about how maybe they could build him a house—so they did. A nice little house right at Pooh Corner.

Loving ourselves always invites others to do the same.

And this is the miracle people like you and me and Eeyore are slow to learn. If we value ourselves, other people will value us as well—without being manipulated into it. And in the end we receive all the love we could ever ask for, and more.

I know this is not Pooh Corner and not where we live, and that those who live at our house don't always love us back as did Piglet and Pooh. Sometimes they leave us behind; sometimes they even take the house with them. But our fairy tales remind us that love abounds. Cinderella. Rapunzel. Thumbelina. And what about the Bible's very own fairy tale? What about Ruth?

According to Jewish law a kinsman could redeem Ruth, but her closest kinsman-redeemer rejected her. Which is important for those of us who risk not being loved in order to love ourselves. The process often leaves us rejected by kinsmen closest to us. But the Bible assures us that if we are committed to loving ourselves as much as, and not instead of, our neighbors, there is a second kinsman-redeemer waiting in the wings—Boaz. For the truth is, there is no shortage of loving people in this world, not if we love ourselves enough to bring them out of the woods. I discovered this to be true in my own life, as did Eeyore, as did Ruth, and as did the Tinman in *The Wizard of Oz*.

“Oil my arms please,” said the Tinman, “oil my elbows.”

He loved himself enough to ask that his needs be met, and in the process he found that he was loved by both the Scarecrow and Dorothy in return. Because this is just the way it works.

And what this does for me, for you, for Eeyore, the Tinman, and Ruth of the Old Testament and everyone else, is free us up to make choices for honest sacrifice based on love and not need, and we move into a whole new realm of giving. No longer Pseudo Martyr, bargaining for worth and love, full of doubts about our value, we’re free to make redemptive choices for the good of others because we’ve chosen to, with no thought of return.

“Dorothy,” says the Tinman, ‘I’ll see you reach the Wizard, whether I get a heart or not.’”



Such choices for this kind of honest martyrdom put us back on the yellow brick road with the wicked witch and her fireballs. Many of us resist. It’s much easier to remain the Pseudo Martyr, frittering away our lives with piecemeal and sometimes painful sacrifices—because it excuses us from bigger issues, like getting Dorothy to the Wizard in the Emerald City. A battered woman doesn’t have to resolve evil on a grand scale if she’s consumed on a personal level. A busy housewife doesn’t have to reach out and help anyone else if she’s consumed with her own “sacrificial” affairs. A college professor doesn’t have to help a struggling student if she’s consumed by academic politics that bleed her of energy and time. If we feel weighted with the martyrdom we experience in our own backyard, strung up on a pole of everyone else’s expectation or rusting away uselessly in the woods, we never

have to do anything redemptive in the wicked world beyond the picket gate and down the road.

But the courageous rally forth. We want to know how to sacrifice redemptively and how to give of ourselves for the good of others.

It's a little scary. Dorothy doesn't like the forest when the three newfound friends round a bend in the yellow brick road. It's dark and creepy. The Tinman, the Scarecrow, and Dorothy pause arm in arm and look about apprehensively, sensing dragons that could inflict real pain. The sun is gone. The air is damp. The music has suddenly grown menacing and we shiver, hearing now the frightening forest noises. "Do you suppose we'll meet any wild animals?" Dorothy asks.

"Um, some," says the Tinman. "But mostly lions, tigers, and bears."

"Lions and tigers and bears, oh my." They hasten forward. "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my!" Arm in arm, faster and faster they hurry through the woods. "Lions and tigers and bears, oh my! LIONS AND TIGERS AND BEARS, OH MY!" Faster, faster. They break into a run.

During World War II, Corrie ten Boom, despite her faith in God, found it terribly frightening to be a Martyr and face the unknown of lions and tigers and bears—until she remembered the words of her martyred father, a wise and loving man. A child, she'd asked if he was sure God would give her strength when she needed it.

"Corrie," he'd said gently, "when you and I go to Amsterdam—when do I give you your ticket?"

"Just before we get on the train."

"Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we're going to need things too. Don't run ahead of him, Corrie. When the time comes ... you will look into your heart and find the strength you need—just in time."²⁷

"Roar-rr!" A lion leaps from the forest. The Scarecrow and Tinman fall back. Dorothy flies behind a tree. The Lion makes a jab at them all and they cower in defeat! Except Toto. Like all dogs, he barks!

The Lion roars again and takes off after Dorothy's little dog. But wait—Dorothy springs into action.

"Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam—when do I give you your ticket?"

“Just before we get on the train.”

“When the time comes ... you will look into your heart and find the strength you need.”

In order to protect her dog, Dorothy flies out from behind her tree and grabs Toto into her arms—strength and courage hers just in time. She is ready to die to save the little dog she loves. And this is what the role of Martyr is all about.

There’s more. Dorothy strikes back. She slaps the Lion across the nose. “Shame on you,” she scolds, stunning us all. She has changed her mind. She is not going to be a martyr after all. She is going to fight back. She is going to be a Warrior—for while there are dragons that can be redeemed through sacrifice, there are also dragons that can, and must, be slain. We’re ready for the next task of the journey: learning what it means to be a Warrior, and to fight.



NOTES

1. Matthew 14:14 (TEV).
2. Matthew 12:15 (TEV).
3. Mark 8:3 (TEV).
4. John 6:15 (TEV).
5. Luke 18:15-17 (TEV).
6. Matthew 12:39 (TEV).
7. John 10:17, 18 (RSV). [emphasis mine]
8. Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within* (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1986), 105.
9. Pearson, *The Hero Within*, 106.
10. Mark 8:35 (RSV).
11. Rufus Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies* (New York: W. Norton Co., Inc., 1966), 70, 71.
12. *Records of Massachusetts Colony*, vol. iv. part i., 345.
13. *Records of Massachusetts Colony*, 383.
14. Jones, *The Quakers in the American Colonies*, 85.
15. *Records of Massachusetts Colony*, 384.
16. *Records of Massachusetts Colony*, 419.
17. Joshua 2:12 (NIV).
18. Joshua 6:17 (NIV).
19. Johanna Johnston, *Runaway to Heaven* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963), 199.
20. Charlotte Bronte, *Jane Eyre* (New York: New American Library, 1960).

21. Lenore Weitzman, *The Divorce Revolution* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), 325.
22. Brenda Wilbee, "Part of the Family," *Moody Monthly*, October 1987, 20.
23. Catherine Marshall, *Christy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 470.
24. James and Phyllis Alsdurf, *Battered Into Submission*, quoted in *Battered Into Submission*, "Christianity Today", 16 June 1989, 24.
25. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 82.
26. Peck, *The Road Less Traveled*, 102.
27. Corrie ten Boom, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *The Hiding Place* (Old Tappan, NJ: Chosen Books, 1971).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion.

- 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NIV)

Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

Proverbs 31:9 (NIV)

A Martyr chooses to self-sacrifice not from compulsion but from a position of power and purpose—compatible with what God has called her to do and always with the redemption and restoration of herself and others in mind.

1. Like Cinderella, have you been compelled to martyr yourself for someone else's pleasure?
2. Is the person demanding your servitude interested in your well being—or their own?
3. What did you think Jesus meant when he told the church leaders of his day, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice"? (Matthew 9:13)
4. Have you ever asked God what his purpose is for you?
5. What do you fear will happen if you claim God's purpose for your life and abandon the one someone else has defined for you?
6. Are you a Pseudo Martyr? Name a time when you had to manipulate to get your needs met. Are you afraid of being unloved?
7. Have you ever known what it means to martyr yourself in order to *alleviate* suffering rather than *endure* it?
8. Who needs your sacrifice today? Is it compatible with what God's called you to do? Will it bring redemption for someone in need?

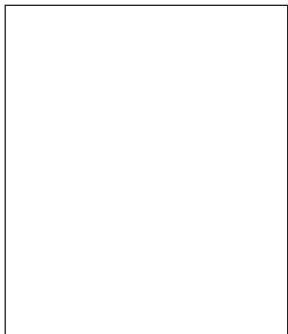
A reminder:

A gift opens the way and ushers the giver into the presence of the great.

Proverbs 18:16 (NIV)

Prayer:

Please teach us to recognize your abiding love in ourselves and those who need us. Help us to love ourselves, and out of that love claim the purpose for which you made us. Only then can we Martyr ourselves effectively, offering self-sacrificial gifts that redeem and restore those in need, and which sometimes come back to us, but always ushers us into the presence of the great. Amen.

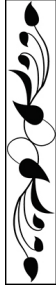


"It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him."

— J. R. R. Tolkien
The Hobbit

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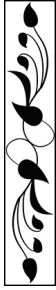
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SIX - *W*ARRIOR

“How do I slay this dragon?”

- Deborah the Warrior



A TIME FOR WAR *Even For Women*

These are the nations the LORD left to test all those Israelites who had not experienced any of the war in Canaan (he did this only to teach warfare to the descendants of the Israelites who had not had previous battle experience) ...

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time.

- Judges 3:1, 2; 4:4 (NIV)

Sometimes we have to fight back. The Orphan, Pilgrim, or Martyr options don't always solve the problem. In *The Wizard of Oz*, poor Dorothy has had about all she can take. First Miss Gulch, then the wicked Witch of the West, now a roaring Lion. "Shame on you!" she hollers, moving swiftly and forcefully into the Warrior role by smacking the Lion a good one on the nose. "It's bad enough when you pick on a straw man, but when you go around picking on poor little dogs!"

When the church teaches women and children to always turn the other cheek, they do everyone great disservice—some dragons simply do not respond to anything but brute force. M. Scott Peck says, "I have learned nothing in twenty years that would suggest that evil people can be rapidly influenced by any means other than raw power. They do not respond, at least in the short run, to either gentle kindness or any form of spiritual persuasion ... " Sometimes, the Warrior learns, it takes a slap across the nose to save Toto.

Thirteen centuries before Christ, the Canaanites apparently needed a slap too. For twenty years they'd been oppressing the Israelites;

and the Israelites, like Dorothy, were fed up. But, unlike Dorothy, they were afraid. Sisera, commander of the Canaanite army, had nine hundred iron chariots. Men and women alike cowered in the face of such overwhelming odds. Everyone, that is, but Deborah.

Deborah is one of the more fascinating women of the Bible. Wife of Lappidoth, an obscure man in Hebrew history, she was the only woman to rise to the height of political power by consent of the people. She was judge, ruler, prophet, and military hero, and few women in world history have attained such public respect, supreme authority, and military command.

She held court under the royal Palm of Deborah on the open road between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, where Samuel would someday be born. There she heard cases of controversy and dispensed justice, and there she heard the increasingly frequent stories of oppression from the Canaanites. She burned with indignation. Why was this being allowed to continue? She called Barak to her court, one of the country's most capable military men. "The Lord God," she told him in no uncertain terms, "has commanded that you take ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. I myself will go down and lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with all his chariots and troops, to the Kishon River so you can storm them by force."

"If you go with me, I'll go," the military captain said. "But if you don't, I won't."

We learn from the Jewish historian Josephus (and indirectly from the "Song of Deborah" in Judges 5) that when Deborah and Barak led their troops against Sisera a storm came up. Sleet and hail burst over the valley from the east and drove straight into the face of Sisera and his army.² "Up!" cried Deborah from where she and Barak stood on a lofty rock watching the slingers and archers below disabled by the biting cold. "For this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand! See? Is not the Lord gone out before thee?" Rain and wind to their backs, down they swept, ten thousand and a woman against nine hundred iron chariots stuck in the mud of the raging Kishon River. Not a man was spared.

Sometimes God calls women to war. When the dragon roars with nine hundred chariots downwind, we end up on the front line whether we like it or not.

We resist. Being a Warrior is a man's role, and we know that for us to take up arms is to strike at the very heart of what it means to be a woman. Female Warriors have always been punished swiftly, silenced by sexual slurs, their femininity called into question, deemed mad. Colonial Anne Hutchinson, when she taught that women could read and find meaning in the word of God just as capably as men, was declared by Puritan Boston to be a "rebel with a confused, bewildered mind, and a woman 'whose stern and masculine mind ... triumphed over the tender affections of a wife and mother.'"³ Leaders of the suffrage movement were called lesbians. Harriet Beecher Stowe was considered a busybody who didn't take care of her family. Feminists who want equal rights, are called man haters. Historically and currently, a woman Warrior is unacceptable, and we need only look at the children's book *Dumbo* to see the truth of this.

The stork delivers a baby to Mrs. Jumbo, who is "expecting," All the old ladies cluck. My, my, what a cutey pie. One leans over to tickle his chin. Kootchy-kootchy-coo.

Katchoo! Out flop two very big ears.

A horrified gasp. Then tee-hee. Everyone titters.

One catty old biddy pulls on the little guy's ears. In Disney's film, Mrs. Jumbo smacks the offending trunk—just like Dorothy with the Lion. A sound slap on the nose.

The "ladies" get in a huff. Who cares about her little Jumbo anyway? You mean *Dumbo*?

Haha. Hahahaha! Titter titter, hee-hee-hee.

Furious, Mrs. Jumbo sees the peg that holds the partition door up, and up swings her trunk. BANG! Down swings the door and Dumbo is spared further mockery.

But later, when the circus is in full swing, a little boy with his own big ears comes by. He sticks out his tongue, then ducks under the fence to blow into Dumbo's ear. *Hahahaha!*

Mrs. Jumbo picks up the insolent brat with her trunk, drapes him over the fence and proceeds to spank his upturned bottom, an understandable response to the conflict at hand.

A female Warrior? In my *Dumbo* Golden Book, everyone came running; circus hands generating panic where no panic need be, throwing lassos and frightening poor Mrs. Jumbo into a bellowing, defensive fight. Up she goes on her hind legs, trumpeting. The ropes slide over her neck, yank tight. Down she comes. Her punishment

is swift and sure. She's separated from the baby she loves, led away to solitary confinement with bars on the windows. A bold sign is banged into place: DANGER! MAD ELEPHANT! Even in our children's books a woman Warrior is declared insane.

No wonder we fear the Warrior role above all others. We'd rather do anything than look a dragon in the eye and say, "You are a dragon and I'm going to slay you." The dragon breathes real fire. We're going to get burned. There is going to be blood, most likely ours, and few of us have courage enough to face such gravity. We're not Dorothy, we're not Mrs. Jumbo. We're the cowardly Lion and we don't mind admitting it.

"You're right, I am a coward," the Lion confesses to Dorothy. "I haven't any courage at all."



The immediate task of the Warrior is to come to terms with personal fear. We do this, says Maria in *The Sound of Music*, by "facing it." Which is what the Wizard (in his bumbling way) understood. When Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion finally get in to see him, he says, "You must prove yourselves worthy by performing a very small task. Bring me the broomstick of the wicked Witch of the West."

"But what if she kills us first?" the trembling Lion asks.

"I said GO!"

The Lion flees, and so do we.

When I separated from my husband way back in the 1980s, six-year-old Heather was attending first grade at a local parochial school. There were only six weeks left in the year and I had no money to pay the tuition. It pained me to think of transferring my daughter to public school for such a short time, particularly since she'd be required to ride a bus with kids she didn't know for three-quarters of an hour, one way. Life was disruptive enough. Yet her father refused to lend a hand, and for me to keep her at Holy Trinity of God was like the Lion being asked to get the witch's broomstick. Emotionally, I fled.

Pearson in *The Hero Within* says that because women are so afraid of the Warrior role, they are often only "seduced" into the fray to save others.⁴ Only when our back is up against the wall do we come out flying, never mind our fear. Deborah the prophet. Mrs. Jumbo the elephant. Dorothy the Orphan. You. Me.

