

Turning Points

MENDED HEART

I started with love
Ended up with sin
So sometimes it's hard to know where to begin
I wish I could explain it
But I just don't know how
I thought it would all be better by now
I thought all my fears would just vanish to dust
I didn't know all my scars could just turn to rust.
I've been living a life that's been meant for the devil
I don't want to be known as a holy rebel
I want to be mended, I want to be new
So Lord, please tell me what I have to do
I love you, God, with all of my heart
So with your love is where I shall start.

Joel Lawry

A HELPING HAND

I need a helping hand as I walk through this life. Can I count on you to help me out?

The laundry's piled up to the ceiling. The children are hungry, and the house is a total disaster.

I need your help. I can't do this all alone. One child needs to go to a football game, and one needs to be at cheerleading. One needs a hug, and one needs to be disciplined.

Will you give me a helping hand? Can I count on you to help me out?

I need a helping hand. Will you walk beside me, one step at a time? Can I count on you to stand by me?

If I couldn't walk, if I couldn't see, if my face was disfigured, if I was old or like a vegetable, would you give me a helping hand?

Will you hold my hand? Would you never let me go? Put your hand in mine and grip me tight. Can I count on you to stand by me?

Karen Smith

PULLING BACK THE CURTAINS

There once lived a bitter, mean, old man, who lived in a big dark house on a hill. His name was Paul. Paul was mad at the world because he was left all alone by the people he loved most. His wife died 3 years before, and both of his children were killed a year later in a fire. He trusted no one and used bitterness to hide his loneliness.

One day, Paul discovered a small pup on his porch while checking his mail. He paid the pup no mind and shut his door. The next day there sat the pup on the porch, and he was there everyday until the old man brought him inside his house. He grew quite fond of the dog, talking to him and even walking the dog.

One day the dog started pulling at the curtains. The man did what he hadn't done since the day of his wife's funeral, he opened them up. "I'm glad I did," he said to the pup. "The sunlight reminds me of my wife's smile."

And even though the sunlight brightened the house for days to come, Paul's life grew dark. He became very sick until he couldn't leave his bed. The dog stayed by his bed side all the time. Until one day, Paul died, and so did his pet. People say the curtains still remain open and sometimes they still see Paul walking and talking to his dog, whom he had grown to trust. Finally there was someone who never left Paul.

Ashley Christian

LIFE'S NOT SEE THRU

You best believe me when I say this to you, dawg
Life's not see thru
Whatcha wanna do, dawg?
You could be somebody walking down the street,
somebody ran up and punched you in
the mouth and took the shoes off your feet.
Like in New York, people during 9/11
watch 3,000 of their peeps take their seats in heaven.
Here's proof to you
Life's not see thru.

With our nation grieving we went to war over something we
believed in.
I wake up every morning thanking God that I'm breathing.
You struck first. We made it worse.
I'm a victim of the streets with no time to rehearse.
These words in this come out of my head like a curse
woke up by a nurse.
You've been shot in the leg
knowing you're walking eternity with a peg.
I said this to you once but I'll say it again
Life's not see thru
It's that way till the end.

Don't fall under, these demons are rebellious,
Just stand tall and listen to what they tell us 'cause
Life's not see thru.
I'm lost trying to find the passage, the way home.
I turn the corner; I'm staring down the barrel of the chrome.
I hope I don't catch one in the dome.
I do.
Now I leave my family alone at home.
Life's not see thru.

Livin' in the hood ain't no good.
They blast at you on sight, understood.
Walk down the street and get shot 'cause of the wrong color.
They do you in and go after another 'cause
Life's not see thru.

It'll eat at you, leave you physically and emotionally unable.
I spit the hardest lyrics to create my label.
Somebody could kick in your door and leave you
bleeding all over the table.
Life's not see thru.

Mark Simon

A RAINBOW IN THE SKY

A rainbow in the sky can show you light
on the darkest day.
It can bring you hope and promise.
A rainbow can show you the purest joy.
A rainbow in the sky once showed me life.

Kristy Young

THE DAY MY LIFE CHANGED

The biggest change in my life happened when my husband passed away. We were married for six years. I thought that my husband and I would grow old together, but everything changed on Oct. 3, 2002, when I got the call.

My husband's name was Cary. He was only twenty-nine years old when he passed away. He had heart problems. The nurse at Clinton Memorial Hospital called me and told me that my husband had collapsed at work, and he was on a breathing machine to help him breathe. When I got there, they told me that they were shipping him to another hospital.

They took my husband to Christ Hospital. The doctor there told me that the machine was doing all the breathing for him. They told me when he collapsed at work his heart had stopped, and he had gone too long without oxygen. They didn't know if he was going to make it. So, they did a test on him to see if there was any brain activity and there wasn't. The doctor told us we needed to decide what we wanted to do.

On Oct. 7, 2002, we, the family, decided to take him off the breathing machine and let him go. That was the hardest decision I had to make. It was really hard to say goodbye. Looking back now, I think the hardest thing was having to go back home and tell his three daughters.

It has been really hard to get back into our daily routine. My life has changed because my husband is never going to walk through the front door again. I just think of all the good times we had together. That's what gets me through each and every day.

Susan Fugett

WHAT KIND OF MOTHER AM I?

What kind of mother am I? I was a young mother, but that didn't give me a right to do what I did. I was a selfish mother; that was what kind of mother I was. I can't change the past, but I can make sure I don't do it again. I want to make a change in my life so that way, my boys will grow up and be good, caring, responsible, and successful in life. Every night I lay awake in bed and think, "What have I done to my children?" I have hurt them by putting my own wants and needs before my children's. Will they forgive me? I hope so.

I was always told that a mother has to take good care of herself before she can take care of her children, and now I believe that. I sit and think and think about my life since I have had my children. I haven't always made the right choices, but I always did love my children. I just didn't think about their feelings. I just kept thinking that my children needed a father, and I didn't want them to go through the hurt or to feel different and unwanted like I did when I was growing up without my real dad.

So, what kind of mother am I? I know what kind of mother I want to be: A mother who will do right with my children, Ryan and Bobby. I'll talk with them. I'll be more wrapped up with them. I'll put their wants, needs, and feelings first, before my own. I will close this with these words: I love my children, and I want them home.

Tonya West

MY STORY ABOUT AN ANGEL

1983... My daughter, Rhonda, came to me in tears with news of her pregnancy. I was heartsick. Only 16! I had so many hopes and plans for her. I didn't want her to have a baby at her young age. She was still a baby herself. I had two other children younger than Rhonda at home and a full-time job outside of the home. I didn't want another child to raise. I had married for the second time in 1978, and my husband had five children when I married him. Even though they did not live with us, we were paying child support and were barely making ends meet.

We decided to meet with the parents of the father of the baby, Paul, and see what their ideas were pertaining to this matter. I had decided to think strongly of adoption, but Rhonda wanted no part of that. When we met with Paul's parents, they wanted the kids to get married. That was the last thing I wanted to see happen. I had gotten married when I was 16, and it was a horrible experience. I had quit school and had regretted that, and then I had three children and an abusive husband. I wanted better than that for my children.

Paul's parents got the court involved, and because the kids were both only 16, the decision of marriage rested in the hands of the judge. The day of the hearing, all sides were presented. Paul's parents told the judge the kids could live with them, and they would see to it that they remained in school. They were both only juniors in high school. Paul's mother said she would watch the baby when it was born so Rhonda could continue her education. My protests were pretty weak in comparison. The final decision from the judge was that Rhonda and Paul would be allowed to be married. I had lost the battle. I put together a nice, simple wedding for them in May 1983. Life settled down, and Rhonda and Paul lived with his parents.

Rhonda had her baby daughter on November 9, 1983. Michelle Diane. I was there, and she was beautiful and perfect in every way. God had certainly been good to us. I was a grandma. There is no feeling in the world like being a grandma. It was like having Rhonda in my arms again. I was only 37 years when Michelle was born, too young to be a grandmother, but she became the center of my life. I lived for the times I could have her. Rhonda did graduate and on time at that. I held Michelle at the graduation and had a mixture of pride and guilt. Pride that my first-born child was fulfilling my dreams of her completing school, but guilt for not trusting that things would work out. Paul did not graduate, but they both found jobs and moved out on their own.

Paul was an only child, but my two children loved and spoiled Michelle. We had her a lot of the time while they worked. She became a big part of our lives. We would take her to church with us when we had her. When Paul's parents had her, they too would take her to church. They had a different religion than we did, but at least she was in church most Sundays. She learned the song, "Jesus Loves Me," and she loved singing it. She also learned the then-popular song recorded by the Judds, "Grandpa, Tell Me About the Good Old Days," and she would climb up on my husband's lap and sing it to him. His heart would melt.

I am about to move this story up to 1986, but first I must tell you that in 1984, a situation happened between Paul and my youngest daughter, Carol. When I found out about this from a school counselor that Carol had confided in, I filed charges against Paul. He was arrested and sent to prison for a year. Rhonda stuck by Paul, and for a time we were estranged. Paul got out of prison early, and eventually Rhonda and I got a relationship back. We agreed that she and Michelle could come to my house, but of course Paul was not permitted and I would no longer go to her house.

Friday, December 20, 1986... I am about ready for Christmas. This is going to be such a fun Christmas. Michelle

turned three on November 9, and she is really getting into the Christmas thing. This is the first time that Rhonda and Paul would have a Christmas tree. Paul didn't celebrate Christmas the way our family does, but he did allow Rhonda to have a tree this year. Every time Michelle would come to our house she would stand at the tree in awe at the lights and the presents. The silver icicles on our tree would reach out and cling to her clothes, and she would get so excited. Her eyes would dance and sparkle. My youngest daughter, Carol, now 15 years old, would put her up to asking me for a present. "Grandma," she would ask, "Can I have one present now? PLEASE?" I would pretend not to hear her, and she would keep asking until I finally would tell her, "No Michelle. You have to wait for Santa Claus." This went on every time she was at our house. We had bought her enough that it would not have hurt her to have a present early, but I wanted to keep up the traditions of Christmas. On this particular day, Rhonda and Carol took Michelle to the mall to see Santa Claus. I had already had Santa at my house to see her, and she was not impressed. She screamed and cried even though Santa had brought her presents. Rhonda told me she didn't like Santa at the mall any better. That day while there, Carol took money she had saved from babysitting and bought Michelle a beautiful new pink and black dress for Christmas. She came home, showed me, and was so excited to wrap it up for Michelle.