Even the cowardly Lion.

When the wicked witch captured Dorothy, the three friends wound their way up a steep, craggy mountain to the witch's lair to rescue her.

"I've got a plan on how to get in there," says the Scarecrow when they stop for a rest and consultation. "And you," he says, looking at the Lion, "are going to lead us."

"I gotta get her out of there?" the Lion asks, trembling, holding his tail. We all tremble. Impossible. Dangerous. *I have to keep Heather in school?* Suddenly the Lion says, surprising us all, "All right. I'll go in there. For Dorothy."

Me too. Trembling, holding my tail, I had to say, "All right. I'll do it. For Heather."

Love and the need to protect seduce us into the fray—and like the cowboy who gets back up on the horse that threw him it's the battle that teaches us how very courageous we are.

I knew my husband had a savings account in a bank in San Jose, California. But which bank? And how much?

I started to call around, praying for the Lion's "nerve" each time I dialed. It may seem an easy task, but for me, a woman who'd never been allowed access to money, this was terrifying. I had no idea what I was doing. Too, I'd never done anything without express approval. I couldn't even subscribe to a magazine without permission and *now I wanted to tap into a bank account?* This frightened me more than asking "Do you have an account for Mr. and Mrs. ..." Finally someone said yes.

The account had \$3000 in it. I breathed a huge sigh of relief. Not so fast. Eighteen hundred, the bank lady said, had been drawn out in the last month. "Eighteen hundred dollars?" I whelped, Heather's first grade picture hanging off the wall, smiling down at me, front teeth missing. "How," I asked, finding that Lion's nerve, "do I get the rest out?"

"Two hundred of the remaining twelve hundred isn't mature yet," she explained. "But if you send a letter asking for the thousand I can send you a check." One thousand out of three. By law I was entitled to \$1500. Even so, asking for the thousand dollars felt uncomfortably dangerous and sly. I wrote the letter anyway. *Soooo*

sneaky. I put it out for the postman. *Soooo* underhanded. By night I was in a state. I called my husband.

"I just wanted you to know," I told him, "that I withdrew a thousand dollars from the savings account in California. But I needed that money," I hastened to explain, "to keep Heather in school."

"When did you close it out?"

"You can have the other two hundred. I—"

"I said, *when did you send the letter?*"

"Today. They told me—"

He laughed like those cackling, cruel elephants in *Dumbo*. I can still hear it, a titter and mocking glee over having outsmarted me. "Oh, that's too bad," he said, amused and gloating. "I sent in a withdrawal slip three days ago, closing out the account."

The Tinman, the Scarecrow, and the Lion are all making plans to rescue Dorothy when three guards come over the wall and jump them. Jumped, I hung up. Ice in my gut, I stumbled for the couch. The dragon laughed in my face and I rocked back and forth, unbelieving. How could a father deny his daughter what he could afford to give? More to the point, *how*, I wondered, seeing only the impossible fortress of poverty, *was I going to keep Heather in school?* I knew I was being called to the front lines and was scared.

In Judges 3, the Lord left the remnants of four nations in the Promised Land to test the Israelites who had not yet experienced war. This was me. This is you. This is any of us who've never learned we sometimes have to fight in order to bring about change for good in a fallen world. But how, if the guards have all come over the wall and jumped us? How, if the dragon strikes back?

Sometimes courage isn't enough.



But God is. Weren't we all surprised when the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion peered over the rocky ridge wearing the enemy's clothes? But was Deborah surprised when wind and sleet drove down from heaven to swell the Kishon River and mire the wheels of her enemy's chariots? The very next night after the dragon laughed in my face I got a phone call. "How much did you say you withdrew?"

"A thousand dollars."

"I filled out my withdrawal slip for the whole twelve hundred. Two hundred isn't mature."

I knew that. What was he getting at?

“My slip for the twelve hundred dollars bounced.”

My heart lurched into double time. “You mean I get the money?”

“No. I’ll be over Friday to pick it up.”

Friday night his eyes bored into mine. “Give me the check.” He meant it, and I actually wavered. Then I remembered our daughter in bed. I looked him straight in the eye. “No.”

My first “no,” my first swing at the enemy, rattled me. As soon as he closed the front door, I went upstairs on wobbly feet. Moonlight fell through the open curtain onto my little girl’s face. I sat on nearby chair, physically shaking and sick to my stomach, and very grateful she couldn’t see me lay the broomstick at her feet.

Yes, sometimes God calls us to war. As women we’re afraid of it, we’re not very good at it, a lot of times we’re crushed by the back swing. But God, we find, is in the thick of it with us. He gives us the lion’s “nerve.”

“Wicked witch or no wicked witch, gods or no gods,” the cowardly Lion declares. “I’ll tear ‘em apart. I may not come out alive, but I’m going in there.”

I said, “I’ll do it for Heather.”

This is what we are sometimes called to do. But unlike the Lion, we know there’s God. And that sometimes he leads us straight into battle. For me, seventeen years of domestic court. But battle gives us the courage we seek and is proof to ourselves and the world that if we dare to fight back, some dragons can, and need to, be slain.



B R E N D A

There is a time for everything,
also a season for every activity under heaven ...
A time for war and a time for peace.

- Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8 (NIV)

Several years ago I had an appointment with an optometrist. The contacts I'd been wearing for fifteen years suddenly started to blur and I was blinking a lot. Things did not start off well when I was kept waiting ninety minutes and things only deteriorated when, after five minutes of throwing a few numbers on the wall and trying a few lenses in front of my eyes, he left for a fifteen-minute coffee break.

"Where'd you get the donuts today?" I heard him ask someone in a back room. Meanwhile, I sat drumming my fingers on the arm of a chair that held me three feet off the floor. But because I was still in the mode where one must always be pleasant, I was smiling when he came back in.

Without any further examination, he sat down and spat out a diagnosis of on-coming blindness and sent me on my way—still smiling and even exchanging pleasantries. A woman must be pleasant at all times, even when devastated. When I got the bill for seventy-five dollars, though, I quit smiling and quit being pleasant.

I sent the man a check for twenty-five dollars and told him it was all he was going to get. I explained that I'd gone to an ophthalmologist since seeing him and was given a full exam. I was diagnosed as having an allergy to spring pollen and given eye drops that resolved the problem within days. The bill for that was only fifty-four dollars. There simply was no way, I wrote, I could justify paying a higher fee to a mere optometrist who apparently did not know what he was doing.

This was one of the first times I poked a sleeping dragon. Fire erupted. The enraged optometrist sent the check back with a stern warning he would turn me over to a collection agency if I did not pay up. He stamped DELINQUENT ACCOUNT across a statement he'd

made up special for the occasion. To be honest, such power scared me. I had to either pay or suffer a black mark on a credit rating I'd worked so hard to keep clean. Kill or be killed, and there wasn't a whole lot I could do with this highway robbery. For days I went around in my own rage. Who was he to make up what amounted to a phony bill and have all the blessings of a system that would come down hard on me? Then it dawned on me while stirring the chili one night—if he could turn me over to a collection agency, why couldn't I do the same to him?

Taking a deep breath, for the concept of choices was still new to me, I sent him back my twenty-five dollar check—along with a bill for fifty to cover the time I'd spent waiting in his office. “You have thirty days to pay,” I wrote, “or I'll turn you over to a collection agency. It would, however, be much easier if you accepted the twenty-five dollars as payment in full. This would effectively cancel our mutual debts to each other.”

I never heard from him again, but I did get back my canceled check for twenty-five dollars, with his signature acknowledging payment in full. It goes to show, when we dare to fight back, SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



J A E L

All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left. Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite.

Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, “Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid.” So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him.

"I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up.

"Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say 'No.'"

But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died.

- Judges 4:16-21 (NIV)

When Deborah and Barak plunged down the hill to meet the mired chariots of Sisera, not a man was spared. But it took a second woman to complete the battle. Sisera, abandoning his chariot, had raced wind and sleet for safety.

Winded, exhausted, a man on the run, he came to the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, a man at peace with the Canaanites. Here Sisera thought he'd be safe. "I'm thirsty," he said. "May I have some water?" Jael opened a skin of milk and invited him to rest.

Weary and worn and miserably cold, he curled up in front of the fire, commanding her to stand guard at the tent's door. "If anyone comes by, tell them no one is here!" Only moments passed and he was asleep.

What would you do? Jael did not like Sisera any better than Deborah liked him. I wonder if she, although married to a Kenite, was Hebrew. Why else would she pick up a hammer and pry loose a tent peg, her only weapon, and set the point to Sisera's temple? Had her sister's children been plundered by the Canaanites? Had her mother been made a widow? Had her place of worship been desecrated? Her God mocked?

How long did she hesitate, debating the Warrior within? Did she whisper a prayer for courage when she pulled back the hammer and sent the peg crashing through bone and brain, pinning him to the ground? I don't know, but the Bible tells us that when Barak arrived in hot pursuit, she ran to greet him.

"Come," she said, drawing him into her home, "and I will show you the man you seek."

Sisera was dead, victory won. “Blessed above women,” sang Deborah, “shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be.” Blessed because when we fight back with what we have on hand, we find that SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



DOROTHY

You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

- Isaiah 26:3 (KJV)

A glance and Dorothy King's eyes took it all in. Hospital bed, traction, sling, respirator. Behind the tubes and IVs, her son's head and face were so swollen she couldn't recognize him. *Another accident.* ⁵

Dorothy King was no stranger to accidents. Mother of five sons, she'd long before accepted the calamities that accompany five boys growing up on a farm. Eleven broken bones between them, two emergency surgeries, another two surgeries to splice tricky breaks, a car wreck, a motorcycle wreck, numerous minibike wrecks. After a while she quit counting.

Then came the first really terrible phone call. Calgary, Alberta, Canada, 1978, a call to eclipse them all. Her second born, just turned twenty, had set out from their Pennsylvania dairy farm to cross the country on a motorbike trip with three of his cousins, and now a stranger was telling her of an accident. Could they do emergency surgery?

“Why?” she asked. Punctured lungs. Lacerated liver. Crushed ribs. Two broken legs. Intestines so mangled they'd probably never work again. But that wasn't the worst: Mike's back was crushed. If he lived, he'd be paralyzed from the waist down.

Mike did live, and Dorothy King thought the worst was over. But five years later the phone was ringing again. Another motorcycle wreck. Sarasota, Florida, this time. This time Kent, her fourth born.

The nightmare returned. As in Mike's case, strangers performed all-night emergency surgery while she made frantic arrangements to fly out before it was too late. As with Mike, the prognosis was not good. As with Mike, the injuries were endless. As with Mike, she stood in shock at the end of the bed, hardly able to register the magnitude of the trauma. Severe concussion. Bruised lung. Ruptured spleen. Hole gouged from stomach to bladder. Broken pelvis. Crushed wrist. Snapped ankle. Shattered kneecap. Compound fracture below the knee. Cut jugular. The only reason he was alive was because a bystander had known how to stem the bleeding that would have left him dead in two minutes.

"Kent?" she whispered, slipping quickly around the respirator to squeeze between heart monitor and oxygen tank. *Bleep ... bleep ... bleep-bleep*. Erratic heartbeats. Hiss-swoosh, hiss-swoosh. Oxygen, in, oxygen out. She went weak in the knees when she saw the worst. He was bleeding from his eyes, and in vain she searched for recognition of her nineteen-year-old son. Nothing.

"Kent?" A wash of cold. Unlike Mike, Kent he did not respond. Oh, how could she go through this again? *Oh, God, how?* Isaiah 26:3 came to mind: Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee.

Five years earlier, her father had died of cancer. A man of God, he'd always memorized Scripture. After taking him home to die, she used to sit with him for hours. "Will you," she'd asked him one day, "pass on to me the blessing of your memory work?" And so as Isaac to Jacob and Jacob to Joseph, her father passed to her his family legacy, the desire to memorize Scripture. And as she sat watching for any sign of life in her son's face, verses she'd memorized slowly came to mind, thawing her cold, frightened heart.

She reached for Kent's hand and curled her trembling fingers into his. Did she trust God? Slowly her trembling stilled; slowly peace warmed her heart. One by one the verses came, staying her mind on God. The nurse came in. Her five minutes were up. She could come back in an hour.

Today Dorothy King looks at Kent, healthy and well, and remembers that when we fight despair with the sword of Scripture, SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped.

- I Samuel 19:11-12 (NIV)

Once upon a time Little Red Riding Hood was more than a match for the big bad wolf. How so? you might ask, for Little Red Riding Hood is not someone we see as a Warrior of any kind. We can blame Charles Perrault for this. In 1697, he took an oral story of a young woman's rite of passage and made it into a moral fabrication, adding the red cloak, the male wolf, and tragedy to the disobedient. Of his own distorted version, where the wolf devours naughty Little Red Riding Hood, he had this to say:

Little girls, this seems to say,
 Never stop upon your way.
 Never trust a stranger-friend;
 No one knows how it will end.
 As you're pretty, so be wise;
 Wolves may lurk in every guise.
 Handsome they may be, and kind,
 Gay, or charming—never mind!
 Now, as then, tis simple truth –
 Sweetest tongue has sharpest tooth!

One hundred fifteen years later the Grimm brothers added a happy ending, allowing a huntsman to come along and cut from the beastly wolf's stomach poor Little Red Riding Hood and her grandmother. Both versions, however, veer far from the original tale.

"There is," says Alan Dundes, a University of California anthropologist, "a whole male fantasy that's been tacked onto the story.

Male writers essentially took a female tale and ruined it. They've made the heroine a frail little thing who has to be rescued."⁶

So what is the original fairy tale if not a story to make women afraid of the woods and wolves and to teach compliant obedience? It's a story of a daring heroine who is shrewd, brave, tough, and independent—and who fights back through subterfuge and wins.

Once upon a time a woman asked her daughter to take a hot loaf of bread and a bottle of milk to her granny.

"Where are you going, Little Girl?" a wolf asks.

"I'm taking this hot loaf and a bottle of milk to my granny."

"What path are you taking?" the wolf asks. "The path of needles or the path of pins?"

And here emerges a story symbolic of a young girl undergoing a social ritual connected with sewing communities. She is moving out of the initial process of piecing cloth together by pin to the act of sewing cloth together into something functional and useful.

"Why, the path of pins!" says the Little Girl. "Then I shall take the path of needles."

We pick up the tale similar now to Perrault's. The wolf has eaten Granny whole and taken her place in bed.

"Oh, Granny, what big nostrils you have!" says Little Girl.

"The better to snuff my tobacco with, my child."

"Oh, Granny, what a big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you, my child!"

But this is not the story of Little Red Riding Hood. This is the story of Little Girl. She is not a helpless victim, doomed for destruction by her own passivity. Little Girl says, "Oh, Granny, I have to go pee!"

"Do it in the bed."

"Oh, no, Granny. I must do it outside."

"All right, but make it quick."

The wolf ties a cord to Little Girl's foot and lets her out the door, tugging now and then to make sure she is still there. But again, Little Girl is not victimized. She quickly ties the rope on her foot to the plum tree and by the time the duped wolf figures out she is gone, she is safely back at home—with no lectures from her mother or Charles Perrault. She doesn't need a lecture. She has fought back and won—as all little girls need to learn they can do.