Saturday, December 21... Today started off great. Rhonda had to work until noon, so Paul was home with Michelle. But she was coming to my house later in the afternoon for a visit. I decided to bake cookies so Michelle would have homemade cookies to leave out for Santa on Christmas Eve. That was a tradition for my kids, and I wanted it to carry over to Michelle. Around 1 o'clock in the afternoon, Rhonda stopped by but left Michelle in the car. She was there to tell me that Michelle was sick, and she was taking her to the hospital emergency room because her pediatrician was out of town

until Monday. Rhonda said Michelle was crying and her teeth hurt. She was also running a high fever. Because she had just turned three, I assumed she was cutting teeth. I was still baking so I told Rhonda to go ahead but to let me know what the doctor had to say. Rhonda called me when she got home and said the doctor on call told her she had flu symptoms and to give her Tylenol and if she wasn't better by Monday, to call the pediatrician and get her in. At 7 p.m., Rhonda called to tell me that Michelle was not getting better.

I talked to Michelle on the phone, and she sounded very weak and was making rattling sounds. Because I was not allowed at their house, I sent my 17-year-old son, Mike, to their house with my vaporizer. Rhonda called me again at 9 p.m. to tell me she had Michelle in bed and she was going to sleep with her. She told me she would call me the next day after we got home from church. Christmas was Tuesday and I was sure Michelle would be well enough to come over.

Bill and I stayed up until 1 a.m. wrapping presents. My kids had gone to bed around 11 p.m. We were in bed but not yet asleep when the phone rang. It was Rhonda and she told Bill to get me and come to the hospital. Bill told me she sounded pretty calm. We got up and dressed. I didn't bother waking Mike and Carol. I knew at their ages they would be OK while we were gone. Bill and I joked all the way to the hospital thinking they were going to admit Michelle for overnight and that Rhonda wanted her mommy to be there with her. I assumed that Paul was not with Rhonda or she would not be calling me to come over. We got to the hospital around 1:30 a.m., and I told Bill I would probably stay the rest of the night there with Rhonda.

When we arrived at the hospital, I saw Jim, a man I know who is a medic. When he saw me, he dropped his head and didn't speak. I thought that was strange, but I didn't think much about it. I was in a lighthearted mood and was anxious to see Rhonda and Michelle. I told the receptionist who we were and she had us follow her. She took us to a waiting room and the door was shut. When we walked in, the first

thing I saw was Paul and Rhonda sitting on a couch together. Then I saw Paul's mom and dad. Rhonda stood up and said, "Mom, Michelle is dead." DEAD! What a sick, cruel joke to be playing on me. Then I realized this was no joke. My baby girl was gone. I can still hear my screams to this day. I remember beating someone with my fists. I later found out it was my dear sweet husband. A part of me died right then and will never come back. The doctor finally let us in to see my precious baby. She was on a big bed and she looked so pale and so tiny. A little slobber was running down the side of her mouth.

We got home from the hospital around 4 a.m. I had to wake my children to tell them. It was the only time I have ever seen my son cry since he was a baby. My next task was to call my family and tell them. No one could believe me because Michelle was so full of life and was so looking forward to Christmas. The next few days are pretty much a blank to me. My sister and I went to Rhonda's house while she and Paul were gone and took the Christmas tree down. We gathered all of her presents and took them to Children Services so they could go to another child.

Somehow, we got through the calling hours. Because she died at home, there was an investigation by the police. My precious angel was buried on December 24. It was so cold outside that day, but it was no match for the coldness I felt inside. Somehow we made it through the holidays, but it is all still foggy to me.

An autopsy was performed. Michelle died of bacterial meningitis. That was the reason her neck and jaw were hurting. A test at the hospital on Saturday afternoon would have detected that, but no tests were performed. She went to sleep that night and when Rhonda woke up around midnight, she was not breathing. They called 911 and the medics tried all the way to the hospital to revive her. Oh yes...My friend Jim at the hospital, he was on that squad run. He was one of the medics who tried so hard to revive Michelle.

Time helps to ease the pain. Between my children and my step children, we now have 18 other grandchildren. Rhonda and Paul divorced shortly after Michelle died. She was their only child. Both have since remarried and both have one child. Rhonda divorced again and has had many problems in her life. Her son is now eleven years old, and he talks fondly about the big sister he knows he had. Rhonda went on later and got a college degree and has a good job now. She also has a very caring, wonderful man in her life.

It has been 17 years since God took Michelle home. She would be 20 years old now, but to me she will always be my 3-year-old angel.

Sharon Russell

IF TODAY WOULD BE MY LAST DAY

If today would be my last day
I would give thanks to God for
all the wonderful persons
I met through my entire life.

If today would be my last day
I would find every person I hurt
and I would ask for their pardon,
I would really say I am sorry.

If today would be my last day
I would call up my mother and
I would tell her that she has been
an inspiration for me,
And I would ask for her blessing.

If today would be my last day
I would give a big hug and a big kiss
to my daughter on her smooth cheeks,
And I would tell her that she is a piece
of heaven to me.

If today would be my last day
I would kiss my husband good bye
every morning and I would tell him
that I am very grateful to God
for letting him share my life all these years.

Oh God! I would like to live now
as if it would be my last day.

Sol Ortiz

BABY ANGEL

My name is Christina. I have a little girl who is everything to me. Her name is Angel. Now when she comes home from preschool, I hug her and tell her that I love her. But this time last year I almost lost it all. I was on drugs then and didn't know what I was doing.

I was 16. I would do just about anything to get high. I would even sell my food stamps. One afternoon I was so high I dropped a cigarette, and the house caught fire. Little Angel was in her bedroom playing. She was not breathing when the firemen found her.

A couple hours passed, and I realized what had happened. My Angel was burned – not badly, but enough to stay in the hospital overnight.

My parents, Tom and Pam, took Angel for three months while I got help for my drug abuse.

I have felt many emotions about this time. Now I see Angel in a different view. I see her as a little girl, not as a doll. I want to hold her, and tell her that I love her as much as I can.

Now to show her how much I love her, I go to night school to get my G.E.D. After I do that, I plan to go on to become a nurse.

--A work of fiction by *Anna Cline*

LITTLE WORDS CAN GO FAR

As a little girl growing up, I was told I had to work
hard.
When I wanted to give up, I was told I must be
strong.
When I quit school, people would ask what was
wrong with me.

Now I am grown with a family of my own,
and still, those three words live on.

HARD – a word that means a lot when 3 young children
are all you got.

STRONG – the way that you must be to raise a family.

WRONG – a word I now regret, for I am me, and that is the
best I can be.

Three little words have carried me far.
Now 4 new words
lead me through each day.

I love you, Mommy.

Angela Long

YOU ARE NOT THE ONE

You are not the one I gave my heart to.
You are not the one who told me I love you.
You are not the one I swore I would love for life.
You are not the one that said, "One day you'll be my wife."
You are not the one I dreamed of all night.
You are not the one that would look at me with such delight.
You are not the one I would wait all day to see.
You are not one that made me believe.
Who is this man looking at me with such anger?
You are not the one I love. You're a stranger.

Aimee' Womack

SLAVERY

Sometimes I feel like a slave
Trapped in a deep dark black cave
Turn the page here I am alone and afraid.

Truthfully the truth can cut like a knife.
Unbelievably love can be as cold as ice yet so nice
Life is nothing but a big game the trick is getting someone to
remember your name.
The Man upstairs is the only one who can call any of us by
name.

Sometimes I feel a truth is a lie.
And a lie is the truth
I felt the devil boot me out of my youth into his world of
demons.

I felt my own kind scheming on me, so I'm pleading the
darkness will pass, and I'll see the light at last.
Slavery. Pray for me. It passes.

Nakia Thomas

MY BABY'S DELIVERY

I had a scary experience of delivering a baby. It was our second child. I felt I had to have more kids, the more the better. I did not understand what women went through to have a baby.

My wife was in labor at 2:00 A.M. during a snowstorm. I called the doctor hoping she would be at the hospital. We got stuck in a snowstorm on the way to the hospital...my wife in labor and my baby son in the car. I went to a factory and tried to climb the fence. The guard told me to stop or he would shoot. I told the guard to help me because my wife was having a baby in the car. He called for an ambulance and the police. My car was stuck in the snow bank. I went back to the car and the baby's head was coming out. What shall I do? I helped my wife and pulled the baby out.

A friend came out of a bar and stopped to help me. We tried to get the car out of the snow, but no could do. We saw the police coming down the road. The baby was born before the police came. She was wrapped in blankets. My friend went to the hospital with me.

I was shaken up at the hospital. After I saw my daughter I felt better. She had hair all over her body. She looked like a little monkey. The story of Vivian's birth was in the newspaper. It was front page news. I learned from that experience that the birth of a baby and the labor of a mother is painful and hard work. I also learned to respect women and children more.

Rudy Perez

FIRST DAY IN THE USA

I always remember September 10, 2003. It was my first day in the USA. It was a beautiful fall night.

When I left the Chicago airport, I felt worried and excited. This is a different country. Many people have different color skin and hair. They all speak fast in a different language; I do not understand what they say. I felt afraid. I asked myself, "What do I do? I will stay here for the rest of my life. What can I do?" I wanted to cry. I felt very bad.

I told my husband my feelings and my worry. He did not say anything to me. But he gave me a big hug.

My parents-in-law and three sisters-in-law were waiting for us. This is the first time I saw them. I am so excited. We hugged each other. They were all nice to me. They know I cannot speak good English. So, they talked to me very slowly. I could understand well. I thanked them so much.

They brought me to a red beautiful restaurant to eat dinner. At my first American restaurant I do not know how to order food. My mother-in-law helped me. Then she ordered pumpkin pie for me. This is delicious pie. But it was too sweet. I just thought, "No need long time. I will be a fat girl." American food can make people fat soon. But I like it very much. True. After 5 months, I am fat almost 10 pounds.