Yet this is not what we were taught. We were brought up on the

Perrault/Grimm versions, and grew up knowing never to stray from the path, to always be obedient, to see the world as belonging to the male, be they vicious or heroic, to submit to death or hope for rescue. Such a tragedy, for we inherited fear instead of valor, compliance instead of dominance, submission instead of shrewdness. And we inherited a deep-seated fear of fighting back, to our own tragic end.

Yet our fairy tales in their original form teach us that we can, and must, fight back. We must be Little Girl—not Little Red Riding Hood. Because when we fight back, SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



MAHLAH, NOAH, HOGLAH, MILCAH, TIRZAH

The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milkah and Tirzah.

They came forward and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly at the entrance to the tent of meeting and said, “ ... Why should our father’s name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father’s relatives.”

So Moses brought their case before the LORD, and the LORD said to him, “What Zelophehad’s daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father’s relatives and give their father’s inheritance to them.”

- Numbers 27:1-7 (NIV)

Until very recently in time women couldn't own property; we *were* property. The first crack in the door began way, way back some thirty-five hundred years ago when the Israelites were getting ready to move into the Promised Land.

Prior to leaving Egypt there'd been a census. New land was to be apportioned to family units. Forty years later, however, the original folks had passed on and a new census was needed to reassign their allotments to heirs. But Zelophehad, a descendant of Joseph, died without sons. This took him off the list, his family doomed to pass into oblivion. But he had five daughters. Weren't they entitled to land?

No, they were women.

Back then it made no sense to give a woman an inheritance, she *was* the inheritance; this was so much a part of the collective psyche that no one ever thought to question it. Except the five daughters of Zelophehad. Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah went before Moses and the priest to present their case.

"Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son?"

It was a tough problem to resolve. While the Hebrews wanted to protect the family name, they weren't so sure they wanted to do it at the cost of allowing women to own land. Moses took the dilemma to God.

"The daughters of Zelophehad speak right," said God. "Thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them."

A new law was put into effect, and women for the first time since unrecorded days of patriarchy began to own property—albeit under limited circumstances.

The Zelophehad case has even more significance when we find in the American Bar Association Journal of February 1924, an article by Henry C. Clark quoting the unprecedented case as being an "early declaratory judgment in which the property rights of women ... are clearly set forth," and to find that jurists still turn to it at times for opinions. It is considered the oldest decided case "that is still cited as an authority."⁷

And now, because five sisters dared to fight for their right to property, we learn SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



GLADYS

“You deaf and dumb spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out ...

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer and fasting.”

- Mark 9:25-29 (NIV)

Thanksgiving 1989 was different from all others for Gladys Steffenson. Her daughter and seven others had secluded themselves in St. Paul Cathedral of St. Paul, Minnesota, to pray and fast until the U.S. government indicated a change in its policy of military support for the government of El Salvador. Precipitating the event was the murder of six Jesuit priests and their housekeepers by the military police, an act of such violent proportions that Gladys’s daughter decided she had to fight back.

At first Gladys wasn’t sure Valerie was doing the right thing. They weren’t activists; they didn’t protest anything. They were a typical Midwestern family with strong moral values and a complacent trust in the government to attend the more “weighty” issues. However, Gladys found her attitude changing.

“As we visited the little group each day in that dark, cold building,” she says, “my attitude changed from concern for my daughter to concern for my government and the evil of our policy toward that tiny country.”

Gladys Steffenson wasn’t the only one who found her attitude changing. The press became sympathetic, and both newspapers and TV brought daily coverage to the Twin Cities. Large groups started

to hold rallies outside, and the mayor, congressmen, the governor, and the Speaker of the House, Tom Foley, all gave support by phone calls, visits, and speeches. The final Sunday three thousand filled the cathedral in a huge and solemn prayer vigil. "I was amazed," says Gladys, "to see the power of eight people who dared to fast and pray. What once concerned eight, now concerned thousands."

The fast lasted nineteen days. The group finally agreed that while they had not achieved a major victory, they had made an impact on many lives. They disbanded in time for Christmas, to celebrate the hope we have for dragons yet unslain.

"Fasting is an ancient custom," says Gladys, "one that we don't know much about but should probably practice more. None of us will ever be the same again. I would never have imagined the effect this small group could have in influencing people and events. If we have lost some of our complacency, we won't miss it."

Whenever any of us fight, win or lose, we find that SOME DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN.



PRUDENCE

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it out to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

Prudence Crandall was a gutsy lady. In 1832 she converted a two-story building in the small town of Canterbury, Connecticut, into a boarding school. She was soon running one of New England's finest, most profitable and reputable schools. The citizens of Canterbury were only too proud to have her distinguished establishment in their town. Until she admitted Sarah Harris, a young black girl.

Parents immediately demanded Sarah's withdrawal. If she wasn't dismissed, they would withdraw their own daughters, and for

a few days Prudence vacillated. Her conscience eventually won out, and overnight Sarah was an only student.

Prudence had to shut down, but she wasn't licked, not by a long shot. She put an ad in Frank Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper, *The Liberator*, advertising for the "highest academic caliber of young black ladies." In two months she was back in business, with almost the same number of students, only this time they were all black.

Canterbury declared war. They began by pelting the students with sticks, stones, and obscenities. While the students were taking a first trip into town the front porch was smeared with excrement, chicken heads, and a dead cat. Windows dripped with splattered eggs. The stores followed up by refusing to sell Prudence supplies, the doctor refused to come out when needed, and the newspaper ran editorials attacking her for disrupting the town's cherished tranquility. Still Prudence was not going to be beaten. Black girls had the right to an education, and she was going to give them one.

Abolitionist friends came through, delivering supplies, and when manure was dumped into the school's well, Prudence's father began delivering daily rations of water from his farm two miles away.

Failing to scare her away, the town moved into the courts by pushing through a bill forbidding anyone to teach a "colored person" not a resident of Connecticut. Prudence refused to comply and was arrested and jailed for one night. She posted bond and kept on, keeping the school open while the case dragged on for a year, finally being dismissed by the highest state court on a technicality.

This infuriated the town of Canterbury and it responded with violence. The school was set on fire, but it was extinguished before much damage was done. It was then raided by masked citizens in the middle of the night. With crowbars they smashed their way in, demolishing everything in sight on the ground floor, ransacking the classrooms, and plundering the office. Prudence and the girls huddled in the bedrooms upstairs prayed that God would intervene. He did; the men left without harming the girls.

But Prudence couldn't fight anymore. What had begun as a fight to defend one black girl's right to an education had escalated into a threat of death for twenty more. Prudently, Prudence retired from teaching. She married her Baptist minister friend, a man who'd stuck with her through thick and thin in the small town of Canterbury, and they moved out of state.

Surprisingly enough, when Prudence Crandall was eighty-three, the state of Connecticut sent a letter of official apology, along with a small pension, proving once again that with perseverance and pluck SOME DRAGONS CAN EVENTUALLY BE SLAIN.



WONDER WOMAN

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. Look!

The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the LORD Almighty. You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

- James 5:1-6 (NIV)

When my children were young there was a bill before Congress to raise the national minimum wage by forty cents, I had a student at the university who liked to parrot his father. "If you make the rich pay higher wages," Stack insisted, "they won't be able to hire as many workers and unemployment will increase. So instead of sniveling for more money," he summed it all up, "the poor ought to be *grateful* they at least have a job."

My son's fifth grade teacher had a different opinion, and Mrs. Priddy countered this anti-Robin Hood mentality with the weapon of chalk and a blackboard and the fertile minds of her students. She had them work out just exactly how much money a person making

minimum wage would earn in a year, and then asked them to contrast that sum first to the Washington State poverty level and then the average income per year per family. This is what Phillip, at age ten in 1988, learned: minimum wage grossed a person \$8,008 a year; poverty level was \$13,950 a year for a family of four;⁸ and the average family of four had an annual income of \$28,165.⁹ The average family, my son learned, earned more than three times what millions of the working poor managed to scrape together. Phillip came home from school wondering why all the debate over a measly forty-cent raise when, as he said, minimum wage at the very least ought to be doubled.

Today, no one in America who works forty hours a week at minimum wage can rent a median two-bedroom apartment.”¹⁰ Where’s our Robin Hood?

Dr. William Marston invented the systolic blood-pressure test used in lie detectors, and he found as a result of his work that women are more honest than men in business as verified by criminal records, that 90 percent of women are “gaited to be good,” and that women, as indicated in intelligence tests, can do more work in a given time—and more accurately—than men.¹¹ In 1941, when asked by publisher Charlie Gaines to give his ideas on audience reaction to cartoons, Marston said, “Why don’t you give the world a woman heroine?”

Whoever heard of a woman heroine?

Dr. Marston thought it was about time we did. Women, he said, tend to fight differently than men. They tend to fight with honesty, goodness, and intelligence. And so under the pseudonym of Charles Moutlon, Dr. Marston wrote a pilot cartoon strip featuring a woman warrior. She battles “not to control, to have power over, or to ‘pound on’ as men are prone to do—but to protect, to correct, and to offer mercy to the repentant.”¹²

Wonder Woman took the country by storm. Today *Wonder Woman* comic books sell like hotcakes and are made into movies. Why?

Because our world is hungry for the weapons women can bring to the fray. Women, generally speaking, do not fight to rule over or to destroy or usurp. They tend to fight, if they fight at all, for justice and peace and fairness for all. “Farewell,” says *Wonder Woman* to her enemy, Amazon, letting him go rather than bashing his head as he justly deserves, “I must lead my warriors into ways of peace.”¹³ A woman warrior, *Wonder Woman* demands justice, brings peace, and offers to the repentant—and unrepentant sometimes—grace.

Robin Hood was the hero of our fairy tales. Wonder Woman is the heroine of the comic book. But Phillip's fifth grade teacher is Robin Hood and Wonder Woman *off* the page, fighting in real life against poverty and victimization. And you can bet she's scored her point: Phillip will never pay an employee less than a living wage, even if it's legal to do so.

We too can be warriors like Wonder Woman and Mrs. Priddy at Geneva Elementary because when we fight with honesty, justice, and mercy SOME DRAGONS CAN AND OUGHT TO BE SLAIN.



ANNE

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town.

- Matthew 10:14-15 (NIV)

Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces.

- Matthew 7:6 (NIV)

Before Anne Hutchinson was born, her father Francis Marbury had been thrown into English prisons three times for his Puritan views. His daughter, Anne Marbury Hutchinson, came by her spit honestly. Ironically, it was the Puritans who tormented her.

In 1630, the Archbishop of Canterbury, England, cracked down on the growing numbers of Puritans, and Anne, her husband William, and their several children were among the first to flee to the New World. To help pass time aboard ship Anne took to holding Bible studies for women, her leadership upsetting some of the men. Upon

investigation, the men were further upset to find Anne claiming direct communication from God through his Holy Book. Heresy. Anne stuck by her guns.

Once in Boston, she and her husband quickly made a name for themselves. Within months, William was a wealthy merchant while Anne became known for her weekly Bible studies, held in their large home across the street from Governor John Winthrop.

Anne developed a loyal following. Not only was she adept at midwifery, nursing, and friendship, she opened new doors of intellectual thought. Husbands began attending her Bible studies and before long eighty men and women crowded into her home, leaving many to stand outside—to the governor's growing dismay.

Bedrock to Puritan government was the notion of a pecking order, men at the supreme top. Anne's Bible studies undermined this. Who was she, a woman, to interpret what only men could understand? Winthrop sent the senior minister, John Wilson, and his assistant, John Cotton, to question Anne about her theology and remind her of her place.

She stuck to her guns, again. On the basis of that investigation, she was brought to trial in November 1637. When she again declared that God communicated to her directly through Scripture, Winthrop pronounced, "Mistress Hutchinson, the sentence of the court you hear is that you are banished from out of our jurisdiction as being a woman not fit for our society ..."¹⁴

"Why, what is the charge?"

"Say no more. The court knows and is satisfied."¹⁵

Banishment was set for spring and William set off at once to Rhode Island in search of new land. Taking advantage of his absence, the church tried her a second time. Forty-six years old, pregnant with her thirteenth child and in poor health, she was questioned without break for ten hours. Anyone who's been pregnant, knows this is too long to go without a potty visit. At long last John Wilson the minister announced, "I command you in the name of Christ Jesus and of this church as a leper to withdraw your selfe out of the Congregation."¹⁶

Anne rose and walked stiffly to the Meeting House door. I can see her holding the small of her back, aching and sore, her skirts soiled with urine and possibly feces. But I can hear the ring of conviction in her voice. "The Lord judgeth not as man judgeth. Better to be cast out of the Church than to deny Christ."¹⁷

Anne, nine of her children, and a few loyal followers set out on foot for Rhode Island, covering sixty miles in six days. It proved too exhausting and Anne's baby was stillborn. Assistant minister John Cotton smugly responded that God's punishment was justly due.

But Anne was not to be stopped. She was fighting for the right of women to read and think for themselves, and come to their own understanding of God. Women lived in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, as well as Boston, Massachusetts.

Boston was not happy. They sent a letter to William promising to forgive him if he would but denounce his wife's teaching.

"I am more nearly tied to my wife than to the church," he wrote back, declining. "And I look upon her as a dear saint and servant of God."¹⁸

In 1642 William died, leaving Anne without support in a time when Boston was moving to gain jurisdiction over Portsmouth, Rhode Island. Having accused her of heresy, they now accused her of witchcraft. Having no other recourse she moved into a Dutch territory on Long Island, only to find the Dutch and Indians at war. A year after William died she was killed, along with five of her six children still living at home. The Bostonian clergy and government rejoiced. "God's hand is apparently seen herein," said Governor John Winthrop. "Proud Jezebel has at last been cast down."¹⁹

Anne Hutchinson fought gallantly for the right of women to seek their own personal experience with God, and for that fight she died. It appears the dragon won.

Or did it?

Years ago I visited Boston, a city rich with a history of bloodshed and contradiction. A larger-than-life statue of Anne sits on the front lawn of the government building. I had not expected to find her there. Had she died in vain? I wondered. Had the dragon really won?

As a little girl I grew up seeing in the pages of Scripture ideas different than those of my Sunday School teachers. As a grown woman, I *still* see Scripture differently than many. No one banishes me.

I sat a long time amidst the roses planted nearby, watching the sun glance off the determined and noble bronze jaw of Anne Hutchinson. Some dragons do rage on, but when we fight back with determination SOME DRAGONS ARE EVENTUALLY SLAIN.



B R E N D A

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.
It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always
perseveres.

- I Corinthians 13:6-7 (NIV)

Seventeen years as a single parent forced me into the Warrior role. As much as I wanted to, I couldn't walk away from the fight. A "no show" in court means the petitioner gets what they seek. A massacre occurs. I was forced, then, into an adversarial role I hated, that kept me in poverty, always held me in fear, and watching my children get bandied about. In seventeen years, I responded to maybe thirty petitions for an average of one every six months. My life was a battleground, and I spent thousands of dollars and suffered severe health loss. The Warrior is a role few of us seek.

One day, about Year 13, I was back in court. This time the battle was so one-sided it shocked even me, a seasoned Warrior. How could a father lie to a judge and declare his children not smart enough for college—in order to relieve himself of legal obligation to help provide what he himself had? The judge mocked my unread defense of my children's academics and my daughter's SAT scores—and said he'd use my documentation as a doorstop. *Haha*. He and my children's father shared a hearty laugh over that one. The laughter undid me.

I'm not sure how I got out to the car. I sat trembling in the front seat, too distraught to drive home. I'd not even been allowed verbal rebuttal, silenced by a curt wave of the judge's hand.

A friend lived nearby. I drove to her house and knocked. Laura had to catch me because one word out of my mouth and my knees buckled. I suppose I was in shell shock. She gathered me in her arms and sat me on the sofa next to her.

"I failed. I lost!" I wailed. "My poor daughter! I tried, but it wasn't good enough!" I felt a hemorrhaging of despair drain through me.

“You did not fail,” Laura told me sternly. “You fought! But the judge had his trusty cannon, Apathy. Your ex his almighty Lie. Together they gunned you down but, look, you’re here! Worse for the wear,” she admitted with a laugh, giving me a hug. “But this is only one battle. You have a weapon they don’t. In the end Love will win the war. It’s the mother of them all.”

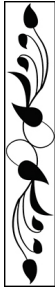
I hiccuped. “What will I tell Heather in the meantime?”

“You’ll tell her and the boys that you tried.”

“But—”

“You *tried*.”

Warriors don’t win all the battles, but by the time my youngest graduated from high school and headed off for college like his big sister and brother before him, I knew Love had won the war. And I knew that SOME DRAGONS CAN—AND ARE—EVENTUALLY SLAIN.



NOT ALL DRAGONS CAN BE SLAIN,
AND HEREIN LIES A DANGER
We Can Become Like Our Enemies

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what
is right in the eyes of everybody.

- Romans 12:17 (NIV)

When we fight dragons, many back down; others don't. Sometimes they laugh at our weapons. SAT scores for a doorstep ... *Haha!* What happens when witches and dragons are too powerful? When the judge bangs his gavel and the wicked witch snatches Toto? In Oz, Dorothy wails, "What are you going to do with my dog? Give him back to me!"

"Certainly. When you give me those slippers."

Awhile back, I participated in a task force investigating gender bias in Washington State's court system. The thirteen-member panel of legislators and attorneys found that if you're a woman seeking justice in Washington you're not going to find it.²⁰

Within the family, women lose as well. One out of every two of us are physically assaulted by our husbands. If you're a woman and going to be murdered, chances are you'll be killed by someone who claims to love you rather than by a stranger.²¹

Historically women have lost. "Remember the women," Abigail Adams admonished her hubby John when he went off to help draft the Constitution.²² No one did.

Economically women lose. The average woman college graduate earns the same as the average male high-school graduate, and women still only earn sixty to seventy cents for every dollar men earn.²³ When country music twangs over the radio, "Cowboys don't cry, heroes don't die," we know better. We do cry. We do die. Some dragons are too big.

“You see that?” the wicked witch asks Dorothy with a hiss. She turns over an hour glass. “That is how long you’ve got to be alive! I can’t wait forever to get those shoes!”

When dragons are too big to slay, our first temptation is to give in, to give the dragons what they want. “You can have your old slippers,” we cry along with Dorothy. “But give me back Toto!”

The ruby slippers, though, *don’t come off*. We can apologize, we can beg, we can promise. We can do everything Dorothy did to convince the Witch we’re throwing in the towel, but it won’t work. The slippers won’t come off until we’re dead; horrified, we watch as the sands of time run out.

“I’m frightened!” cries Dorothy. We are too. We can hardly think straight we’re so scared, and in our panic *it’s too easy to become evil ourselves*.



“In the heat of the fray,” M. Scott Peck explains, “it is tempting to take hold of some seemingly simple solution—such as ‘what we ought to do is just bomb the hell out of those people.’”²⁴ And why not? Gretel popped the wicked old witch into the oven and Brer Rabbit smacked the tar baby.

“If you don’t say howdy by de time I count three,” he’d warned the tar baby in an Uncle Remus story, “I’m goin’ ter *blip* you in de nose.”

Dolled up by Brer Fox and Brer Bear to look like someone sitting on a log, the tar baby of course couldn’t answer, making the short-sighted Brer Rabbit mad. He drew back his fist. *Blip!* Right in the face. “Let go my fist!” he hollered. He drew back the other to land another punch. Wham, stuck again, two fists in the tar. It made him even madder. On he went, hitting and punching, butting his head, getting more and more entangled in the icky tar—looking more and more like his supposed enemy.

“De more he try ter get unstuck-up,” Uncle Remus narrates, “de Stucker-up he got” until soon good old Brer Rabbit was so stuck, he “can’t scarcely move his eyeballs.”²⁵

We might excuse Gretel’s desperate measure and even laugh at old Brer Rabbit, but in *Medea*, however, Euripides warns of evil more personal.

Once upon a time Medea saved Jason, proving herself a valiant Warrior. But ten years later Jason threw her over for the king’s

daughter. Insult to injury, Jason banished Medea and their two little boys, and who among us can blame Medea for her rage?

We can and do, however, question Medea for what she did. Education philosopher John Dewey said that when we fight back “*we become like those whom we oppose*,”²⁶ and this is exactly what happened to Medea. Even though the Chorus urged her “to uphold the laws of human life—‘I tell you, you must not do this,’”—Medea would not be stopped.²⁷ Enraged with a patriarchy that supported and even applauded the disregard of women and children, she did not care whom she brought down in her effort to punish Jason and see that justice be done. She used her sons to kill the bride and king, and then with her own hands, rather than see them die in exile, she killed her boys. By fighting for justice, she’d unwittingly become as her enemy and become evil herself.

Medea is not alone. We, too, can become like our enemy. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), avowed Warriors for civil liberty, have fought to ban certain religious books from state libraries. Right-wing religious groups who preach family values find no issue when our government kidnaps and cages brown-skinned children at the Mexican border. Our American democracy, founded on a belief in self-determination, supports countries who routinely violate human rights and subjugate their citizens. We *do* become like our enemy.

How do we avoid it? By remembering, I think, *why* we fight. Are we fighting to destroy or to protect? Are we being shaped by our principles—or *are we being reshaped by our enemy*?

Harriet Tubman was probably being shaped by her principles when she held her gun to the temple of any slave who wanted to turn around and go back to the South. “You go North or die,” she’d say. One cashed-in ticket on the Underground Railroad would seal the doom of hundreds.²⁸

I suspect Hannah Dustin, however, was being reshaped by her enemy. In 1657, after the Indians kidnapped her and dashed her newborn infant’s brains against a tree, she killed two braves, then bludgeoned to death two squaws and four children before making her escape with ten scalps tied to her waist for bounty money.²⁹

When we fight back, we *have* to ask over and over, are we being shaped by our principles? Or are we being reshaped by our enemy? We have to ask again, and then yet again. *Are we being shaped by*

our principles, or are we being reshaped by our enemy? It's so easy to get disoriented and forget why we're fighting in the first place.

In the story of Deborah fighting the Canaanites, Deborah never forgot why she fought. "Village life in Israel ceased," she sang triumphantly, battle over, "until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother to Israel." Nor did she become like her enemy, Sisera of Canaan. She simply moved in, defeated him, and pulled out. "So may your enemies perish, O Lord! But may they who love you be like the sun when it rises in its strength!"³⁰

Dorothy in Oz does not forget the why of her battle either. "Run, Toto, run!" she screams, even though she's trapped, remembering even in her fright why she's fighting—to protect and defend Toto. "Run!" Out the door, down the stairs, past the guards, and off the drawbridge. "He got away!" Her voice catches. "He got away ..."

In the story, Dorothy's friends also don't forget the who and why of their battle. Tinman, Scarecrow, and Lion crowd together on the other side of the tower door where she's locked up, the sands of time running out. "Dorothy? Are you in there? It's us!" they all call while the last of the sand begins to slip through the bottleneck.

"Yes, it's me!"

The Tinman axes the door to shreds just in time. Dorothy throws herself into the Lion's welcoming arms.

"Hurry!" the Scarecrow urges, keeping his head. "It's not over yet. We've got no time to lose!" Off they go, fleeing, running, tearing down the stairs and out the—

"Going somewhere?" the Wicked Witch of the West wants to know.

They're cornered. Cut off at the pass. No hope for rescue now. No place to flee. Everyone is going to die.

"How about a little fire, Scarecrow?" mocks the Witch, tossing a match at him.

"Help! I'm burning! I'm burning!" he cries.

Dorothy is still a Warrior. Not the kind who's become like her enemy, fighting fire with fire and being shaped by the evil she hopes to combat, but a Warrior shaped by her own principles of love and protection. She flings a bucket of water over the Scarecrow.

Surprising things can happen when we fight back in love.

Whenever we talk about evil, dragons, and conflict, we ultimately have to talk about love. The cruelest of dragons, M. Scott Peck writes, can only be stopped by brute force, but the hardcore reality

is that they can never really be destroyed—except by love of the dragon’s *victims*.

Take a look at Corrie and Betsy ten Boom’s fight against the Third Reich in Haarlem, Holland, during WWII. There was nothing they could actively do to stop Hitler’s deadly march across Europe, snatching up Jews, gays, gypsies, and the disabled with efficient sweep. But they could love the vulnerable in his path. At one point they had nineteen Jews hidden in their home. I’ve been there. It’s a tiny space. They took great risk. Others all over Europe did the same. Countless people were saved and this the Warrior discovers when dragons prove too powerful. Unable to attack the source, we can stand in the gap. And discover that when we love the underdog, through no *direct* action on our part, good eventually conquers evil.

Back to Oz. “I’m melting!” screams the Wicked Witch when Dorothy’s water accidentally splashes onto her. “Melting ... oh ... ” We look on aghast, stunned and unbelieving. “Who would have thought,” the Witch moans, caving in on herself, evil consumed, “a good little girl like you could destroy my beautiful wickedness!” Only the hat remains, and the broom.

“We realize what we dimly have always known,” says M. Scott Peck. “Evil can be conquered only by love.”³¹ In Madeleine L’Engle’s *A Wrinkle in Time*, L’Engle illustrates how this love—not for the enemy but the enemy’s victims—can ultimately destroy the dragon and keep us from becoming like it. Her main character Meg has gone back to Camazotz to get her little brother held captive by IT. Her only weapon is advice from Mrs. Whatsit, given to her just before she leaves: “*Yyou hhave ssomethinnng ITT hhas nnott*,” the old woman stuttered. Meg has to figure out what she has that the enemy does not. It will be her only weapon.³²

In direct confrontation with the evil IT, Meg finds that IT can’t get her if she fights back with anger. Anger has its strength. But wait, this isn’t anger anymore. This is *hatred* Meg feels—sheer unadulterated *hatred*. Suddenly she’s lost in the breadth and scope of her hate, and her stomach begins to churn in rhythm to IT. She’s becoming like her enemy. With every vestige of consciousness, she jerks herself free. Hate isn’t what she has that IT does not! *IT knows everything about hate!*

Just then her little brother, twisted and consumed by IT, screams at her, “Mrs. Whatsit hates you!” But that isn’t true, thinks Meg.

Mrs. Whatsit loves her! And suddenly Meg knows. *Love!* IT doesn't have love! *Love* is her weapon!

But can she love IT? Can she love IT enough to see such evil shrivel up and die? Madeleine L'Engle drives home an important point about fighting evil when she writes of Meg: "But she, in all her weakness and foolishness and baseness and nothingness was incapable of loving IT. But," L'Engle writes, "she *could* love Charles Wallace."³³

Meg shouts to her little brother, "I LOVE YOU!"

Charles Wallace's eyes stop twirling, his forehead stops twitching. He steps toward her, and then he's running, shrieking, "Meg! Meg!"

"I love you, Charles! I love you!"³⁴

A swirl of darkness and then Meg and Charles are home again, rolling on God's green earth. Meg, through love for her brother, has saved him.

Is this not what happens in Oz? Dorothy is incapable of loving the witch, the evil enemy, but she *is* capable of loving the Scarecrow. And by loving the Scarecrow, dashing his flames with water, the wicked witch is *indirectly* destroyed.

"She's dead," says a guard after looking at the puddled wicked Witch of the West. "You killed her."

"I didn't mean to kill her. It's just that he was on fire ..."

It's just that Dorothy loved the Scarecrow, and love transformed evil into irrelevancy.

We make a mistake if we think we can love evil—or the people who do evil. We cannot love IT. Like Meg and Dorothy, we're too weak and foolish and base and nothing; we're incapable of such love. Leave that to God. But we can love evil's victims. We can love Charles Wallace and the Scarecrow—and *all those held in evil's power*.

When we do, the dragons are slain. In Israel, the last verse in the story of Deborah is simply this: "Then the land had peace for forty years." In Oz, there's a puddle of water—and the broomstick.

"Hail, Dorothy!" A cheer goes up. Ding, dong, the wicked witch is dead!

"The broom," says Dorothy in a sudden smile to all those she's set free. "May we have it?"

And so with our broomstick in hand, proof that we've come to understand how love conquers evil—not by attacking evil directly

but by loving its victims—and on guard against becoming like our enemy, we're ready for the next step of our inner journey, the hardest task of all: transforming evil through the healing, magical role of the Wizard.



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29. Reifert and Dermody, *Women Who Fought*, 20.
30. Judges 5:7, 31 (NIV).
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SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground ... Stand firm then, with the belt of *truth* buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of *righteousness* in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of *peace*. In addition to all this, take up the shield of *faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of *salvation* and the sword of the Spirit, which is the *word of God*. [emphasis mine]

- Ephesians 6:13-17 (NIV)

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

- Romans 8:37 (NIV)

A worthy Warrior fights to protect: But battle is messy and wounds are inflicted. Some fester into despair. Others become infected by the evil we fight. A Warrior has to be careful both without *and* within.

1. Are you a reluctant Warrior? What is your biggest fear?
2. Have you had to fight for yourself or someone else? What did it take to draw you into the fray?
3. Do you feel forgotten on the battlefield? Look at your history. Write about the ways you discovered help and found solace.
4. Have you ever been tempted to retaliate and take revenge? If so, did it slay the dragon? What about the dragon you became?
5. What weapons of Truth, Righteousness, Peace, Faith, Salvation, and God's Word did you find helpful in fighting the war you were called to battle?

A reminder:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

- Romans 12:17 (NIV)

Prayer:

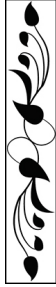
Help us overcome our fear when called to war, and thank you for the armor you provide to keep us from becoming like our enemy. Only by donning your Word can we withstand the evil we face. Amen.



— Friedrich Nietzsche

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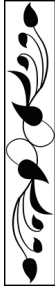
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SEVEN *W*IZARD

"I can transform this dragon!"

- Abigail the Warrior



*T*AMING BY NAMING *And Letting It Go*

A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings ...

One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him."

Abigail lost no time.

-1 Samuel 25:2, 3, 14-18 (NIV)

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

- John 10:10 (NIV)

A Warrior's sword doesn't always slay. Sometimes the dragons are too big, too entrenched, too powerful. Like frightened little Pinocchio, we can't outrun Monstro and are swallowed whole. Like

Cinderella, clothed in rags and alone in the night, we weep without hope, "It's just no use, no use at all."

Do we give up? Let the dragon win?

But what about Jiminy Cricket? Tinkerbell? All our fairy godmothers? We forget there's yet another choice.

A choice for Wizardry.

People get a little freaked out when they hear the word. Are you talking about *sorcery*, *black magic*? No ... I'm talking about the transformative power of truth and honest discernment that sets us free. The Wizard transforms dragons by naming conflicts at their deepest levels—and, when possible, brings into play creative alternatives.

"I hereby confer," said the Wizard to the Scarecrow, "upon you the honorary degree of Th.D."

"Th.D.?" the Scarecrow asks. "Doctor of ... Thinkology."