In the past 5 months, I feel good. I do not have my worry of the first day. I still miss my family and all my friends in China. I still miss my good old life in China. But I have new friends here now. I found a good job. I have a good school and teachers. They teach me how to speak good English. I believe my English will be very good. I am so busy now. I do not have time to worry about other things. I do not feel alone and afraid now. I love my life. I love English. I love America, and I love all my life in America. But I always remember my worry on the first day in America.

Yuan Hua

I DON'T WANT TO COOK!

Some day I think if I don't cook, what happens?
Maybe
My husband would be very hungry and he will look at me all
the time.
My daughter, she must cook for herself – only herself.
My son will open the refrigerator and drink milk or juice.
If I don't cook for more than one day
They will go out to eat.
Without me.
Sure!

Mi-Sook Ko

PAIN

I stand alone against the night sky.
It is asking me to cry out loud.
I can't bring myself out of the pain.
The sounds in my head play out a life,
Of misery and abuse. I can still taste
The blood in my mouth at times.
But I still cannot cry out loud. The sting
Of the strap still fresh on my legs,
Still after 24 years. From time to time
I can still feel the blood trickle slowly
Down the back of my leg.
As I wipe it off there is nothing there.
As I slip into depression, madness ascends on me.
As I plunge from the edge I reach out and grab ahold.
Knuckles whitening to hold on, fingertips bleeding.
I cannot let go. My mind screams out, please
Someone help me.

John Aleshire Sr.

UNDERSTANDING MY LIFE

The most difficult time of my life was as a child. I had received some very physical beatings from the age of six until I was ten. I dealt with the pain I was going through, thinking that I deserved what I got because I had done something wrong. But as an adult I have realized that no child deserves the kind of beatings I received. I believe this experience has had a positive side to it. I believe this experience has made me a good and protective father. I love my children dearly and would never want them to feel the pain and terror I have.

The age of six is as far back as I can remember. I can't remember what I did to make my parents mad at me. But I do remember always being caged up like an animal. Every day as soon as I got home from school, I was locked in my bedroom. It was a horrible, cold dungeon. There was no carpet, only a wooden floor. Both windows had plywood over them with a chain link fence over the plywood. I had a mattress, but no sheets and blankets. If I wanted to use the restroom, I had to go in the closet. The only light I had was through the heat duct in the wall where I received my food, and sometimes school was the only source of food for me. Sometimes I would get a beating before going to my room. If I came home and my parents were in an argument, I knew I was in for it. I would get slapped and punched in the head just like I was an adult. If I made the mistake of sitting down, I would get kicked right in the mouth, and it would get worse if I tried to defend myself.

The worst beating would come at the age of ten. I tried to run away, but I didn't understand the concept of running away. I ran down to a small convenience store and stole a box of candy, then went home to hide under the porch. I was so hungry I ate every bite of chocolate within minutes. Then dad pulled into the driveway with the headlights shining right on me. I was taken into the house

and stripped completely naked; my hands were tied behind my back. As I watched my dad rip the cord from the lamp, I was terrified. I was trying to beg and plead how sorry I was, but he didn't care where he hit me; he just started swinging. With every lash I received there was immediate swelling. Some lashes were swelling so bad that the next time I was hit, the spot that was swelling opened into a gashing wound that would need stitches. From my head to my feet was covered with lashes. I don't know when he stopped because my body eventually became numb. As I lay there motionless, I was picked up and carried back to my cell with no treatment to the open wounds. I lay in my room for a couple of days with no food. I wasn't allowed to go to school. I kept telling myself that it was my fault. I shouldn't have tried to run away, and I shouldn't have stolen the candy. I had received similar beatings to this in those four years. But that was the worst.

I had been out of school for a couple of weeks when Mrs. Farrie came to visit with a get-well gift. Mrs. Farrie was a kind and loving teacher. She was always full of hugs and candy. She made me feel special, always telling me how good a student I was, making me feel good. She must have noticed some of the scars on my face because after she left, some people showed up at the house with the police. These people explained that they were from Children Services and that they were going to take me to a safe place.

They took me to Hanna Neil Center for Children. I was scared, but I felt safe. I got a nice bed with sheets and blankets, three full meals a day, and I was surrounded by other children just like me. The staff there was loving and caring just like Mrs. Farrie.

This is how I lived my life for four years, and I believe that Mrs. Farrie saved me from something that could have gotten worse. Today, just thinking about that night I ran away and stole the candy, I can still feel those lashes with the cord. But remembering the fear and pain I went through as a child makes me a better father.

Back then I coped with this problem by thinking that I had done something wrong, that I made my parents mad at me, so I deserved what I got. But no child deserves a brutal, physical beating for any reason.

Today I deal with this problem by remembering the pain and fear I had as a child. Then I remember Mrs. Farrie and how she made me feel good about myself. I work with kids everyday. I coach two baseball teams at different age levels, a football team and a wrestling team. I try to make every child I work with feel confident and special, just like Mrs. Farrie did with me.

I have four children of my own, and I don't want my children to have to experience that kind of fear and pain. I love my children very much. I help them with homework and try to make them believe in themselves, to believe that they can accomplish anything they want. We play family games. I spend every moment I can with them because I want them to know how much I care.