Notice the Wizard in Oz did not *give* the Scarecrow brains. The point of conflict was really not about brains. It was belief. The Scarecrow did not *believe* he had any. So the Wizard transformed the dilemma by naming the real problem and then conferring upon him something in which the Scarecrow *could* believe—a diploma.

"The sum of the square roots of any two sides of an isosceles triangle is equal to the square root of the remaining side!" Diploma in hand, the Scarecrow is at last confident enough to rattle off his version of Euclid. "Oh, joy! Rapture! I've got a brain!"

Such "magic" isn't easy. When we look at the fairy godmothers and Jiminy Crickets of our fairy tales, it's hard to relate. Rags into riches? Frogs into princes? Straw into gold? Puppets into boys? Diplomas for brains? In our experience, these kinds of miracles are few and far between, best left for someone more divine. We might as well try turning water into wine. Leave the Wizard role up to the fairy tales—and God. Yet he calls us to be Wizards, too, transforming dragons that can only be tamed through naming and creative response.

One of my favorite fairy tales of today is *The Paper Bag Princess* by Canadian author Robert Munsch. Princess Elizabeth and Prince Ronald are about to be married when a dragon comes along and burns down the castle and takes off with Prince Ronald. Elizabeth puts on a paper bag (all that is left in the ashes) and sets off to get Ronald. By following a trail of burned forests and horses' teeth, she comes at last to the dragon's lair. But when she bangs on the door, *bang-bang-bang*, a very weary dragon tells her that while he loves to

eat princesses he's already eaten a whole castle today. Can she come back tomorrow? SLAM!

Knuckles to the door. BANG-BANG-BANG!

"Is it true," asks Elizabeth the Wizard, "you are the smartest and fiercest dragon in the whole world? Is it true that you can burn up ten forests with your fiery breath?"

Pretty clever. She named the dragon's essence: burning things. To prove it, the dragon burns down fifty forests—wearing himself out so badly he doesn't have enough breath left to "cook a meatball."

"Dragon!" she pushes, naming deeper. "Is it true that you can fly around the world in just ten seconds?"

If this dragon loves burning things, he *loves* showing off. Around the world he goes. Ten seconds fiat.

"Fantastic. Do it again!"

She has this old dragon in her power. She's named him at his *very deepest level*. Around the world he goes again. Twenty seconds this time, wearing himself out so completely he flops down and promptly falls fast asleep. She steps over him, goes into the lair, and rescues Ronald.¹

Elizabeth won not as a Warrior—or any of the other options open to her—but through the wisdom that comes from being a Wizard. She named the dragon at his deepest level and then came up with a creative solution. Let him do what he does best. She appealed to that vanity and was able to play him right into her hands.

It's kind of a nifty thing to be able to do.



Most of us can't do this, though, because fundamental to the role of the Wizard is the *belief that evil can at times be fought with nothing more than a statement of truth*. Wizards don't convert or slay. They don't submit or ask for help. They simply name evil for what it is and find creative solutions around the givens.

For most of us this is tantamount to condoning all that is wrong in the world. It's letting evil go unchallenged. The dragon gets to fly around the world, breathing fire.

My first experience with a Wizard was when I was seven years old. I was in the swamp with the ducks when a kid poked his nose over a ginormous fallen log and said, "Hey! We were here first."

"Pardon?"

"My pop says we were the first ones to move in around here."

"You might have been the first to move into the subdivision," I told him, dander up, for I took great pride in being the first to live in the forest. I climbed onto the high, mossy log between us to purvey the new subdivision next door and its ugly stumps. "See where your house is? We lived here before they cut down all those trees."

He wouldn't believe me. I went to get the authority. My father. To my surprise, he wasn't interested in going outside to defend the truth. "But, Daddy! He says he was the first to move in and *that's just not true!*"

"You told him the truth, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that enough?"

I thought my father a little foolish, which is exactly the way the rest of the world views Wizards. Since when is telling the truth *enough*? Since when is letting someone get away with a lie *enough*? This *lets* evil prevail!

What we don't understand is that it takes faith to be a Wizard, faith in Truth—and God. Faith to let go and trust that truth, even the truth of evil, when stated and named, can at times be transformed.

"You are a lousy mother," said Fay's² ex-husband one day in the driveway so all the neighbors could hear. "You never take the girls to the park. You never read them bedtime stories. You never run them down to the library—"

"You're right. I'm a lousy mother."

The ex, a big, strapping kind of a guy, popped his mouth shut, popped into his Mercedes, and peeled off.

"But she had to say she was a lousy mother," a friend of mine objected when I told her the story, "and that's just not true."

Ah, but from his point of view, she was; and Fay knew better than to defend herself to someone holding a vested interest in feeling superior. More to the point, by not defending herself she named the real truth. She didn't *need* her ex-husband's endorsement—and he knew it. Off he stormed.

When faced with a messy situation at work, a friend once told me, "Sure I can fight back, but then I'd have to get in the moat with the crocodiles. I'd rather stay on the drawbridge, thank you very much, and watch them all swim in circles."

By naming the deeper truth and saying, “Yeah, whatever,” my friend was able to walk away from her job and Fay won the day. No skin off their teeth. Look who went storming off and who swam in circles—and who was free to get on with their lives?

Wizards waste no time in childish banter and red herrings. They peel back the layers of truth like an onion—tear-gushing though it can be. They accept truth for what it is, even the truth of evil. And then trust God to resolve and move toward creative transformation.

Not always easy, for if we have a problem with letting evil go unchallenged, we *really* have a problem with creative alternatives. Which is the real reason, I think, so few of us pursue the role of Wizard. It can feel sneaky.

Jesus said, “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.”³

Nonetheless, we get nervous. Shrewd as *snakes*? For a woman to be a Wizard is to feel profoundly guilty. Fortunately we have Abigail, a Wizard from the Old Testament, to ease our minds.

Abigail’s husband, Nabal, is a rich man. He’s also a fool. Abigail has to be shrewd if she and her household are to survive. After shearing season one year, wicked old Nabal held a party and invited several guests. David, on the run from King Saul, six hundred men with him and camped in nearby Maon, had helped Nabal’s shepherds protect the huge flock of three thousand sheep and one thousand goats that were spread for miles on the open plains. When the feasting began, David sent ten of his men to ask Nabal for some provision. It seemed a reasonable thing to do.

Nabal sneered contemptuously, “Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse? Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming who knows where from?”

A servant overheard the conversation and hurried to Abigail, a woman in whom he apparently had a great deal of confidence, which suggests that Abigail was used to cleaning up after her husband’s blunders. At any rate, the servant advised her of David’s request and her husband’s insults.

“Yet these men were good to us!” he tells her, breathless with fear. “Night and day they were a wall around us while we sheared the sheep. Nothing was missing when they were with us. Yet Nabal is

such a wicked man no one can talk to him, and disaster hangs over us all! Please, see what you can do.”

See what you can do? What can a woman do?

Obviously Abigail can't talk to her husband. The messenger said so himself. Nabal is such a wicked man no one can talk to him. Can she be an Orphan? Pilgrim? Martyr? Warrior? None of these choices offer the immediate resolution she needs. What about Wizard?

The Bible tells us Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, a bushel of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins, and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, loaded everything onto donkeys, and took off—without so much as a boo to her drunken idiot of a husband.

When she rounded a mountainous ravine on her donkey, she came upon David and four hundred of his six hundred men, their angry voices carrying on the hot, dusty evening breeze. “It's been useless,” David was saying, “all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. The man's paid me back evil for good, that's what he's done, and may God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive any male of all who belong to him!”

Abigail hastens to close the gap, clippity-clop. “Whoa ... ” She quickly dismounts, then bows before this shepherd David who'd fled the wrath of King Saul. “My Lord, pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal,” she says, cutting to the quick of the conflict by naming the truth. “He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him.”

Whoa! Call your husband a fool? Really now, this is going too far. There are rules against this. Let's pull out the list. *Not* okay to go behind your husband's back. *Not* okay to placate those he insults. *Not* okay to malign the fool for whatever reason.

But Abigail doesn't malign. She names the truth. Her husband *is* an idiot. She goes one step further, a Wizard. “Please,” she asks David, still bowed before him. “Forgive Nabal's offense.” She is not out to create trouble but to resolve and transform it. And so while she doesn't hesitate to name the truth—her husband *is* offensive—neither does she condemn him. “Forgive his offense.” She was as Christ commands us all to be, shrewd yet innocent.

“And take this gift,” she says of the food, putting the icing on the cake of her creative solution, “which I've brought, as servant to her

master. Give it to the men who follow you, for the Lord will certainly make of you a lasting dynasty because you fight the Lord's battles."

A Wizard, shrewd yet innocent, Abigail saw and named the deepest level of the dilemma, her husband's folly—and then went on to seek a creative alternative. She gave to David more than he'd asked for in the first place, and the dragon was transformed.

"Go home in peace," said David, accepting from her hand all that she'd brought. "I have heard your words and granted your request."

Taming by naming and letting it go is what a Wizard does. With the magic wand of truth we can change rags into riches, frogs into princes, straw into gold, puppets into boys, and—

"The sum of the square roots of any two sides of an isosceles triangle is equal to the square root of the remaining side! Oh, joy! Rapture!"

—diplomas into brains.

It's not that hard to do, it just takes a little practice.



SANDI

A gentle answer turns away wrath but a harsh word stirs up anger.

- Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

A few summers ago a girlfriend and I went to Montreal of French Canada for our summer holiday. She'd grown up in the city. I'd lived seventy miles to the north when I was ten. For a week we prowled the old city, jogged Mt. Royal, shopped for bargains along Rue de St. Laurent, and drank iced tea in the outdoor Sir Winston Churchill Pub. At the end of the week I called for a car rental and the two of us headed downtown to pick it up. I wanted to check out the Laurentian Mountains where I'd lived.

"Oh," said the woman at the desk, "we don't have that model anymore. But we do have the four-door Grand Prix ..." You guessed it. They'd pulled a fast one and I had to either fork over twice the money or forget my trip to the Laurentians. The woman at the desk and I locked into verbal combat. I lost. Sandi and I were not going to the Laurentians and I was livid.

Sandi popped into high gear, pulling out of her hat all the old Wizard tricks. "*Excusé mon amie, si'l vous plait, mais ...*" I stood stunned, watching her in action. She went straight to the heart of the matter, naming it for what it was in a soft and gentle voice. I had called. A reservation for a two-door Mazda had been placed. The price had been confirmed. So far so good. But then Sandi switched gears. "*Peut-etre mon amie ne comprende pas—*" Wait a minute, *I hadn't understood?* She was exonerating the rental agency, her soft and gentle voice melting their wrath while leaving me blistered. But I came out of my slow boil when Sandi instructed me to thank them nicely for the four-door Grand Prix they were willing to give me for the original price.

I did as told. "*Merci beaucoup. Tres bien,*" I added, grabbing the keys. We took off before the agency could change its mind.

“What happened?” I asked, dodging the crazy Montreal drivers and wondering if I’d paid for any insurance on this Grand Prix.

“I let them save face by pointing the finger at you,” said Sandi, the Wizard, kind enough, though, not to point out I heartily deserved it. “They were so mad at you,” she went on, “*Watch out for that green car!* I knew they’d rather see you set back a peg or two than lose your \$24.95 by showing you the door.” She pointed to the exit I’d been looking for. The Laurentians. “I just gave them what they wanted—you in a skillet!”

Sandi named the truth (my behavior), found a creative response (serving me up in a frying pan!), and voila! One dragon down and one feeling sheepish, for Sandi was a Wizard who could TRANSFORM DRAGONS TWO AT A TIME.



JO CHEBED

Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.”

- Exodus 1:22 (NIV)

Jochebed was born with her wits about her. She was the mother of Aaron, first of the Hebrew priesthood; Miriam, first of Hebrew prophets; and Moses, first of Hebrew military leaders. These three children of hers were the founders of the Hebrew nation, uniting the remnant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with a code of laws, religious structure, and national identity. And while not much is known about Jochebed, we know of her children, and we know of her incredulous act of wizardry on a day when the dragon roared.

The Hebrews were growing strong in Egypt. Threatened by their sheer numbers, Pharaoh ordered all baby boys born to Hebrew women be thrown into the Nile. We only have to think of *Crocodile Dundee* to know the fate of these tiny babies still wrinkled and pink from birth,

and as Zora Hurston Neale, African-American folklorist, says in her novel *MOSES Man Of The Mountain*, "A great force of suffering accumulated between the basement of heaven and the roof of hell."⁴

The suffering snared the heart of Jochebed when she looked into the wee face of her third child, for she could not bear to see him tossed to the crocodiles. But how could she save him? For three months she kept him hidden, perhaps in a barn where his cries might mingle with the squawk of chickens and the braying of a donkey. Perhaps she kept him in a root cellar, in a cradle wedged between clay jars filled with grain, peppercorns, onions, bread, and dates, his cries muffled by the solidly packed earth above him. But she couldn't go on hiding him forever, and night and day she prayed. "Oh, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, look upon your servant with compassion."

I think she must have been asleep when the answer finally came, for the answer is not one the conscious mind ferrets out. The river! If the dragon was throwing babies to the Nile, what safer place could there be? If that's what the dragon wanted, so be it. If God was of a mind, Jochebed thought, the basket she would make might float to kinder people who would hear her baby's feeble cries and take him in.

The next morning, hope surging for the first time in her breast, Jochebed instructed Miriam and Aaron to quickly fetch her some reeds from the riverbank to weave a basket boat. "I want only papyrus!" she instructed. "Papyrus keeps off them crocodiles!" And off scampered Aaron and Miriam.

She wove the basket tightly, lined it with pitch and tar, and then with a prayer to a God who had not spoken in four hundred years she put in goose feathers and a sheeting made from the skirt of her own dress. She nursed her son for the last time and, when he was asleep, laid him inside. Did she hesitate to close the lid? Did she falter when she set the basket into the river? Did she set her face and seal her heart when she had to give a wee push, to let the current take him from her? According to Zora Neale Hurston, she said, "Youse such a great big river and he is such a little bitty thing. Show him some mercy, please."⁵

We all know this story of mercy. Pharaoh's own daughter came out to bathe and heard his cries. She ordered the basket fetched, took one look at him, and with compassion said, "This is one of the Hebrew babies." We all know how Miriam, hiding among the bulrushes, was quick witted enough to dash out and say, "Shall I go

and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?” And we all know how Moses was nursed by his own mother, raised in Pharaoh’s court, and how years later it was he who led his people out from Pharaoh’s land.

But we forget all about Jochebed, mother of Aaron, Miriam, and Moses—a Wizard who TRANSFORMED A VICIOUS AND UNMERCIFUL DRAGON.



TAMAR

If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.

- Deuteronomy 25:5 (NIV)

Married to one of Judah’s evil sons slain by the Lord for wickedness, Tamar was quickly married off according to leviratic law to his brother. But he too was evil and was slain by God. Judah promised Tamar his third son as soon as Shelah was of age, so that she might have a son.

Judah, however, delayed the ceremony with one excuse after another, fearful that Shelah too might die. He harbored the notion that there was something sinister about Tamar. In reality, his sons were the sinister characters in the story, both slain by God. But their deaths, Judah decided to the contrary, were her fault. Which left Tamar in a bind, for leviratic law forbade her marriage outside the family, and yet by the same law she was guaranteed a son. And she needed a son. A son was equivalent to a retirement fund. What was she to do?

It seems like an odd law to us and hardly fair, but nonetheless Tamar, an apparently devout woman, abided by it. She remained

unmarried and waited patiently for Shelah to come of age. When he did, Judah made no move to wed them.

She was not one to sit idle, twiddling her thumbs while waiting around for dragons to see reason. She devised a plan that would force old Judah to accept his responsibility—to give her a son of his house. It was sheep shearing season and guests and Judah were out and about, passing back and forth on the roads of Timnath. Wrapping herself in a colorful and becoming robe and drawing a veil over her face to disguise herself, she went out to the road and waited.

The widowed Judah thought she was a prostitute and propositioned her.

For a fee.

He offered a kid goat.

Give me a pledge until it is sent, she told him.

What kind of pledge?

Oh, your signet, your bracelets, and your staff will do.⁶

He must have been really taken with her to agree. They went into a tent and she conceived. She went home, took off her apparel, and resumed the dress of widowhood. Judah, in the meantime, sent his servant with the kid into the town where she lived with orders to bring back his more personal belongings.

“Where is the harlot?” the servant asked at the village outskirts and the townsmen exclaimed,

“Harlot? Why, there is no harlot here!”

Three months later Judah heard that Tamar was “with child by whoredom.” Typical of those who break the law when it doesn’t suit them, he was quick to enforce the law when it did. “Bring her here,” he said, “so that she might be burned!” I can’t help but wonder if this isn’t what he’d wanted to do all along, convinced as he was that it was Tamar’s evil that had destroyed his wicked sons. At any rate, Tamar appeared before him and knocked his socks off.

“Discern, I pray thee,” she said, holding out his signet, bracelets, and staff, “whose are these?”

He could not deny the truth, for it was as plain as the nose on his face. “She’s been more righteous than I,” he confessed, “because I wouldn’t give her Shelah my son.”

In due time Tamar bore Judah twin sons, one being Pharez, ancestor of King David. It would not have happened, though, had she not chosen the role of Wizard. She named the dragon for who he

was, an unfair and callous old man, and devised a creative alternative by making him acknowledge his sin, thereby TRANSFORMING A DRAGON WHO THOUGHT HE'D WON.



SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The purposes of a man's heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out.

- Proverbs 20:5 (NIV)

My father's professor at the University of Michigan once told this story, and it illustrates perfectly what a Wizard is.

An elementary student called Sally was once a straight-A whiz. But almost overnight she started getting Cs. The teacher tried everything she knew, to no avail. The puzzled and exasperated teacher finally sent her to the principal's office. Turns out, the kids were making fun of Sally for her exemplary marks.

This story reminds me of my son coming home on the last day of third grade, report card in hand. Some bully on the play ground had shrieked, "There goes Blake! He's so dumb! He didn't get any pluses!" Blake, cut to the quick, for he's a bright boy, climbed up on the corner desk in my office and was crying out all his troubles to his big brother, Phillip.

"And they all started to laugh!" Blake blubbered, truly bruised by the misnaming. "And I tried to tell them I got *all* pluses except two, and they were check pluses, and—"

Just then Heather, who'd graduated from middle school and would begin high school in the fall, passed by. "That's okay, Blake," she said, giving him a tender pat on the back. "This year they'll tease you for low grades. Next year they'll tease you for high ones."

I'm not sure why the puzzled teacher in the professor's story couldn't figure out why Sally's grades had dropped if a graduating eighth-grader understood the great dragon of education. But in this

particular story, Sally's school principal fortunately understood. She also understood, as does every Wizard, that there's not much point in trying to argue about it.

So rather than argue, rather than try to convert the dragon or subdue it or slay it, or force any kind of issue with it, the principal simply pulled out a blank report card. She signed it and handed it over to the student.

"Here. Fill this out with any grades you want and show it to your friends. But straighten up and we'll keep the real report card in my office. A deal?"

The principal recognized the truth and responded with a creative alternative, thus TRANSFORMING THE DRAGON WHICH HAUNTS THE HALLOWED HALLS OF EDUCATION.



NARRATOR OF CRANFORD

Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you.

- Proverbs 20:22 (NIV)

Miss Matty in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* is shopping for a new gown and overhears a farmer's disbelief that his bank note is being turned down by the proprietor. The Town and County Bank is about to fail and no store is accepting funds from that source. But the farmer had spent some time trying to decide on just the right shawl for his lady and is thunderstruck to be told he has to put it back.

Miss Matty hurries over and questions the whole transaction. What is wrong with a note from the Town and County Bank? she wants to know. Why, she's a shareholder. She would have heard if there was trouble!

Very well, if you insist, she says, digging into her purse, and then giving the farmer five sovereigns to cover his note and get his scarf. She will look into the matter.

But the owner of the store warns her not to. "You, Miss Matty," Mr. Johnson confides, "are without funds as well if you hold shares in the Town and County."

"Perhaps so," she tells him. "But I don't pretend to understand business; I only know that if it is going to fail, and if honest people are to lose their money because they have taken our notes—I can't explain myself ... Only I would rather exchange my gold for the note, if you please." She turns to the farmer. "Take your wife the shawl. It is only going without my gown a few days longer. Then, I have no doubt, everything will be cleared up."

"But if it is cleared up the wrong way?" asks the narrator, a young woman two generations younger than the elderly spinster, and through whose eyes the story is told. It *was* cleared up the wrong way. Miss Matty's bank is broke and Miss Matty ruined.

In this delightful novel of the mid-nineteenth century, Gaskell weaves a complex tapestry of wizardry at its best—so that we can see just how the repayment of good, rather than evil, can bring about a solution to an impossible problem: What can Miss Matty do to support herself?

"I thought of all the things," writes the Narrator, "by which a woman, past middle age, and with the education common to ladies fifty years ago, could earn or add to a living, without materially losing caste ... " This was the dragon: How a genteel lady of certain age could support herself without losing caste in English society.

Teaching, of course, was the first thing to present itself to the narrator. Piano, perhaps, to children. No, "that faint shadow of musical acquirement had died out years before." Needlework? No, "Miss Matty's eyes were failing her." Geography? Horrors! Equators and tropics and mysterious circles are imaginary lines to Miss Matty, who "looked upon the signs of the Zodiac as so many remnants of the Black Art." Ah! Candle lighters or "spills," as Miss Matty prefers to call the knit garters. But alas, teaching such a skill would do nothing but "distress her sense of propriety."

There is nothing Miss Matty can teach, thinks the narrator, "to the rising generation of Cranford." But then the tea urn is brought in for afternoon tea and a new thought enters the narrator's head. Why should Miss Matty not be an agent for the East India Tea Company? There could be no objections to the plan, for tea was neither greasy nor sticky, two qualities Miss Matty could not abide. Nor was tea

too heavy, taxing Miss Matty's fragile strength. The only problem was the license. To trade, to buy and sell was degradation and the required license a serious flaw in the plan.

But! thinks the narrator, the license could be put in a spot where no one can see it!

And so it was. Miss Matty's parlor was turned into a teahouse without the degrading characteristics of trade: instead of a counter there's a table; there are comfits and lozenges to tempt the children in; and there are bright canisters for the tea itself. The floorboards are scrubbed to a white cleanness and adorned with a brilliant piece of oilcloth for the customers to stand upon while waiting at the table-counter. And the license? A very small '*Matilda Jenkyns, licensed to sell tea*' is hidden under the lintel of the new door.

Still, Miss Matty is upset. If she sells tea, it will injure Mr. Johnson's business. Down to his store she goes to tell him of the project. But Mr. Johnson kindly puts to rest all Miss Matty's concerns and any fear she might have of injuring his business. In fact, he'll even refer his customers to her, for his tea, he declares, is only a common tea, while Miss Matty's, he assures everyone, are choice sorts.

And so Miss Matty's future is secured, her ruin behind her. Even the approval of Mrs. Jamieson, self-appointed leader of Cranford society, is gained. Miss Matty will not, she pronounces, by selling tea forfeit her right to the privileges of society in Cranford.

All's well that ends well, Elizabeth Gaskell would suggest. But before the novel concludes, Miss Matty's long lost brother Peter returns from India a rich man and Miss Matty lives happily ever after. The tea house is converted back into a parlor and the ladies of Cranford continue to visit, drinking tea in the late afternoon, protecting the structure and family life of all the town's inhabitants.

"Ever since that day," concludes Gaskell through the voice of the narrator, "there has been the old friendly sociability in Cranford society; which I am thankful for, because of my dear Miss Matty's love of peace and kindness."

I add, there is restoration *because the narrator made a choice for wizardry*. By naming the truth and seeking a creative alternative, she managed to TRANSFORM THE MIGHTY DRAGON OF ENGLISH SENSIBILITY.



CORRIE

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

- Galatians 3:28-29 (NIV)

When times are hard there is never any debate: women are equal and perfectly capable.

In Colonial America when survival was dependent upon long hours and hard work, women enjoyed the freedom of men and were called deputy husbands.

During the Revolutionary War they managed farms, signed contracts, bought and sold—only to lose their independence when the men won theirs.

In Frontier America, women saddled horses and rode them astride; they owned land, chopped trees, managed businesses, and manned the shops—only to lose their independence when civilization arrived.

At the turn of the last century women preachers rode the circuit, built churches, baptized their followers, many ordained and commissioned by D. L. Moody himself—only to lose their independence when their churches were established, their role as women ministers taken away and strictly enforced.

During World War II women went to work and earned a man's salary while simultaneously raising families and were applauded for their heroism—only to lose their independence and high wages when the men came home.

There is no arguing the fact that when times are tough, when a woman's strength, fortitude, wisdom, talents, and insights are needed, they're equal. But the minute things settle down, all kinds of blocks go up to keep women down.

None of this, however, ever bothered Corrie ten Boom of Haarlem, Holland. It had never been an issue with her, and when people tried

to make it one she simply pulled out her Wizard's wand. The story I like best is of a run-in she once had with the Brethren Assembly: the Brethren would not allow her to speak under the very strict scriptural interpretation that women should keep silent in the church.

This did not slow Corrie down one iota. Without bothering to argue about it, or to point out her own scriptural support for equality, or defend what she believed God had called her to do, she simply invited all the Sisters of the church to come hear her speak—and then invited the Brethren, saying that if they were interested in hearing what she had to say to the Sisters, they were more than welcome to attend. They did.

Corrie named the truth of the conflict, disagreement over scriptural interpretation, and then carried on with what God had intended she do anyway—without ruffling any Brethren feathers. And for one week at least, THE DRAGON WAS TRANSFORMED.



K A R E N

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
 along unfamiliar paths I will guide them;
 I will turn the darkness into light before them
 and make the rough places smooth.
 These are the things I will do;
 I will not forsake them.

-Isaiah 42:16 (NIV)

Karen Campbell knew God wanted her to marry Marc Watson, but her father didn't. For Karen it was a bit of a dilemma; her father wasn't a Christian, and so how was she to resolve this?

"How's he going to support you?" her father wanted to know. "He's a cook."

"He's got a good job," Karen pointed out. "And he's interested in getting a degree in business administration."

“He can’t earn enough money in food services to raise a family,” her father persisted, and she felt her dander getting up.

“I have a job,” she told him.

“I don’t like the idea of you working.”

The issue, Karen realized, was not Marc. It was money. And so she thanked her father for his concern and opened her Bible to a favorite verse, Isaiah 42:16:

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known,
along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn
the darkness into light before them and make the
rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I
will not forsake them.

Clearly this disagreement between her and her dad was something Karen was unfamiliar with, the two of them at loggerheads over something so important. They’d always been close and she had no intention of breaching the special bond they shared. But what to do? How was God to lead her through this one?

But I’m a banker! she thought. If it’s finances he’s concerned about, why not ease his mind and give him a financial statement? With her favorite Bible verse leading the way, Karen set to work and, when it was done, she handed it to her father. God, she knew, would have to smooth out the rough places.

It wasn’t the spectacular turnaround on her father’s part that she’d hoped for. He was still unsure how it would all work out, but it was clear he did want the best for Karen.

“The best,” she insisted, “is to marry Marc.”

The wedding was unexpectedly spectacular. Her father, taking her arm to begin walking her down the aisle, looked into her face. She saw that he was crying, *and* smiling. “Marc’s a great guy,” he said, “and I love you.”

And so Karen was married and the conflict resolved because she named the basic issue (money, not Marc) and offered a creative response (a financial statement). It took a bit of time and some head scratching, but nonetheless THE DRAGON OF A FATHER’S WORRY WAS TRANSFORMED.



ANNE “WITH AN E”

Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

- Matthew 5:23, 24 (NIV)

A fortnight after the adopted, eleven-year-old Anne “with an e” arrived at Green Gables, home of Marilla and Matthew Cuthbert, Mrs. Rachel Lynde dropped by to meet the young orphan.

“Well, they didn’t pick you for your looks,” she said.

Skinny, homely, freckles. Hair as red as carrots.

With a bound, Anne of Elizabeth Montgomery’s enduring classic, *Anne of Green Gables*, crossed the kitchen, her body all a tremble. “I hate you! How dare you call me skinny and ugly!” On and on she railed, stamping her foot, crying in fury and hurt. Mrs. Lynde wouldn’t like if someone called her clumsy and fat and without a bit of imagination, now would she?⁸

Marilla insisted that Anne apologize. Anne would have none of it. Marilla locked her up in her room to reconsider, and Anne buckled down to a lifetime of solitary confinement. She was *not* sorry!

The next evening after the milking, though, Marilla and Anne were on their way down the lane. Montgomery writes that one walked erect and triumphant, the other drooped and dejected, but halfway to the Lynde home Anne suddenly perked up. Marilla wanted to know what Anne was thinking. I’m thinking, she said, of what I can say to Mrs. Lynde. Marilla began feeling like something was about to go askew.

The moment they were in sight of Rachel Lynde knitting on her porch, Anne, bounding up the steps, turned instantly penitent and mournful. She dropped to her knees, held out her hands beseechingly to the astonished woman. “I am so extremely sorry. I could never express all my sorrow, no, not if I used up a whole dictionary.” And on and on she went, chastising herself and begging for forgiveness

until quite suddenly the heart of Mrs. Rachel Lynde, that gossipy, old busybody, turned quite over.

It was quite all right, she assured Anne, forgiving her instantly, admitting her own outspokenness, even adding that once she'd had a school friend whose carrot-red hair had turned a lovely auburn, and perhaps Anne's would too. Anne pulled in a long breath, rose to her feet, and said now that she had hope it would be so much easier to bear if her hair might someday turn a handsome auburn, and from now on she would feel as if Mrs. Lynde were her benefactor.

On the way home Anne said to Marilla, "I apologized pretty well, didn't I? I thought since I had to do it, I might as well do it thoroughly."

Marilla couldn't figure out why she felt a need to scold Anne for apologizing so well, but then that was ridiculous. A scolding for apologizing well? She kept back her misgivings and instead said she hoped Anne would not have to apologize for anything for a long time to come.

"Oh, Marilla," said Anne, slipping her hand into Marilla's. "I'm so happy. I could pray right now and not find it a bit difficult."

Anne "with an e" might have been an orphan, but she was a Wizard as well. If the dragon wanted an apology, give the dragon an apology. It'll TRANSFORM A BUSY BODY DRAGON EVERY SINGLE TIME.



MA

Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV)

"The blackbirds are in the corn," Laura Ingalls told Ma. "Oughtn't I tell Pa?"¹⁰

Ma said no, blackbirds always ate a little corn, but by noon the blackbirds were eating a *lot* of corn.