Carl Foreman

GAINING A LIFE

The day my son was born was the most wonderful day of my life. It was a day that I had waited for all of my life, especially the last nine months! When he arrived that Saturday night, on August 2, 2003, it was the greatest feeling of love, excitement, and worry that I have ever experienced. I took him in my arms and just stared at his little red face, his full head of dark black hair; I admired his little button nose and tiny, squinty, blue eyes. I thought to myself about how amazed I was that I had created this beautiful, living, breathing life. I couldn't believe that he was really here and he was mine, all mine, forever.

The day we came home was also a very exciting day for me. I had my newborn dressed in an adorable Winnie the Pooh outfit with matching booties and a hat – he looked so cute! The first thing I did when we got home was show my newborn his bedroom that was painted bright blue and had a Winnie the Pooh border going all the way around the room. I didn't get much of a reaction from him, but I was still excited about it. We went into the living room, sat there, and the greatest feeling of fear ran through my whole body, from head to toe. I realized this is real, very real, this is my child, my flesh and blood, and he is one hundred percent dependent on me. At that moment I thought, "What if I fail as a parent?" and, "What does it take to be a good mother?"

The next few months were absolutely wonderful. I had overcome most of my fears about motherhood and finally was getting to know my son. He was learning to hold his head up, make noises, giggle, hold things in his hand, and eat with a spoon. Everyday was like a new beginning. He was always doing something new. I had such a wonderful time watching his little personality develop.

My son has changed my life in so many ways. He has inspired me to get my GED and do whatever it takes to get it, even if it means long hours of school and studying. This is a

goal that I had set for myself about five years ago, but I had not fought for until now. I'm determined to continue my education as an example for my son, and to prove that if you work hard you can achieve your goals. He gives me a reason to do better for myself and to try to achieve the goals that I have set for myself.

I am learning that being a parent isn't easy. It takes a lot of patience, energy, and most important, lots of love. I would *absolutely* not trade him for anything. He is my life, and he completes me. I love motherhood, and I honestly can't remember what life was like before he was born.

Rachael Fraelich

CITY GIRL VERSUS WHITETAIL

It is a cold December day as we patiently wait for daylight and the deer's arrival. I'm sitting in my cold, hard metal chair poised and ready to shoot at the first sign of the buck I had seen the morning before. Finally, after what seems like forever, they appear and they are magnificent. They walk slowly up the field, jumping at every sound like the crackling of the leaves and cars. I can see they are easily spooked. My husband whispers from somewhere behind me, "There he is! There's your buck. Are you ready?"

The buck comes up closer to the doe and runs her off, and he begins to sniff around, and finally starts eating, giving me a perfect shot. I put my finger on the trigger, being careful not to make a sound; I put my sights on him, line up the shot, and pull the trigger. Then I hear a big boom.

He runs up the field; I watch him go as far as I can, then I lose sight of him. I'm thinking to myself I missed him. There is a mixture of emotions swirling around inside me. I am shaking all over; I can barely get my legs to work as I try and stand up. In the back of my mind there is this nagging feeling as I finally start walking up the field to where he had stood just moments before. We start searching for signs of blood. There aren't any. I begin to panic, thinking I really did miss him. As the reality of that starts sinking in, I feel sick to my stomach. I start getting upset. We keep walking looking for signs, and just as I am about to give up, I spot him lying in a brush pile.

I am so excited I don't know how I get to him. When my husband gets to where I am standing, he says that I took off so fast he could barely keep up with me. I guess I ran all the way. I start jumping up and down and screaming. It is the most fun we have had together in a long time.

Phyllis Endicott

LIFE'S LITTLE LESSONS

Someone once told me that God doesn't give you any more than what you can handle. I guess that saying is true, because there have been a lot of bumps in the road of life for me. That same person told me that every bump in the road is a chance to learn a lesson.

I started learning life's little lessons at an early age and decided that I could overcome anything that is thrown into my road. I hit the first bump when I was diagnosed with an immune deficiency, and the doctors told me that I wouldn't live past the age of fifteen. At that time, medical professionals didn't know much about the immune system, and the life expectancy of a person who had an immune deficiency wasn't very long. Then, when I lived to be fifteen, the doctors realized that with treatment I could live a full and somewhat normal life. This treatment that I would have to get was very experimental and could cause some problems in the long run. The treatment was an IV infusion of plasma once a month; it caused my immune system to produce antibodies against illness. I thought this meant that I could grow up, get married, and have children. That is when I hit the next big bump in the road.

That bump was the most devastating news that I thought I could ever hear. The doctor told me that I would never be able to have children unless I wanted to take a chance of becoming very ill or even die. I learned that there is a lot more in this world than getting married and having children. That is when I threw myself into my studies and decided I would go to college to become a nurse to help others. Just when I thought everything was going great, I hit a huge bump in the road. It made me think that I had nothing else to live for because my hopes and dreams would be

destroyed. That bump I just hit was huge because all of my hard work would go down the drain.

My parents decided that they could not live in Ohio any more and needed to move back to Texas. But I didn't want to move. I had just settled in and was doing great because I would graduate in six months. My parents decided that I could stay in Ohio and finish out school, but when they left, I had to find a place to live and a job. That is when all my hopes and dreams were shattered because my assistant principal decided that I had missed too many days of school, and she kicked me out. So I threw myself into working two full-time jobs and trying to keep all of my bills paid and food in my stomach. But that all changed when I found the love of my life. That taught me that once you hit rock bottom, the only way to go is up.