Pa tried shooting them. Ma and the girls tried running up and down the rows. Pa said he'd go into town and get some more cartridges, and Ma and the girls screeched and shouted and clapped their arms until sweat ran down their backs and corn leaves cut their faces. But still the swarm of blackbirds kept eating. "It's no use, girls," said Ma with a weary sigh.

Pa came home with the cartridges. But the more he shot the blackbirds, the more there were. They seemed to come in from all over the Territory: common blackbirds, yellow-headed blackbirds, blackbirds with red in their wings. Hundreds came as if by invitation, and the next morning a dark cloud of them rested over the cornfield. The crop's gone, said Pa. We might as well eat what we can.

Ma sent Laura and Carrie out to pick what was left. They fought the birds nose-diving their sunbonnets, boiled what they salvaged, sliced the cobs clean, then laid the milky kernels on a cloth in the sun to dry, with another cloth over them to keep off the birds. Next winter they would have at least some of the corn to eat. There's that to be thankful, said Ma.

"Comb your hair and sit up to the table, Charles," she said to Pa when he came in to dinner. She opened the oven door.

"Chicken pie?"

"Sing a song of sixpence—" Ma started to sing.

Laura and Carrie joined in, "—a pocket full of rye,

"Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie!

"When the pie was opened

"The birds began to sing

"Wasn't that a dainty dish

"To set before the king?"

"Well, I'll be switched!" said Pa as he cut into the pie. They agreed it beat chicken all hollow. "It takes you," said Pa to Ma, "to think up a chicken pie a year before there's chickens to make it with."

It wasn't even Sunday and they were eating like kings. And as long as the blackbirds kept up and the garden held out, they would be eating like kings every day.

Ma is right, thought Laura. There's always something to be thankful for.

That is, if you're a Wizard. "It's no use, girls," Ma had said. Truth named—the birds would not go away—she went on to find a creative alternative and THEIR DRAGON WAS TRANSFORMED.



B R E N D A

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

- John 17:17 (NIV)

He dangled his keys lazily from his finger. “I can make you famous,” he told me. “I can get you in any magazine you want. I’ll make sure you’re invited to teach at writers’ conferences. All you have to do ...” *Ticktock, ticktock*, he swung his keys in case I missed the point. “My wife is sick with Lupus, no one needs to know.”

I knew this well-known Christian writer could make or break my fledgling writing career. I refused, however, to accept his proposition and become his mistress on the writers conference circuit. To my surprise, he assaulted me. Terrified and confused, by God’s grace I made my escape. But he chased me down the street and jumped into my car. And lunged.

Without going into details, I learned that this well-known writer, speaker, and college professor was also well known for this kind of behavior. I also learned he was too important, his name too big a draw, and that money was more important than my safety and that of other women. Our legal system being what it is, and having three children to support, my options of Orphan, Pilgrim, Tinman, and Warrior did not seem practical. This left me the role of Wizard. Name the truth and seek creative resolution.

I wasn’t in shape to do much of anything. The real damage for any victim is not the crime *per se* but the disruptive sense of powerlessness afterward—an almost obsessive dwelling on the event that won’t go away—as if we can out think the shadows and find a return to safety and trust.

My therapist suggested, if possible, I confront the man who hurt me. Not to effect change in him or repentance; this wasn’t going to happen. But for me. Naming Truth, she explained, can be transformative. The verdict is out as to why, but the evidence is sufficient enough that our legal system allows victims to address their abusers before sentencing. Something magical happens when victims name

their truth to the person responsible. They regain equilibrium and the shadows start going away.

I got my chance three years later. We were both in a van filled with other writers being taken to an airport after a conference. I sat in the back row; he, the middle row. “God give me the strength,” I prayed, shaking in my boots. The situation wasn’t ideal but was the only one God had given me. As soon as we pulled to the curb outside United Airlines, he opened the door and got out. But before he could reach in to grab his briefcase, I moved forward and blocked him.

“You owe me an apology for sexually assaulting me three years ago at Seattle Pacific University.”

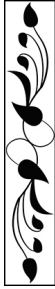
My therapist had warned me. When poked, abusers go apoplectic.

“You’re sick! You’re crazy!” he bellowed. “You need help! You’re so SICK!” He gave me a hard shove and that was that. Silence invaded the van. No one knew what to do. Or say. I certainly didn’t. An uncomfortable void.

A few minutes later, I got out, trembling—but shockingly euphoric, I shook with joy. I raced to the phone and called a friend. “My therapist was right!” In the process of confronting this man who’d hurt me, I’d regained my power.

For one thing, he’d never again hurt me; he’d forever avoid me like the plague. Better yet, whenever his name came up in the future (his behavior unchanging, new victims in his wake), I found that a simple “he did that to me too” sufficient to maintain equilibrium. No longer was I stuck reliving the whole miserable event. As quickly as his name surfaced, just as quickly it sank. This dragon of my past had been transformed.

Which goes to show that when a woman chooses to be a Wizard, her simple act of truth-telling and creative alternative—in this case, confrontation—can and does TRANSFORM THE DRAGON WHO STALKS HER MIND.



NAMING OUR OWN SIN

Truth That Transforms

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.

- Matthew 7:1-5, 7, 8 (NIV)

The Wizard in Oz is not very nice when we first meet him. "You dare to come to me for a heart, do you?" he mocks the nervous Tinman. "You clinkety, clanking, clattering collection of collagenous junk!"

The second time we see him, when Dorothy and her friends return with the wicked witch's broomstick, he is no better. "WHY" he bellows in a perfect rage, "HAVE YOU COME BACK?"

I'm not sure how Dorothy found her tongue. But she did. "We'd like you to keep your promise to us, if you please, sir."

"Go away and come back tomorrow!"

She gets a little testy. “If you were really so great and powerful you’d keep your promises!”

“DO YOU PRESUME TO CRITICIZE THE GREAT OZ?”

No, he is not a nice person, but then neither are we.

As Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, and Warrior, always thrown against the dragons, it’s easy to start viewing life from a “them/us” perspective. Them is *bad*, us is *good*. The Wizard, though, moves beyond dualism by recognizing that we’re all checkered by good and evil, them *and* us. We all live outside the Garden of Eden. We all aren’t without sin.

“You hypocrite!” said Jesus, affirming this truth. “First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”¹¹

Easier said than done. The speck is so obvious, the plank ... well ... what plank? We’re skilled at self-deception. In fact, our capacity for self-deception, writes Cornelius Plantiga, Jr. in *Christianity Today*, “is almost fathomless.”¹²

One reason for this is that our culture and faith require conformity to prescribed ideals. “We are,” writes Carol Pearson, expanding on Plantiga’s assessment, “supposed to ‘live up’ to standards of virtue, achievement, intelligence, and physical attractiveness. If we do not, then we are expected to repent, work harder, study, diet, exercise, and wear better clothes until we fit the prevailing image of the ideal person.”¹³ If we’re less than perfect, we run the risk of being cut from the team, and so we work hard to attain and maintain what is expected of us. The projected image is what counts, the persona.

We systematically repress and pretend in order to meet that expectation. But we’re not perfect and therefore become both deceiver and duped, unable to see the plank in our eye. Like the Wizard in Oz, we ignore our baser selves and retreat behind a self-righteousness curtain where we can present a pious image created especially for public viewing. What we fail to realize is that for all the perfection we project, we, like the Wizard, can never hope to name a dragon’s truth if we deny our own.

Fortunately for the Wizard, Toto pulls back the self-righteous curtain and exposes him for who he is, a mortal man frantically pulling levers and twisting knobs, and bellowing away, “The great Oz has spoken!”

What of us? Who pulls back *our* curtain?



A psychological phenomenon occurs when we deny the truth about ourselves. Whatever we deny gets projected onto someone else. Some call it “mirroring,” and this is what Christ was getting at in Matthew 7. The speck reflects the plank. As Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, and Warrior, we see dragons as something to be conquered and tamed, but as Wizard we come to view dragons as helpful mirrors, sometimes reflecting what’s wrong in our own lives. By looking into our brother’s eye, whose sin we *can* see, we’re able to see reflected back at us our own—which we *can’t*.

It can work on a simple level. Once I wouldn’t do something for my fifteen-year-old daughter and she called me immature.

“Immature!” I hollered, then let her have it about as immaturely as anyone can get.

It can also work on a deeper level. I couldn’t stand a man in my writing group way back when, he was soooo arrogant. Then one night after a collective critique of his story, a friend said to me: “Weren’t you being a bit arrogant?”

I’d come across all hoity toity, a know-it-all. But I couldn’t admit it for days, the truth hidden from myself, seen only in other people, projected and amplified. I didn’t know it was my own evil arrogance I saw reflected in Tom. I looked at him and saw but one dragon—not my own staring back at me.

It was Pogo who said, “We have met the enemy, and the enemy is us.” The enemy *is* us. We are not very nice people.

“Who *are* you?” Dorothy demands of this man behind the curtain.

“I am the great and powerful Oz—”

But we’re not great. We’re not powerful. We’re imperfect human beings full of good and bad.

“You humbug!” the Scarecrow accuses.

“Yes, yes, it’s exactly so,” we finally confess with the Wizard in Oz. We’re all humbugs.

Oddly, this is the point in *The Wizard of Oz* where the story turns around, redemption near: *At the point of confession*. The moment Oz’s Wizard names the plank in his eye and confesses to being a humbug, he suddenly, magically, moves out of impotent pretension into the wise and wonderful Wizard we’d set out to seek, able to name and transform conflict which before he’d been unable to even identify.

But now? Diplomas for brains, medals for courage, testimonials for hearts—even a hot-air balloon ride back to Kansas for Dorothy. There is magic in confession.

Do you remember the story called “The Frog Prince”? The little princess has lost her golden ball down the well, and an ugly old frog comes along and says he’ll fetch it for her—if she promises to let him eat off her golden plate and sleep on her golden pillow.

“Oh, yes, yes,” she promises, but when he retrieves the ball, she can’t go through with it. He is such an *ugly* frog.

Her father tells her she must. A promise is a promise. What matters in the king’s book and to most of us is that she attain and maintain the prescribed ideal of virtue. It doesn’t matter that the frog repulses her, or that she can’t stomach the idea of it eating off her golden plate or sleeping on her golden pillow.

In recent versions of the story the princess caves to pressure and complies. She kisses the frog and he turns into a handsome prince. The moral of the story is simple: compliance rewards. The original version, however, is more in line with the role of Wizard. Disgusted, the little princess does the honest thing. She picks up the ugly old frog and throws him at the fire. POOF! *Then* he turns into the handsome prince! The original story taps into the symbolism of fire as a purifier, weaning out the contaminates and forging new things. There’s much to be forged anew within us.

The Bible says that if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.¹⁴ We can’t transform dragons while in a state of self-deception. But! if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”¹⁵ Denying our repulsion and kissing the frog doesn’t really work: we deceive ourselves. But if we confess the truth, “Ugh! I hate ugly old frogs!” the unprecedented occurs. Frogs become princes: rags, riches; straw, gold. Confession leads to forgiveness, and magic and miracles are unleashed in our lives.

“Old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new.”¹⁶ Forgiven, we’re able, like the Wizard of Oz, to magically name and transform the evil around us—in ourselves and others, for it’s honesty, not perfection, that enables us to become the Wizards God calls us to be.



We hear all the time of drug addicts who convert to Christianity and never need another fix, of mothers who find victory in the face of a child's death, of families whose finances turn around when they begin to tithe. Testimony nights at church abound with stories of the Wizard and great books are written every day about Wizards who transform. No one argues the truth of this; the evidence is all around. But, does it always work this way? Does confession and naming of truth *always* bring us everything we want and need, transforming *all* our pain into joy?

What about the chain smoker in the back pew whose fingers just itch to pick up another cigarette? The mother who can't love her teenager? Marriages that don't heal? Paralyzing grief that won't go away? What about you? Me? What about all of us who live in the ashes of the dragon's fire?

We make a mistake when we assume *all* dragons can be transformed. To think so is naive, perhaps wishful thinking on our part. What about the dragons we tamed as Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, and Warrior? Dragons we had to subdue, slay, sacrificed to, and run from? The Wizard in us can transform a dozen dragons, but there's always a beast immune to the Wizard's wand.

In Robert Munsch's *The Paper Bag Princess*, Princess Elizabeth, remember, managed to transform a dragon by flattering him into exhaustion. "Is it true you can fly around the world in ten seconds?" But she quickly meets another dragon. Prince Ronald himself.

Prince Ronald is not impressed by Princess Elizabeth when she comes to rescue him. Her hair is a mess! She's wearing a paper bag, she smells sooty! He tells her to come back when she looks like a real princess.

What's a Wizard to do with this?

Elizabeth told Ronald he looked like a prince. His hair was neat, his clothes were tidy, but, she told him, he was a bum. She wasn't going to marry him.

One dragon she transformed by naming its vanity and tricking it into showing off; the other, she shrugged and named the truth—Ronald was a bum—and she walked away free. The final picture in Robert Munsch's classic fairy tale is of Elizabeth dancing into the sunset, kicking her heels, arms flung high. For this is what a Wizard does. She names the truth and dances on.

Easy to say, hard to do. Not so easy when *our* boyfriends sneer. Or when tragedy strikes. A diagnosis of cancer, perhaps. Few of us, then, are up to fairy tales.

In *Jubilee*, Margaret Walker's historical novel about her great-grandmother, we follow Vyry through slavery, civil war, and reconstruction, numbed by page after page of brutality and violence. When Vyry's own husband takes a whip to her son, she goes into a tailspin of despair. How is she to carry on?

My parents watched a daughter die from a heart defect. They watched a son lie paralyzed for weeks, neck broken from a diving accident. How were they to carry on?

Robin Bend¹⁷ sat day after day in a trial against her ex-husband for raping her son, listening to the evidence and testimonies of doctors from the Sexual Assault Center at the University of Washington, only to get a verdict of not guilty. Bobby was considered an unreliable witness; he was only four years old. How was she to carry on?

How do any of us carry on?

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Wizard is finally going to take Dorothy back home to Kansas in his hot-air balloon. All systems are go, everyone's gathered! They're off! Oh, no! Toto jumps out! Dorothy scrambles out to get him. "Wait for me! I'll be right back!" she calls over her shoulder. But the balloon lifts off. "Oh!" she wails. "Don't go without me! Please come back!"

"I can't come back!" the Wizard yells down. "I don't know how it works!"

As Wizards, we don't know everything. Let's face it, there are so many things we don't understand.

"Oh, no!" poor Dorothy cries, "I'll never get home!"

How do we carry on?

I think it's interesting that Jesus, right after calling us all hypocrites and telling us to get the planks out of our eyes, says, "Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." In case we didn't get it the first time, he repeated it. "For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

"What am I going to do?" Dorothy wails.

John Fischer, songwriter and musician, writes in his book *True Believers Don't Ask Why*: "I ask because I don't know the answer; I seek because there's more to find; I knock because this door goes

somewhere.”¹⁸ This is how we carry on. We ask to find answers. We seek to discover all we don’t know. We knock because the door before us goes somewhere.

Do you remember Heidi of Johanna Spyri’s classic children’s tale? Grandmamma Sesamann has told her God always answers our prayers. But Heidi, like us, got discouraged when the answer wasn’t forthcoming.

“Do you pray to Him every day,” Grandmamma asked, “to make you happy again?”

“No, not any more.”

“I’m sorry to hear that. Why have you stopped?”

“It’s no use. God didn’t hear me and I daresay that if all the people in Frankfurt pray for things at the same time, He can’t notice everybody and I’m sure He didn’t hear me.”

“Why are you so sure?”