Everything was going great, and that is when I started taking classes for my GED. I thought now I could fulfill my dream of becoming a nurse. After six months of classes I came to a crossroad that had a huge bump on one side and a little one on the other. I had an important decision to make because I found out I was six weeks pregnant. I thought that because I was taking the pill, I couldn't get pregnant. Then I found out that if you take certain medications the birth control wouldn't work. When my family doctor found out, she gave me two choices: I could be restricted to complete bed rest my whole pregnancy and carry this child to full term, or I could keep doing everything else and lose the child. I decided that I needed to be on bed rest and hopefully, carry this child to term. I took my doctor's advice, and now I have a beautiful daughter named Rosa who is healthy. She is seven months old and can sit up and crawl.

I learned that doctors aren't always right and that no matter what your health is like, you should live life to the fullest and never give up on your hopes and dreams. I haven't

given up on mine because I am enrolled in Even Start. It is a family literacy program that helps with parenting skills, and it also helps me get my GED. As soon as I get my GED, I am going to start classes at the local college so that I can become a nurse. God hasn't given me more than I can handle, but it sure felt like it sometimes. But I have taken all of these experiences in and learned from them, so that I can help someone else one day.

Nichole Cronenberg

WAITING

As I wait, I watch and listen.
As I watch and listen, I wait.
I wait for the love we'll share.
 I wait for you here.
 I wait under the moon.
As I wait, I watch and listen.
As I watch and listen, I wait.

Ginger Herman

MY BIRTHDAY

My birthday
Supposed to be a special day
My birthday
My God-given day
This is the day
My birthday
I have tried to find ways to
Celebrate
My birthday
I have been counting down the
Days to my birthday.
I've tried to find ways to
Celebrate my birthday,
My 21st birthday
I tried to plan this day
My birthday
Sad to say things didn't
Go how I wanted it to go
Starting with I had no calls
To announce my day was here,
From family members I keep
So dear.
(My birthday)
Left my days in tears

Latoya Spears

A LONG JOURNEY TO HEAVEN

The most wonderful and peaceful experience I have had in my life was when I decided to try to live my life for God. It all started out in Columbus, Ohio, in the month of June 2003. In previous years I used to pray and read the Bible because other people forced it upon me. But when I started learning to seek God for myself, I felt a sense of joy and peace.

Before I learned to seek God, my life felt totally meaningless. There were times when I felt like life was never going to get better for me. Sometimes I even thought about committing suicide. Whenever stress or depression came upon me, I would go out and spend my money on drugs and alcohol. Before I learned to seek God, I would do anything I could to please my flesh.

It wasn't until, in that month of June, on a nice, hot, sunny day, I started once again getting suicidal thoughts in my head and thinking evil. Finally I came to the conclusion that I needed some help. The next thing I remember is I sat down in a park and began to pray. As soon as I finished praying I started feeling relaxed, and I started walking home peacefully.

From that moment on, even until this day, I've been in the process of trying to put my faith and trust in God. When I first started to make the commitment, I still had my tribulations and my trials like I have now. When I first started to read the Bible, I read the book of Proverbs and then I started to study the four gospels. When I began to take my time studying about Jesus, I saw how he suffered, and then I started to realize why I sometimes suffer.

Even though I continued to try to put my faith and trust in God, I still had some tough issues in my life to deal with. For example, after 2 months in my walk I submitted to USA Search to try to find my family. The search cost 72 dollars. When it was done, I got the address and wrote to them. I received no response.

The next thing I knew, I was starting to fall back into my foolishness. Then I started to remember a verse I read in Proverbs (26:11) that says, "As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly." I started repeating every ungodly and foolish thing I did before I knew God. I spent every last penny I owned on drugs and fleshly desires. I finally started to come back to reality, but before that I was so far gone it wasn't even funny.

Once I came back down to reality, I started going back to church and reading my Bible and to this day, I do the same. The most important thing I can say about my life right now is, as long as I try to put my faith and my trust in God, I can have a sense of peace, hope and joy. I have it now and hopefully I'll have it forever.

William Gideon

MY ACCIDENT

On June 19, 1976, Richard Gabbour (me) and my brother, Jeffrey, were invited to my best friend Raffi's birthday party. My mother told us to take a taxi, but I told her no, we can walk. So we walked and we had to cross a street. I let my brother go first, and then it was my turn. I ran and looked one way, then the other. It was too late; a car from nowhere came and hit me. I was still alive. My brother was yelling, "Richard, are you OK?" I was pretending that I could not hear him, and then I fell into the coma. My brother ran to my mother, Mireille, and said, "Richard is dead!"

My mother came every day to the hospital to [read](#) and listen to music that I liked. The nurses thought she was crazy, but she still came every day. Until one day, she heard of a well-known rabbi in New York. She wrote to him. He receives millions of letters. One day he picked one up, and it happened to be mine. He wrote back; my parents received it. My mother put it over my head and said to the nurses, "Do not touch it, just leave it under his pillow." The next day I moved my little finger, the next day the other one, and so on until my ten fingers were moving. I woke up blind and could not see.

My brother decided to invite me to his birthday party. My parents asked special permission so that I could leave the hospital. My dad, Charles, lit a barbecue. When the flame was on, I saw it! I was telling my mother and dad that I could see. "What a nice shirt they have, what nice pants they have, and so on." My parents brought me back to the hospital that night but did not want to say anything. My Grandma came to the hospital and pushed me in a wheelchair beside the window. I told her, "Nona, the sun is bothering me."

I was in a wheelchair for one year. I was doing physio (leg) therapy and ergo (hand) therapy. One day I pushed my wheelchair in front of all the nurses and said, "NO MORE!" I began to walk on my own.

In 1990, I was trying to find an activity I liked. I thought about running. I called one person who told me to phone another, until one day I fell on the right one, Cincinnati Recreation Commission's Donald Passonette. We began to train outside twice a week. Then we found some five kilometer races (3.2 miles), up to ten kilometers (6.2 miles), and up to mini-marathon (13.2 miles) races. I do these all year long, even if it rains, hails, or sunshine, I do it.

In 1992, I was called to Columbus to receive THE BEST ATHLETE OF THE YEAR award, presented by the Governor. I went there with my parents. There were over a thousand people; I was called last and they handed me a big plaque. The Governor shook my hands and said "Goodbye." I tapped the Governor on his shoulder and said, "Can I make a speech?" He gave me the microphone. "I thank God and then my coaches for training with me. I still run every weekend of the year."

Channel Twelve News interviewed me and I said, "I never gave up."

Richard Gabbour

IN THE WOODS

As I walked among the trees
one bright and sunny day,
I heard the Lord say, "Child, come this way,"
so naturally I obeyed.

A path was there, it seemed so clear,
I followed it and felt him near.

I walked and walked into the woods
and could no longer hear his voice.
I thought he had abandoned me,
and I had lost my way.

I got down on my knees and prayed,
and suddenly I saw a sunshine ray.
It led me from the cold dark woods,
back to the light of day.

I asked the Lord why this was so.
Why had I lost my way?
He answered me with gentle words,
"Child, I was teaching you to pray."

Jane R. Shepherd

LIFE IS SHORT

Having fun sitting around and partying,
Not thinking before drinking and driving.
Swerving off the edge of the road,
Just trying to be bold.
Over correcting,
Spinning 180 then finally impacting.
Giving up everything in just a moment,
Putting everybody in a world of torment.
All for their pleasure,
Instead of making it to her treasure.
Having everybody who cares
Just sobbing in a puddle of tears.
All for just a drink,
Before the driver could even think.

Paul Fisher

IN THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

When I was 18 years old, I joined the Army National Guard. One day Scott, Steve, and I went to the county fair. While we were walking around, we ran into an Army recruiter. We were approached by Sergeant Mark D. Federle, who asked us if we had ever thought of joining the Ohio Army National Guard. We both paused for a minute and then said, "No Sir." Then Sergeant Federle said, "Come over to our Army booth, and you can fill out some paperwork and answer some questions." We went over to the booth and filled out the papers so he could send us some information about the Army.

After about one or two weeks, I received a packet in the mail. My dad and I went over it and gave Sgt. Federle a call. A few days later he came over to our house where we talked about all the different jobs and duties in the Guard. It all sounded great to me, but my dad was not so sure about it all. He didn't believe that all I had to do was give one weekend a month and two weeks a year in exchange for a college education. About two weeks later, I went over to Sgt. Federle's office in Eastgate and joined. I went up to Columbus for my testing and physical. That same day I was sworn in. When I got home that night, I called all my friends and family to tell them I was in the National Guard.

That next weekend I met with Sgt. Federle, and we went out to my new unit in Felicity, which was the 216th Engineering Unit. When we got there, he introduced me to my new Sergeant. Sgt. Miller showed me around the place and introduced me to everyone. That day I just signed some paperwork and got my uniforms. The next day I had a blast! It was snowing, so we had a big snowball fight.

That spring I went off to Initial Active Duty Training on June 12, 2001. I was shipped to Fort Leonard Wood in Rolla, Missouri. My training lasted about ten weeks. Some of the things I had to take with me were civilian clothing, shoes, two locks, and socks. While I was there it was the hardest challenge I have ever had to undertake. For example, I had to wake up at 4:00 AM every day, do 71 push-ups, 92 sit-ups, and run 2 miles in 13 minutes. Oh yeah, I could not smoke! Ten weeks went by and I made it! I was finally a true U. S. National Guard soldier. My mom, dad, and friends were all happy for me.

After being in the Guard for one year, I made the mistake of dropping out of school. Nowadays, to be in the Army, I have to have a high school diploma or my GED. When I dropped out of high school, they gave me six months to get my GED. I didn't comply with the rules, so I got discharged until I do get my GED. That brings me to where I am today. I'm taking GED classes at Live Oaks so I can join the Army National Guard. I really hope I pass all my tests because I really miss serving my country.

YOU CAN IN THE ARMY NATIONAL GUARD

HSC 216TH ENGINEER BATTALION COMBAT HEAVY

William Joseph Smith III