“I prayed the same prayer every day and nothing happened.”

“It isn’t quite like that, Heidi,” Grandmamma explained, and she went on to tell Heidi that sometimes God waits before answering our prayers. “He has been watching over you,” Grandmamma told her, “all this time—never doubt that—but you have stopped praying, and that showed you did not really believe in Him.”¹⁹

We can’t quit asking. We ask, and ask again. We seek, and seek again. We knock, and knock again. This is what Dorothy did, abandoned in Oz. She asks, one more time, “What am I going to do?”

Asking, we’re brought right back to where we started, an Orphan in need of help. The inner journey isn’t linear, learning our lessons and chalking them off; it’s cyclical, like Monopoly. Around and around the board. Around and around, making and remaking choices each time we pass Go—Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, Wizard—learning each time just a little more of who we are.

One thing I’ve learned: I default to Orphan more than any other role. Despite years of knowing God’s intervention, despite his answered prayer and many miracles, put me at the door of a hospital and I go all to pieces. The fact is, I’m terrified of the medical profession. Out-of-my-mind terrified. Orphan again, I fall into full-blown PTSD, overcome and desperate for help.

So is this all there is? Orphan again? Endless trial, tribulation, landing on Boardwalk, rent due, never finding redemption, Eden or Kansas or happily ever after? Scared of doctors and abandoned like

Dorothy with Toto in Oz? Asking one more time, “Oh, what am I to do?” Hit the backtrack of the video.

“Oh, Scarecrow, what am I going to do?”

“Look!” says the Scarecrow.

We gasp. The pretty pink bubble! And down floats the good witch Glinda.

No. This is not all there is. We forgot about Glinda.



NOTES

1. Robert Munsch, *The Paper Bag Princess* (Toronto: Annick Press, 1981).
2. Not her real name.
3. Matthew 10:16 (NIV).
4. Zora Neale Hurston, *MOSES Man Of The Mountain* (New York; J.B. Lippincott, 1939), 11.
5. Hurston, *MOSES Man Of The Mountain*, 39.
6. Genesis 38:18 (paraphrased).
7. Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford* (England: Chapman and Hall and Smith Elder, 1853).
8. E. M. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables* (LC. Page & Company. Renewal copyright © 1935 by LC. Page & Co. Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, Inc.) Bantam edition, 64, 65.
9. Montgomery, *Anne of Green Gables*, Bantam edition, 75, 76.
10. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 99-105.
11. I Samuel 25:24 (NIV).
12. Cornelius Plantiga, Jr., “Maze of Hearts,” *Christianity Today*, 19 March 1990, 19.
13. Carol Pearson, *The Hero Within* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 125.
14. 1 John 1:8 (RSV).
15. 1 John 1:9 (RSV).
16. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (KJV).
17. Not her real name.
18. John Fischer, *True Believers Don't Ask Why* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 12.
19. Johanna Spyri, *Heidi* (England: Penguin Books, 1956), 108, 109.

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

The Pharisees challenged [Jesus] “here you are, appearing as your witness; your testimony is not valid.” Jesus answered ... “In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me.”

- John 8:13,17,18 (NIV)

If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault ... and if they refuse to listen ... treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

- Matthew 18:15-17 (NIV)

When victimized women speak the truth, even in the church, chances are they won't be believed. It's our word against the powerful and charming. But, like Jesus, we too have God as our second witness; and can rely on truth and creative measures to sometimes be enough to transform evil for good.

1. Personal truth can be tainted because we project what we can't see about ourselves onto someone else—where we can see it. Have you experienced such an awakening? What was that like?
2. What dragons have waylaid you? Were you able to transform them by naming truth and finding creative solution?
3. Have you ever confronted a dragon that hurt you? What fire did they breathe and what is life like now?
4. What post traumatic stress stalks your mind? Is there a way to name this and regain your power and equilibrium?
4. Like Heidi, have you stopped praying? Why?
5. Do you believe that truth is enough in a world that no longer honors it?

A reminder:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.

- John 8:31-32

Prayer:

Help us trust truth's transformative power against dragons who assail from without, hide within, isolate us from help, and stalk our minds with memories that won't let go. Give us the strength to name the truth that sets us free and to trust in you that this is enough. Amen.

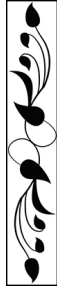


DRAW YOUR DRAGON

"I looked at him ... and I saw myself."

— Hiccup, in
How to Train Your Dragon

[illegible]



EIGHT *L*IVING HAPPILY EVER AFTER

A long time ago I got a phone call from my friend who, coincidentally enough, lives in Kansas. Why is life always so hard? she asked. Why all this trouble, why all this pain, why all this grief? Why, my friend was asking, all the dragons? Where is the hero and redemption we seek? Why are we left behind when all we really want is to get back to Kansas, back to Uncle Henry and Auntie Em?

Where is the happily ever after of our fairy tales?

Let's go back to Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*. She's stranded. The Wizard has taken off for Kansas without her and she's in absolute despair. We can relate. Will we never get home? Will we never get back to Kansas? Will we never live happily ever after?

Wait. Do our fairy tales really promise happily ever after without disappointment? Without dragons? This is the assumption we're making, isn't it? That to live happily ever after is to live without pain and conflict?

But tell me, did Cinderella live happily ever after without a struggle? Did Sleeping Beauty live happily ever after without trauma? Did Rapunzel live happily ever after without grief? Did Hansel and Gretel live happily ever after without deprivation? Did Jack and the beanstalk live happily ever after without risk? Did Thumbelina live happily ever after without sacrifice?

Are there any fairy tales without *any* dragons?

Where in the world, then, did we ever get the notion that to live happily ever after means to live without

trouble? For when we look at fairy tales we find it's not the absence of dragons at all—but the *taming* of dragons—that ushers in happily ever after.

Do you know anyone who seems to have lived pretty much without dragons, everything handed to them—health, good looks, intelligence, money, golden opportunities—all delivered on a silver platter? Compare Scrooge to poor Tiny Tim.

A few years ago I was involved with wheelchair athletes. Ken, suffering from a head injury, had to lie flat on his back, helpless while we took off his leg brace and tugged on a dry suit. But it was a Fonzie's thumbs up and wild grin when we got him onto the water and into the sit ski.

Doug Taylor is a walking quad and because he has so little grip in his hands I had to practically sit in his lap to pull his dry suit on over his feet. We laughed, our entanglement ridiculous. But Doug is the 1991 national champion for quadriplegics in water ski competition and the only quad in the world at the time who could jump the KAN-SKI.

There is no doubt about it, Tiny Tim understands something old Scrooge took a long time figuring out—and we can be thankful. It's not the absence of dragons that brings happiness; it's the taming of them. If we're going to be honest about it, instead of fanciful, we know this to be true.

Back to Dorothy. "Oh, will you help me?" she pleads when Glinda, the good Witch of the North, appears in the pretty pink bubble only moments after the Wizard vanishes. "Can you help me?" What does Glinda say? Let's listen.

"You don't need to be helped any longer. You've always had the power to go back to Kansas."

"I have?" Dorothy says. We *have?* we ask.

And here is another misconception we all seem to have when it comes to living happily ever after. Happiness isn't dependent upon some knight in shining armor we're still looking for or a charming prince riding in to rescue. We are our own heroes. It's *we* who have the power to get back to Kansas, to live happily ever after. It's our choice. It's us, you and me.

We balk at the news. We'd really rather keep searching for a more glorious hero, as did Naman with his leprosy and the Jews with the Messiah. But go back to the fairy tales and see how mistaken

we've been. Where would Cinderella be if she'd not been her own hero and stood up to her wicked stepmother? *Sitting by the cinders*. Where would Jack be if he simply gawked at the beanstalk instead of being his own hero and climbing the thing? *Starving to death*. And Gretel? Where would she be if she'd not been her own hero and given Hansel a bone with which to trick the witch? *A gingerbread cookie*.

How did we get this so mixed up?

It isn't until we choose to become our own heroes that the princes and knights and fairy godmothers, and even God, can make their move. We have to *choose* to let God into our lives. "I stand at the door and knock,"¹ he says.

Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz* is right. It is we who hold the power to go back to Kansas. We choose our happily ever after.

"Then why didn't you tell her before?" the Scarecrow demands—and so do we. Why the promise of a Wizard if we're to save ourselves? It doesn't make any sense. Why the yellow brick road if we could have avoided it? Why the wicked witch to make things so difficult? *Why all the dragons?*

This is what my friend in Kansas was asking.

Glinda has the answer. Dorothy had to take her journey along the yellow brick road because, unless put to the test, she would not have believed she *could* be her own hero, that happiness is her choice. "She wouldn't have believed me," Glinda tells the Scarecrow. "She had to learn it for herself."

Reeeewind!

"She wouldn't have believed me. She had to learn it for herself."

Are we any different?

In 1990 I had a big party and invited all my friends. I was celebrating everything I'd accomplished in the eight years since my divorce: my B.A., my M.A., my teaching, the completion of a fifth book, a contract for three more. Eight years before that I'd had none of these things. In fact, eight years before I'd been a total basket case. My sister, remember, used to ask, "Brenda, what can I do to help?" and I used to whimper, "I don't know, just please help me." Two years of college, limited job experience, one unpublished novel, poor health, three little kids. I'd been over the edge and dangling. Yet eight years later I'd accomplished all that I'd set out to do, and more. How, I asked myself while visiting with family and friends who'd come to help celebrate, did it happen?

In looking back (down the yellow brick road) the answer is astonishingly clear. The dragons. The moment I'd decided to quit enduring the monsters and confront them instead, I, like Dorothy, had been snatched from Kansas and tossed into Oz, where I'd been forced (kicking and screaming and spiraling out of control most of the time) to tame those dragons—first as Orphan, then Pilgrim, then Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard—and then all over again, and again and again, until I evolved into a woman that eight years later I would never have believed possible, not even if God himself had come down for tea to forewarn me. Like Dorothy, I had to learn it for myself, and it took the dragons and the yellow brick road to teach me.

It puts a new perspective on our troubles. Dragons aren't the enemy we envisioned. They propel us forward (albeit kicking and screaming and sometimes spiraling out of control) into the redemption we seek. We have every reason to be thankful, and if we wonder why all the dragons, why all the heartache and grief, why the yellow brick road, it's because we, like Dorothy, have yet to learn that even though the dragons reign it's our choice to go back to Kansas, to live happily ever after. It's always our choice.

"What have you learned?" the Scarecrow asks Dorothy.

"That it wasn't enough to just want to see Uncle Henry and Auntie Em," she tells them all. "And it's that if I ever go looking for my heart's desire I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with."

Do you see what Dorothy has learned? She is her own hero. She's learned that her heart's desire, her happily ever after, is not something she can find by looking for it, or that anyone can give to her. It's not somewhere over the rainbow "where troubles melt like lemon drops," but, rather, her happily ever after is something she must choose for herself. More than that, *her happily ever after lies in the midst of trouble, in her own backyard where Miss Gulch waits, basket over an arm, a sheriff's warrant in hand, for Toto.*

Uh-oh. Miss Gulch ... We forgot about Miss Gulch. We got so busy thinking that if we could just get back home, if we could just find Uncle Henry and Auntie Em, everything would be all right. But it won't. It isn't.

Does it matter, though?

Ma Ingalls told Laura when she found Spanish needle grass on the prairie that this earthly life is a battle. "It always has been so,"

she said, speaking around the sewing pins pressed between her lips, “and it always will be. The sooner you make up your mind the better off you’ll be, and the more thankful for your pleasures. Now Mary, I’m ready to fit the bodice.”²

M. Scott Peck echoes her sentiments when he states his premise at the very beginning of his book *The Road Less Traveled*. “Once we truly know that life is difficult, once we truly understand and accept it—then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters.”³

It no longer matters because Miss Gulch is inconsequential. Redemption lies not in the absence of dragons, but in the taming of them—and Dorothy now knows she can do it. She is, after all, Orphan, Pilgrim, Martyr, Warrior, and Wizard. She is her own hero.

Words. When the dragon strikes, we crumble and it all becomes just words. A little too existential for reality.

In January 1976 my doctor told me I would lose the baby I carried. The dragon roared and all logic and intellect, theory, philosophy, and theology went right out the window. A friend came over. She’d miscarried the year before, and she tried to remind me of everything we gain from disappointment.

“I have a better understanding of God’s love,” she told me. “So much so that I’m truly grateful for the experience.”

I listened, but it was empty words that meant nothing. I only wanted my baby.

But then Ellen opened the Bible and gave me a verse, a promise from God.

“And now those magic slippers,” said Glinda, “will take you back home in two seconds.”

The magic slippers. The ruby shoes, symbols of liberty and safety in the midst of chaos, our promise that God is with us. It makes all the difference in the world, for it’s the ruby shoes that transport us where we need to be.

Dorothy looked down. The ruby shoes sparkled and glistened.

I looked down and read for myself God’s promise.

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in

any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves
are comforted of God.⁴

“Tap your heels three times,” said Glinda.

“Are you sure God will comfort me?” I asked Ellen.

“Yes.” I looked into her eyes and knew she spoke the truth. He had done it for her. He would do it for me. The evil Miss Gulch? It didn’t matter that she waited. I was wearing the ruby shoes, and God would go with me.

“And say, there’s no place like home.”

“There’s no place like home. There’s no place ... ”

Is this the ominous music we first heard when Miss Gulch came riding her bike down the dusty Kansas road? Coming for Toto? It doesn’t matter. “There’s no place like home ... There’s no place like home ... ”

I lost my baby, but the peace that passeth all understanding caught me where I was and took me home, to the very heart of God.

Yes, once upon a time the dragon roared and continues to roar, but when we’re wearing God’s ruby shoes, shod in the Word of God, we can, and do, overcome.

The choice is ours.

This is the Happily Ever After we seek.



NOTES

1. Revelation 3:20.
2. Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 89, 90.
3. M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978), 15.
4. 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4 (KJV).

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

We know that we are children of God, and the whole world is under the control of the evil one.

- I John 5:19 (NIV)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

- Romans 8:28 (NIV)

The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

- John 10:10

Living happily ever after begins when we understand our world is under control of the evil one—even while God simultaneously brings good out of its chaos. It's our choice to let him. Do we choose to remain helpless, *laissez faire* with the evil around us and live in defeat? Or do we invite him into our lives so evil can be recognized and tamed? It's our choice to embrace the abundant life and happily ever after for which we yearn—and which God offers.

1. Dorothy and her friends traveled in search of what they thought was missing in their lives. Brains, heart, courage, honesty, a way home. They already had these. They just had to learn they did. What is it that you seek? What do you need to learn?
2. Dorothy and the others traveled their yellow brick roads of self-discovery. What has been, or is, your yellow brick road?
3. Name three things you've learned about yourself. Or are still learning.
4. Jesus reminds us that the "thief" seeks to destroy. Who or what is the thief in your life? What has it destroyed?
5. Has God yet had a chance to bring good from this evil you knew?
6. He tells us we can have life to the full. What would that look like for you?
7. What hinders you from embracing this full and abundant life?

Reminder:

If any of you lack wisdom, you should ask God ... and it will be given to you.

- James 1:5 (NIV)

Prayer:

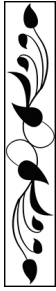
Thank you for our dragons, for when we accept responsibility to tame their evil, we learn who we are—and find abundant, happily ever after, life in you! Amen.



— Sarah K. L. Wilson
First Message

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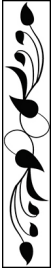


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